

MODERN & CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUALITY

Wisdom Made One: An Original Synthesis

A five-volume original comparative work reading the world's primary spiritual texts side by side -- the nature of reality and consciousness, the discipline of will, attention, and the heart, ways of knowing, what each tradition uniquely offers, and the questions the traditions genuinely cannot agree on -- alongside a shorter standalone overview essay, honoring the traditions' real differences rather than smoothing them into one doctrine.

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Introduction: An Original Synthesis

Introduction: The Gathering

¹ Every genuine spiritual tradition begins with a rupture—a falling-away from what is ordinary into what is true. The Quaker meeting house stripped of all apparatus; the Buddhist monk leaving home; the Egyptian initiate descending into the cave where the sacred fire sleeps; the Taoist farmer who knows that "those who know do not speak, and those who speak do not know"; the Celtic exile who "sets his root" in silence facing the four directions. Different forms, different languages, but the same structure: something gives way, and what remains is not the same as what was there before.

² This is an attempt to bring those forms together—not to create a theology, not to reconcile what cannot be reconciled, but to gather the wisdom that has been spoken in many places and many times into one place where it can finally be heard. Not as argument but as recognition. Not as doctrine but as practice.

³ The texts that have shaped this gathering span millennia and continents: the Upanishads circling the ineffable through negation; the Tao Te Ching teaching that naming begins limitation; the Dhammapada tracing the architecture of suffering and its release; the Bhagavad Gita offering multiple paths to one liberation; the Analects insisting that virtue is cultivated in relationship; the Torah presenting a God who cares and demands; the Zohar exploring the concealed and revealed dimensions of everything; the Gospel of John presenting the Logos as the ground of all that is; the Cloud of Unknowing teaching how to dwell in the place between concept and experience; the Masnavi of Rumi giving voice to the hunger for union; the Qur'an declaring the absolute oneness of what is ultimate; the Stoics learning to live within what cannot be changed; Krishnamurti insisting on freedom from the known; Sri Aurobindo tracing the evolution of consciousness; Eckhart Tolle naming the power of presence.

⁴ And alongside these: the Quaker insistence that "let your life speak," that truth and love must walk together, that simplicity is truth's twin virtue, that there is that of God in every person, that collective silence is the medium of revelation. The Five Volumes of Spiritual Wisdom gathering Torah, Talmud, Qur'an, and Buddha not as competing claims but as complementary illuminations of what is. Red Sky at Night preserving the country knowledge that reconnects us to the rhythms of land and season, to bees that must be told of family news, to the oak and ash and thorn. The Textbook of Wisdom proposing that wisdom is not a function of age but a matter of perception—that cleverness narrows while wisdom widens, that the logic bubble encloses everyone, that wisdom is the art with which perception crafts experience to serve values. The Opening of the Way mapping consciousness onto the body with surgical precision—the five bodies, the automaton and the permanent witness and the spiritual witness, the duel between the personal will and the will to the light, the pendulum law that governs every movement of the soul, the seven accomplishments and the seven obstacles, the heart as the mediator between temporal and extratemporal, knowledge as identification rather than science.

⁵ And the Celtic stream running through all of it—the Sidhe as an actual race who withdrew to preserve themselves from human destructiveness and now seek reconnection, the animacy of stones and trees and rivers and animals, the mist as threshold consciousness, the bard teaching that "speak slowly, think swiftly, act wisely," the Dark Goddess as washer at the ford who burns away accumulated psychic debris, the Four Cities mandala with its heart-center of regeneration, the Song of Amergin as cosmic identification, the recognition that the UFO and the faerie are the same interdimensional contact in different clothing, that every being carries its own note in the original harmonious song of creation.

⁶ None of these traditions says exactly the same thing. They disagree—genuinely, integrally—on whether ultimate reality is personal or impersonal, whether the world is ultimately real or illusory, whether liberation is escape from suffering or fulfillment within it, whether the path is one or many. What follows is an attempt to honor those differences without pretending they don't exist, while gathering what the traditions share around their edges and in their depths. To do this honestly, one must resist the temptation to smooth. What is true is that a genuine engagement with all these sources reveals not a single teaching but a convergence of directions—a recognition that wisdom, however it is named, points toward something that transcends any single formulation while remaining accessible to anyone willing to meet it.

I. The Nature of What Is

¹ The first question is always: what is the ground? Different traditions answer differently, and the differences matter. But there is a recognition that runs through all of them: the ground cannot be captured by the conceptual intellect, not because it is vague but because it exceeds the reach of formulation.

² The Tao Te Ching opens by saying that the Tao that can be named is not the enduring Tao. The Upanishads circle around Brahman through negation—"not this, not this" (neti neti)—refusing to fix what cannot be fixed. The Cloud of Unknowing teaches that the divine is encountered not through what can be said but through what can be loved in the darkness beyond concept. The Buddha's insight into emptiness (sunyata) is not a denial of reality but a recognition that nothing exists independently—form is emptiness, emptiness is form—and that the attempt to fix any phenomenon as substantial is itself the source of suffering.

³ Yet these are not the same insight, and it would be false to pretend they are. The Taoist vision emphasizes process and transformation rather than substance. The Upanishadic vision emphasizes the identity of the deepest self (Atman) with the ground of all being (Brahman)—a non-dual claim about consciousness itself. The Buddhist vision emphasizes interdependence and the absence of any fixed essence—not nihilism but a radical refusal of the substantialist assumption that runs through Western thought.

⁴ What the most comprehensive engagement reveals is that each perspective illuminates what the others cannot fully capture. Process without substance sounds like evasiveness from a substantialist perspective; substance without process sounds like rigidity from a process perspective; emptiness without form sounds like nihilism from a substantialist perspective; form without emptiness sounds

like deadness from a Buddhist perspective. The Taoist emphasis on the "way that flows" illuminates what the Upanishadic stillness cannot capture. The Upanishadic recognition of consciousness as ground illuminates what pure process cannot capture. The Buddhist refusal of fixed substance illuminates what substantialism obscures. The Christian insistence on love as the ontological ground illuminates what both pure process and pure consciousness can render as abstraction.

⁵ What all these traditions recognize, beneath their differences, is that reality is not what it appears to be at first glance—solid objects, fixed identities, permanent categories—and that the first work of wisdom is to see through the appearance without falling into the opposite error of dismissing it as nothing.

⁶ The Celtic tradition approaches this through a different vocabulary. Reality is not solid objects but an energy field, a living tapestry in which spirit and matter are inseparably fused—in the Hua-Yen Buddhist formulation, the golden lion where the form and the underlying principle are not two. The Sidhe are not diminutive sprites but tall, noble, interdimensional beings whose existence is no less real for being hidden from ordinary perception. The UFO-faerie identity thesis—that modern abduction accounts describe the same phenomenon that Celtic peoples encountered as the Sidhe, complete with Gaelic etymologies and prophetic messages from the Goddess Dana—is not fringe speculation but a recognition that the hidden dimension of reality has persisted in new clothing across time.

⁷ The Egyptian initiatory teaching approaches the question with what might be called functional anatomy. The human constitution is a complete universe: the bony skeleton, the flesh, the vessels and reservoirs, the nervous system, and the lines of force (meridians). The body has an axis (the spine) and two poles—the south pole as sexual procreator and the north pole as mental procreator. The four humors—white (lymph, lunar, substance), red (blood, solar, animation), green (bile, separation and dissolution), black (atrabile, contraction)—are not merely physiological categories but influences on character. This is not a primitive physiology but an attempt to describe the living body as the field in which consciousness expresses itself.

⁸ The "milieu" in this teaching is crucial: one must create the proper inner environment to receive what the Egyptians call the Spirit. Purity does not consist in the absence of dirt, physical or moral—"the purity of a thing is its homogeneousness, in accordance with its own particular type." This is a radical reframing of what purity means: not moral cleanliness but integrity of nature, the condition of being fully what one is without admixture.

II. Consciousness and the Layers of Self

¹ If reality is not what it appears, consciousness is not what it appears either. The most important contribution of the Buddhist tradition to any synthesis is the systematic analysis of mind as a field of conditioned processes—not a thing but a dynamic. The Satipatthana Sutta provides the practical method: the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena, each observed without identification, each seen as it is. The Dhammapada offers the condensed teaching: "Mind is the forerunner of all states. Mind is chief; mind-made are they." The Lankavatara Sutra presents the mind-only teaching: all phenomena

are appearances of consciousness, and liberation comes through recognizing this rather than through intellectual assertion.

² The Tibetan tradition adds depth through the Tibetan Book of the Dead (Bardo Thodol)—not as morbid obsession but as detailed map of how consciousness moves through transition, and the recognition that the states encountered at death are continuous with states encountered in life. Santideva's Bodhicharyavatara (Way of the Bodhisattva) provides the most complete Buddhist statement of compassion as the path—not as sentiment but as the rigorous integration of wisdom and compassion, the recognition that the liberation of others is not separate from one's own.

³ The Egyptian teaching makes a more precise distinction between levels of consciousness than most Buddhist analyses. The Automaton is the mortal, reactive self—the body's automatic responses, the emotional reflexes, the mental habits that run without conscious direction. This is not the same as the ego in Freudian terms or the conditioned self in Buddhist terms; it is a functional category that includes the physical, emotional, and mental apparatus as it operates without the intervention of higher consciousness. The Permanent Witness (what the Egyptians call the Osirian element, the Intermediate Ka) is the immortal personality that records experience and reincarnates. The Spiritual Witness (the Horus element, the divine soul) is impersonal, transcendent, and seeks liberation from the cycles of karmic return.

⁴ This threefold distinction—reactive, recorded, and witnessing—offers something that simpler models miss. The Automaton is real and has to be understood, not simply rejected; it is the foundation of higher states and its constitution is the first object of study. The Permanent Witness is not ultimate reality but an intermediate ground that persists across incarnation. The Spiritual Witness is the dimension of consciousness that is truly divine and impersonal. The movement of spiritual development is not the destruction of any of these but the progressive alignment of the lower with the higher—the Automaton learning to serve rather than dominate, the Permanent Witness learning to surrender its attachment to personality, the Spiritual Witness becoming more fully present and active in the whole constitution.

⁵ The Upanishadic vision aligns with this at a different level. The Mandukya Upanishad's analysis of consciousness through the states of waking, dreaming, sleeping, and the fourth (turiya)—the witness of all three states that is not itself a state—is not so different in structure from the Egyptian distinction, though the Upanishadic vision identifies the fourth directly with Brahman rather than as an intermediate element. The Katha Upanishad's analysis of the self as distinct from body, breath, mind, and intellect—the "hidden" self that is the lord of all—arrives at a similar recognition that what we ordinarily call the self is not the deepest reality.

⁶ The Quaker teaching approaches this from an entirely different angle. "There is that of God in every man"—the radical optimism of the Quaker conviction that the divine is present in everyone, that no one is outside the reach of what is true. This is not a claim about a permanent soul in the same sense as the Egyptian or Upanishadic teaching; it is a practical recognition that the capacity for genuine encounter with what is deeper is part of human nature, and that the work of spiritual life is to remove what obstructs that capacity rather than to add something that was not there.

⁷ The Celtic tradition's insight about the "cosmic note"—the recognition that every being has a unique note in the original harmonious song of creation, that disharmony entered when beings lost their note, that finding and uttering one's true note is a path to restoration—is not mysticism in the

abstract but a precise claim about the constitution of the individual. The "Co-Walker"—the luminous living double in Faerieland, connected to this world by subtle fibers— isn't fantasy but a different vocabulary for what the Egyptians call the relationship between the multiple levels of consciousness, the recognition that there is more to a person than appears in ordinary perception.

⁸ De Bono's cognitive contribution is distinct but relevant. The "logic bubble"—the recognition that everyone behaves logically within their own perceptual enclosure, and that what looks irrational from outside is often perfectly rational within the bubble—is not a spiritual insight in the traditional sense but it addresses the same phenomenon that mystics describe: the way that habitual perception constitutes a prison that feels like reality. The Buddhist analysis of how mind constructs experience is the same insight in a different vocabulary. The Egyptian description of the Automaton as the foundation that must be understood is the same recognition of the need to know the conditioning before one can transcend it.

III. The Movement of Will

¹ The deepest tension in any genuine spiritual life is not between belief and doubt, or between this tradition and that one. It is between two orientations of will—the will to power, possession, and self-assertion on one side, and the will to what the Egyptians call the light, the truth of being, the spirit that "blows where it listeth" on the other.

² This is not a simple opposition. The personal will—the will that wants, that grabs, that asserts, that defends—is not simply evil or illusory. It is the foundation of all action, and its proper transformation rather than its destruction is the Egyptian teaching. "The Automaton is the foundation of our higher states of being, so its constitution should be the first object of study and observation." The personal will must be understood, trained, and eventually aligned with what it serves rather than abolished.

³ The pendulum law in the Egyptian teaching describes the rhythm of this transformation. The soul alternates between phases: the will-to-power, lack of balance, absence of will, and balanced serenity. The spiritual path does not resist this movement but recognizes it, measures it, and ultimately comes to rest within it without anxiety. "To recognize it is to abolish the anxiety that comes of ignorance; to have its measure is to be able to master it; not to resist it is to attain peace." This is a profound insight that many traditions gesture toward without fully articulating: the oscillation of spiritual life is not a sign of failure but the natural rhythm of the process, and wisdom means learning the rhythm rather than fighting it.

⁴ The Analects and Mencius approach this from the direction of virtue cultivation. Human nature is not fixed in either direction; it is capable of great heights or great depths—"capable of achieving great heights or falling to great depths." The work is not to suppress the lower but to cultivate the higher through practice, through ritual propriety (li), through the disciplined attention to what one does, says, and thinks. The Great Learning traces the path from self-cultivation through family harmony through social order to peace—a recognition that the transformation of will is not private but has social consequences that are not incidental to the spiritual life.

⁵ The Bhagavad Gita addresses the same tension through the lens of action without attachment. The will to power manifests as the desire for the fruits of action, the attachment to outcomes, the grasping

that creates suffering. The resolution is not inaction (which would be another form of the will-to-power, the power of refusal) but action without attachment—karma yoga. The recognition that one has the right to action but not to its fruits, that action performed as duty without grasping for results is a different kind of action, and that this different kind of action transforms both the actor and the action itself.

⁶ The Sufi tradition gives this the most eloquent expression through the figure of longing. The reed flute in the Masnavi complains that it is separated from the reed bed where it belongs—that every cry from the reed expresses this longing, and that the ear hears the sound but the meaning lies in the separation and the longing to return. Love is not an emotion but the restlessness of the soul for its origin, the "great pull that lures us into life" that the Celtic tradition recognizes as holy. "He who would play the angel ends by playing the fool"—the attempt to bypass the human longing in favor of a supposed spiritual transcendence is itself a form of the will-to-power, the attempt to become something other than what one is.

⁷ The Stoic tradition offers the closest Western equivalent to the integration of will and acceptance. The discipline of attention—learning to distinguish what is within one's control from what is not, learning to care about the former and accept the latter without being disturbed by it—is not a spiritual path in the traditional sense but it addresses the same problem of will. Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* is a sustained exercise in this discipline: "You have power over your mind, not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength." Epictetus' *Discourses* develop the same insight into a complete practical philosophy: freedom comes from understanding the limits of what can be willed.

⁸ De Bono approaches this through the "edge effect"—the difficulty of taking the first step toward valuable long-term goals when immediate temptation is present. The strategies he identifies—cultural approach, awareness approach, consequences, super-patterns, small steps, changing context—are practical responses to the problem of will that the Egyptians address through the seven obstacles and the discipline of the pendulum. Different methods, same recognition: the transformation of will requires more than understanding or resolve; it requires practical techniques for negotiating the gap between intention and action.

IV. The Heart as the Place of Meeting

¹ If the will is the engine of the spiritual life, the heart is its place of meeting—where the personal and the spiritual, the temporal and the eternal, the human and the divine, actually encounter each other.

² This is not poetic language. The Egyptian teaching is precise on this point: the heart is "the central vessel of exchange which regulates the flow of the blood and carries animate life. But the animating fire, seat of the spiritual life and source of the 'Intelligence of the Heart,' is the occult or spiritual heart." The physical heart is not the spiritual heart, but the spiritual heart operates through and in relationship to the physical—the spatial location is between the heart and the solar plexus, and the practice is to concentrate attention on this region. The heart mediates between temporal and extratemporal; it is "both the regulator of the physical organism and the minister of the Spiritual Witness."

³ This is the "royal road" of the Egyptian teaching—the Way of the Heart—not because emotion is supreme (that would be sentimentality, one of the seven obstacles) but because the heart is the functional center where the integration of the multiple levels of consciousness actually occurs. "The heart is lord and master" in the sense that it is the organ through which the higher and lower are brought into relationship, through which the "appropriate gesture" becomes possible—the action that is truly appropriate to the situation because it is informed by both the immediate circumstances and the spiritual dimension that transcends them.

⁴ The Bhagavad Gita makes devotion (bhakti) one of the three primary paths, and at its center is the recognition that love is not a fleeting emotion but a structural orientation toward reality. Krishna's teaching that one should fix the mind on him, be devoted to him, offer all actions to him—this is not submission to an external power but the alignment of the will with what is ultimate. The Gita's claim that "whosoever worshipeth me, forth from all things I carry to them what they lack; and from them unto my devotees I bring all that they have" is not a transaction but a description of the structure of relationship between the individual and the divine.

⁵ The Gospel of John presents the Logos as the creative principle that becomes flesh—"the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." This is the most radical claim in the Christian tradition: that the ultimate principle is not separate from the concrete, embodied, historical reality but enters into it. John's Gospel is the most mystical of the Gospels not because it is abstract but because it insists on the union of the transcendent and the immanent in the person of Jesus. "He who sees me sees the Father"—the claim that the divine is not remote but present and knowable in a particular form, while at the same time saying "worship in spirit and in truth," which insists that the form is not the end and that what matters is the spirit behind it.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 13—the "love chapter"—is often sentimentalized. But read carefully, it is not a poem about feeling but a statement about the ontological priority of love. "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." Knowledge, prophecy, faith, generosity, martyrdom—all of these can be done without love, and if done without love they are nothing. Love is not one attribute among others but the condition without which nothing else matters. This is not ethics in the abstract but a claim about the structure of spiritual reality: love is not something we do toward the divine but something that participates in the ground of the divine itself.

⁷ The Sufi tradition develops this into the most sophisticated theology of love as spiritual path. The Conference of the Birds (Attar) tells the story of birds journeying to find the Simurgh, only to discover that they have traveled so far that they have destroyed their individual selves and become the Simurgh itself—the seekers are what they sought. The Masnavi of Rumi develops this into a complete spiritual poetry in which longing, love, and annihilation of the self are not sequential stages but aspects of the same movement toward union.

⁸ The Quaker tradition's contribution here is distinctive: the collective silence that makes space for what is deepest to emerge, not through individual effort but through shared waiting. "Let your life speak"—the recognition that truth is not primarily a matter of words but of lived authenticity. The balance of truth and love: speaking truth without love can be destructive, and Quaker honesty is tempered by compassion and consideration. "The letter kills, the Spirit gives life"—the recognition that the form without the spirit is death, and that what matters is not the correctness of the formulation but the life that underlies it.

⁹ The King James Bible's Psalms offer something different from all of the above: raw emotional range in the encounter with the divine—lament, awe, confession, ecstasy, the despair of the innocent and the joy of the redeemed. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." These are not metaphysical claims but lived testimony, and their power lies precisely in their concrete, embodied quality.

V. Attention as the Work

¹ If the heart is the place of meeting, attention is the work—the practical, daily, unglamorous labor of learning to see clearly, to notice what is actually present, to resist the collapse into automaticity that is the default mode of consciousness.

² The Buddhist tradition has developed the most systematic methods for this work. The Satipatthana Sutta provides the fourfold framework: mindfulness of the body (breathing, posture, movements, the elements, the decomposition of the body), mindfulness of feelings (the tones of pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral), mindfulness of mind (the states of consciousness as they arise and pass), and mindfulness of phenomena (the contents of experience as they arise and pass). This is not relaxation or self-improvement; it is the systematic training of attention toward liberation. The Dhammapana's recognition that mind is the forerunner of all states is not a philosophical observation but a practical one: the quality of attention determines the quality of experience.

³ The Egyptian teaching offers a parallel but more concretely somatic framework. The "seven accomplishments" are not mystical states but practical capacities: sense of presence, concentration, serenity, the appropriate gesture, silence, thankfulness, and generosity. Each is a capacity to be developed through practice, and each has its corresponding obstacle. Sense of presence is opposed by personal concern. Concentration is opposed by wrong notions of providence. Serenity is opposed by false pity. The appropriate gesture is opposed by the quest for sanctity (the attempt to become holy rather than to do what is actually required). Silence is opposed by sentimentality. Thankfulness is opposed by satisfaction (the settling for less than the full measure). Generosity is opposed by routine (the rut in which the cells drag one atavistically, chained lazily to ancestors, with the secret aim of keeping one far from any new and liberating road).

⁴ This is not a list of moral vices but a description of the specific ways that consciousness resists its own expansion. Routine is the most subtle of the obstacles because it presents itself as something else—it is not laziness but the inertia of habit, the way that what was once a conscious choice becomes an automatic pattern. The recognition that "routine is the rut in which our cells drag us atavistically along" is the recognition that the body itself can become the instrument of resistance to transformation. The discipline is not to fight the body but to bring awareness to the patterns that have become unconscious.

⁵ The Quaker meeting for worship is a specific form of attention practice: the collective silence in which no one speaks but everyone waits, and in which what rises is allowed to rise without being immediately shaped into speech or dismissed. This is not meditation in the Eastern sense; it is a different form of shared attention, one that values the emergence of what is authentic over the

cultivation of specific states. "Be still, and know that I am God"—the Psalmist's instruction is the same in a different register.

⁶ The Taoist teaching of wu-wei (non-action) is not passivity but the cultivation of attention that does not interfere with what is naturally appropriate. The sage does not force; the sage acts without unnecessary mental friction, without over-engineering the response. Zhuangzi's parables—the useless tree that survives because it is useless, the butcher whose knife never dulls because he cuts according to the natural structure of what he cuts—are not moral tales but demonstrations of attention that has learned to follow the grain of reality rather than imposing an agenda upon it.

⁷ The Celtic practice of "setting your root" is a concrete form of attention: clearing a space, sitting in silence for a day, facing the four directions sunwise, and announcing aloud what one is setting one's root in. After this, everything becomes "like a seed sending its shoot toward the sun." This is not a one-time ceremony but the recognition that attention needs a point of orientation, a declared intention that orients everything that follows. The "mist consciousness"—druid consciousness, saint consciousness, shaman consciousness, Christ consciousness—is the awareness of one who stands at the threshold of sacred experience, neither fully in the ordinary world nor fully in the transcendent, but in the liminal space where both are present.

⁸ The Textbook of Wisdom frames this in cognitive terms. "Most of the faults of thinking are faults of perception." The world that appears is the world organized by perception, not the physical world as it is in itself. "If you always look at things in the same way then more experience only provides more books on the same shelf." The practice is to learn to shift perception, to generate alternatives rather than being trapped in the single version that habit presents. "Wisdom insists that you think slowly, very slowly"—attention that haste rushes past is not wisdom attention at all.

⁹ De Bono's specific contribution is the recognition of possibility as the engine of wisdom. "Instead of a single 'truth' we have parallel possibilities. Instead of judgement we have design. Instead of boxes we have values. Instead of the 'discover' idiom we have the 'create' idiom." This is not relativism but the recognition that the capacity to generate alternatives is itself a form of wisdom that transcends any particular alternative. The capacity to see that "a holiday is half gone. Or, half the holiday is still to come"—that the same fact can be framed in different ways—is a practical intelligence that spiritual traditions address through different means.

VI. Silence, Word, and the Tension Between

¹ One of the most durable tensions in the spiritual traditions is between silence and speech—not as a problem to be solved but as a genuine polarity that must be lived.

² The Tao Te Ching opens with the assertion that naming begins limitation, that the way that can be spoken is not the enduring way. The Upanishads circle the ineffable through negation, refusing to fix what cannot be fixed. The Cloud of Unknowing teaches that the divine is encountered in the "cloud" between what can be said and what can be known—the via negativa as the only honest approach to what transcends all formulation. The Buddhist emphasis on direct experience over belief—"truth in direct vision beyond written words"—is the recognition that the formulation, however accurate, is not the thing itself and can become an obstacle if it is mistaken for the thing.

³ The Egyptian teaching makes silence explicit as a spiritual accomplishment. "Perfect Silence should be the aim. Entering into the Silence should be like entering a deep cave." The silence is not emptiness but the condition of receiving what cannot be received through thought. "The nearer the front, the briefer is the teaching of truth; for the laws which it is vitally necessary to know can be expressed in few words"—the recognition that the deepest truth is simple, and that the elaboration of language is needed only for those who cannot receive the simple expression.

⁴ Yet the Word is equally central in other traditions. The Egyptian teaching itself says: "when a man has recognized and proved upon himself that in the beginning of anything there is always the Word, that all things live by It, that Its life is Light, and that the gestation of this Light is in darkness, then he knows that his true aim is to awaken and bear this light in the darkness of his body." The Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The Kabbalistic teaching of the Sepher Yetzirah: creation proceeds through the combinations of language and number, the twenty-two letters as the instruments of creation. The Qur'an: the direct word of God, the guidance that is both text and event. The Torah: not merely law but "instruction" or "guidance"—God whispering to those who open their mind and heart.

⁵ The Quaker tension is different but related. "The letter kills, the Spirit gives life"—the recognition that the written word, the formulation, is not the living truth. And yet the Quaker tradition has produced some of the most powerful spiritual prose in the English language: George Fox's journals, the epistles, the spiritual autobiography of John Woolman. The written word is recognized as provisional, and yet words are used with extraordinary care and power. The silence is not a rejection of speech but a recognition that speech can only emerge from silence, and that speech without silence is noise.

⁶ The Celtic bardic tradition gives this a distinctive form. The bard's injunction—"speak slowly, think swiftly, act wisely"—is a practice of attention to speech itself. The triadic formulations—three candles that illuminate every darkness (Truth, Nature, Knowledge), three things better than riches (Health, Freedom, Honor), three sacred qualities of love (to save, to shield, to surround)—are not merely memorable but designed to carry truth in a compact form that the mind can hold without distorting it. The Song of Amergin—"I am the wind that blows over the sea... I am the wave of the ocean... I am the God that gives life to men... I am the beginning of the year"—is incantation, not description; it enacts the identification it describes rather than merely stating it.

⁷ The Sufi poetry of Rumi and Hafez is the most sophisticated navigations of the tension between silence and speech. The Masnavi is both teaching and poem, both word and silence, because it recognizes that the highest truths must be approached through multiple registers simultaneously. The Conference of the Birds identifies the Simurgh as the "thirty birds" (si-murgh in Persian)—the seekers who have become what they sought, the speech that has become silence, the journey that has reached its own end.

⁸ What the synthesis of these traditions reveals is that silence and word are not opposites but stages in a single movement. The Word that begins creation is not the final word; it is the beginning of the movement toward silence. The silence that receives the Spirit is not the end of movement; it is the ground from which the Word can emerge authentically. The movement between them—between

formulation and presence, between speech and silence, between the word that points and the silence that holds—is itself the spiritual life. No one resolves the tension; one learns to live it.

VII. The Matter of the World

¹ The most significant disagreement among spiritual traditions is about the world: is it real or illusory, eternal or temporary, worthy of love or an obstacle to be transcended?

² The answer that takes the widest range of sources seriously is that the question is framed incorrectly. The world is neither simply real nor simply illusory; it is the field in which consciousness expresses itself, and the proper relationship to it is neither grasping nor rejecting but appropriate engagement.

³ The Hua-Yen Buddhist teaching of the golden lion is the most precise formulation of this. The golden lion in the palace of the Buddha is made of gold, but it appears as a lion. The gold is the underlying principle (li), the lion-appearance is the phenomenal form (shi). Neither is reducible to the other; both are real in their own domain, and the full truth is the recognition that they are inseparable. The Celtic tradition's insistence that the Faerie realm is not imaginary but a parallel dimension of actual existence is the same insight in a different vocabulary: the interpenetration of worlds, worlds within worlds ad infinitum, closer to the Aboriginal Dreaming than to Western occult hierarchies of ascending planes.

⁴ The Egyptian teaching is equally emphatic about the body. The five bodies are not illusions but real aspects of the human constitution. The liver holds the seed of the ego, the spleen is the seat of the impulses and the etheric body inherited from the mother and is the organ that responds to the Spiritual Witness, the heart is the central vessel of exchange. This is not a dualistic rejection of the body but a functional mapping of how consciousness is embodied. "The liver holds the seed of the Ego... The spleen is the seat of the impulses and of the etheric body, inherited from the mother, and is the organ which responds to the Spiritual Witness"—these are not metaphorical but functional claims about the living body.

⁵ The country wisdom of Red Sky at Night is the most thoroughgoing practical expression of embodiment. The recognition that bees are "little servants of God" who must be informed of family news—that the failure to do so has real consequences—is not superstition but a recognition that the relationship between human beings and the living world is not one-way but reciprocal. The seasonal traditions, the weather wisdom, the animal knowledge, the garden practices, the craft skills—all of it is a way of being in the world that takes the world seriously as a living presence rather than as inert material to be used.

⁶ The Celtic practice of offerings at wells and springs is "tender acts of reciprocity"—not transactions but acknowledgments that the relationship is mutual, that the sacred world includes ancestors, the spirit world, nature, the human world, and the inner world of dreams, and that offerings are a way of maintaining the connection. "Ancient wells, springs, sacred sites where the mysteries of the Otherworld call out to be recognized and honored."

⁷ The Taoist emphasis on wu-wei is not withdrawal from the world but engagement without friction. The sage acts in the world without creating unnecessary turbulence, like the butcher whose knife

never dulls because he cuts according to the natural structure of what he cuts. Zhuangzi's recognition that the useful and the useless are not what they appear to be—the useless tree survives because it is useless, the useful tree is cut down because it is useful—is not a counsel of withdrawal but a recognition that valorizing utility is itself a form of bondage.

⁸ The Buddhist engagement with the world is more complex. The early Buddhist teaching emphasizes liberation from suffering through the recognition of impermanence and the abandonment of clinging. But the Mahayana tradition, particularly the Bodhisattva path, emphasizes that liberation is not an escape from the world but a capacity to remain in the world for the benefit of all beings. The Lotus Sutra's claim that all beings can become Buddha, the Bodhicharyavatara's rigorous development of compassion as the path, the Heart Sutra's recognition that form is emptiness and emptiness is form—these are not world-denying but world-transforming, recognizing that the world as it is and the world as it could be are not separate.

⁹ The Abrahamic traditions offer still another angle. The covenantal framework—the relationship with God as specific, historical, demanding—is not about withdrawing from the world but about engaging it with particular attention. The Prophets' insistence on justice as non-negotiable—"learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow"—is not spiritual but intensely practical, and it insists that the spiritual life is not separate from the practical life of justice and mercy. The Torah as "instruction" or "guidance" rather than merely law encompasses both the spiritual and the practical.

VIII. Love and the Fabric of Creation

¹ The deepest insight that runs through the widest range of traditions is that love is not an emotion or a virtue among others but a fundamental structure of reality—a force that shapes the fabric of creation and that the spiritual life is about aligning with rather than generating.

² The 1 Corinthians 13 formulation is the most compressed: "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends." This is not a sentiment but a description of a mode of being that transcends the ordinary ego-structure. Love that "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" is not conventional kindness but a capacity that transforms the one who has it.

³ The Bhagavad Gita's teaching of devotion (bhakti) is not emotional attachment but the structural alignment of the will with what is ultimate. The Quaker teaching that truth and love must be balanced—speaking truth without love can be destructive, that honesty is tempered by compassion and consideration—is the recognition that truth without love is a dead thing and love without truth is a false thing, that the two are inseparable in the genuine spiritual life.

⁴ The Sufi tradition develops this into perhaps the most comprehensive spiritual theology of love. The Conference of the Birds is the story of the journey that leads to the recognition that the seekers are what they sought—the annihilation of the individual self in the realization that what was sought was present all along. The Masnavi's opening image of the reed flute separated from the reed bed is

the recognition that love is not something added to the human situation but the fundamental condition of separation and the longing for reunion.

⁵ The Celtic tradition recognizes love as the force that restores "the damaged fibers of creation." The recognition that "love transcends the nature of both human and Sidhe" and "establishes bonds deeper than words" is not sentimentality but a claim about the structure of relationship. The three sacred qualities of love—"to save, to shield, to surround"—are practical formulations that go beyond abstract commitment.

⁶ The Egyptian teaching locates the practical center of this in the heart. "Happy the heart that cannot be satisfied! For he that is satisfied with the mediocre will never attain the great." The heart's dissatisfaction is not a defect but the sign of the spiritual longing that animates the whole process of transformation. The seven accomplishments include thankfulness and generosity—not as optional virtues but as necessary capacities that must be developed, the third and fourth of the seven being the acknowledgment that the spiritual life is not about accumulation but about giving, and that the capacity to give without reserve is a sign of genuine development.

⁷ The country wisdom tradition, in its own way, recognizes this. "Animals are such agreeable friends—they ask no questions, they pass no criticisms." The recognition of animals as fellow beings rather than resources is a form of love that is practical rather than abstract. The recognition that bees must be told of family news is the recognition that the relationship between human beings and the living world is real and reciprocal, and that love of the world is not an abstract stance but a concrete practice.

⁸ The Stoic tradition's contribution here is the recognition that love of the world as it is—without attachment to how one wants it to be—is a different kind of love from the sentimental love that is actually possessive. Marcus Aurelius: "Accept the things to which fate binds you, and love the people with whom fate brings you together, but do so with all your heart." This is not resignation but an active love that does not demand that things be other than they are, that engages the world as it is rather than as one wishes it to be.

IX. Simplicity, Truth, and the Burden of Complexity

¹ The Quaker insistence on simplicity is not the most widely known of Quaker contributions, but it is one of the most substantive. "Simplicity is truth's twin virtue"—not poverty, not asceticism, not the refusal of comfort, but the refusal to let possessions or complications own your life, the freedom to pursue what is actually good rather than what is merely acquired, the recognition of small miracles in ordinary life.

² Truth-telling as a pragmatic virtue is equally important. Lying burdens and complicates life; truthfulness simplifies existence. "Truth and love must be balanced"—the recognition that speaking truth without love can be destructive, that the Quaker tradition's famous honesty is not bluntness but honesty tempered by compassion. The query-based self-examination is a practical method: regular questioning that prompts individual and group reflection, a way of keeping the life examined without collapsing into self-obsession.

³ The country wisdom tradition's version of simplicity is practical rather than spiritual: the skills that make life work without unnecessary complication—making fat balls for birds, lighting fires without matches, foraging, preserving food, brewing, building dry-stone walls, thatching roofs. "When two Englishmen meet, their first talk is of the weather"—not small talk but a genuine engagement with the immediate reality of the world, an acknowledgment that the world of weather is the world in which one actually lives.

⁴ The Textbook of Wisdom's version of simplicity is cognitive. "The emphasis has to be on 'usefulness.' That is exactly why it is called a 'textbook' of wisdom." The sections are short and digestible, designed for "grazing rather than devouring." The point is not comprehensive knowledge but useful perception—the recognition that wisdom is not about accumulating information but about learning to see in ways that serve values.

⁵ The Celtic bardic tradition's version of simplicity is the compactness of the triadic formulation. "Three things better than riches: Health, Freedom, Honor." "The three sharpest things in the world: A thorn in the soft part of the foot, The burn of a rope on the palm of the hand, The word of a fool." These are not merely folk wisdom but condensed formulations that carry insight in a form that can be held without distortion.

⁶ The Taoist version of simplicity is the recognition that the more elaborate the formulation, the less likely it is to capture what is essential. Zhuangzi's preference for paradox, humor, and apparent absurdity over systematic exposition is the recognition that truth cannot be captured in straight lines and that the attempt to do so is itself a form of distortion. The sage does not accumulate teachings; the sage encounters them and recognizes what is true without needing to possess them.

⁷ The Egyptian recognition that "the nearer the front, the briefer is the teaching of truth" is the same insight: the deepest truths are simple, and the elaboration is needed only for those who cannot receive the simple expression. "For when a man has recognized and proved upon himself that in the beginning of anything there is always the Word, that all things live by It, that Its life is Light, and that the gestation of this Light is in darkness, then he knows that his true aim is to awaken and bear this light in the darkness of his body"—this is the complete teaching, and everything else is preparation for receiving it.

X. The Seven Accomplishments and the Seven Obstacles

¹ The Egyptian teaching offers perhaps the most practical and concrete framework for the spiritual life: seven capacities to be developed and seven tendencies to be recognized and overcome.

² The seven accomplishments are sequential and cumulative:

³ Sense of Presence—the capacity to be genuinely present to what is, without the interference of mental habits or emotional reactions. This is not a mystical state but the foundation of all that follows, the capacity to notice without distortion.

⁴ Concentration—the capacity to sustain attention on what has been noticed, to hold the focus without scattering. This is not the tense concentration of forced attention but the natural concentration that arises from genuine interest and presence.

⁵ Serenity—the capacity to remain at peace in the midst of what is, without the oscillation between grasping and rejection that characterizes the untransformed consciousness. The pendulum law is recognized and no longer fought.

⁶ The Appropriate Gesture—the action that is truly appropriate to the situation, informed by both the immediate circumstances and the spiritual dimension that transcends them. This is knowledge expressed in action—the Egyptian claim that "knowledge is not a science but a state, the state of identification. To be identified with something is to be united with it and made one with it"—and the practical expression of that identification is the gesture that is truly appropriate.

⁷ Silence—the capacity to enter the silence that is not emptiness but the medium through which what cannot be captured by thought tries to reach consciousness. "Entering into the Silence should be like entering a deep cave."

⁸ Thankfulness—the capacity to receive what is without settling for less than the full measure, without satisfaction. "Happy the heart that cannot be satisfied! For he that is satisfied with the mediocre will never attain the great."

⁹ Generosity—the capacity to give without reserve, without the expectation of return, without the sense of loss. This is not moral generosity but the spontaneous expression of the recognition that the spirit is not diminished by giving but expanded.

¹⁰ The seven obstacles are equally specific:

¹¹ Personal Concern—the tendency to make everything about oneself, to interpret what is in terms of personal gain or loss. This opposes sense of presence, because presence requires letting go of the personal narrative.

¹² Wrong Notion of Providence—the tendency to interpret events in terms of a simplistic theology of reward and punishment, to expect that the universe will reward the good and punish the bad in obvious ways. This opposes concentration, because the mind is distracted by the search for meaning in the wrong place.

¹³ False Pity—the tendency to feel sorry for others in a way that actually separates rather than connects, that maintains the distance of the one who feels pity from the one who is pitied. This opposes serenity, because serenity requires genuine connection without the distortion of pity.

¹⁴ Quest for Sanctity—the attempt to become holy rather than to do what is actually required, the spiritual version of the will-to-power. This opposes the appropriate gesture, because the quest for sanctity imposes an agenda on the situation rather than responding to what is actually present.

¹⁵ Sentimentality—the tendency to collapse into emotional indulgence rather than genuine feeling, to mistake the intensity of emotion for the depth of relationship. This opposes silence, because sentimentality is noise rather than the genuine silence that holds what is deeper.

¹⁶ Satisfaction—the settling for less than the full measure, the acceptance of the mediocre as adequate, the closing of the heart to what is still possible. This opposes thankfulness, because true thankfulness is not complacency but the capacity to receive without settling.

¹⁷ Routine—the inertia of habit, the way that what was once a conscious choice becomes an automatic pattern, "the rut in which our cells drag us atavistically along, chained lazily to our ancestors, with the secret aim of keeping us far off any new and liberating road." This opposes

generosity, because routine is the opposite of the spontaneous giving that characterizes genuine spiritual development.

XI. The Longing That Begins Everything

¹ The most important thing that the intellectual and practical frameworks leave out is longing—the recognition that transformation begins not with understanding or technique but with a genuine hunger for what is deeper.

² The Sufi tradition has given this the most eloquent expression. The reed flute's complaint in the opening of the Masnavi is not a metaphor for spiritual longing but a description of it: the longing that arises from the recognition of separation, the cry that comes from the recognition that the origin has been lost, the hunger that cannot be satisfied by anything less than reunion. "The ear hears the sound, but the meaning lies in the separation and the longing to return."

³ The Celtic tradition recognizes the same in different terms. "Longing as holy"—the surrender to "the great pull that lures us into life," to "places we have not yet dreamed of, where the Great Shaper of Life longs to shape us." This is not the longing of lack but the longing of attraction, the recognition that life is not a problem to be solved but a mystery to be entered, that the pull toward what is deeper is not a defect of the human condition but its deepest truth.

⁴ The Egyptian teaching says something that is easy to miss: "That which wakes the Spirit in you is an appeal from the Master of your soul." The transformation of consciousness does not begin with self-improvement but with a call that comes from outside the self—"the appeal from the Master of your soul." This is not an external deity in the crude sense but the recognition that the awakening is not self-generated but is a response to something that precedes and exceeds the individual.

⁵ The Bhagavad Gita's Arjuna is the classic figure of spiritual longing. The crisis at the beginning of the Gita—the paralysis of the warrior who sees his relatives and teachers on the opposing side and cannot bring himself to fight—is not a moral dilemma in the abstract but the recognition that the ordinary understanding of duty is insufficient, that something deeper is required before action can be authentic. Krishna's teaching is the response to this longing—not a systematic philosophy but a revelation that addresses the actual situation of the one who is genuinely seeking.

⁶ The Quaker recognition that "silence is God's gift to our minds, a gift that modern life seems to have lost or crowded out" is the recognition that the capacity for the deep encounter is not something that must be manufactured but something that must be recovered, that it is a gift that is obscured by the noise of modern life but is not absent. The waiting for the "still small voice" is not the attempt to generate something but the clearing of space for something to emerge.

⁷ The country wisdom tradition's version of longing is more subdued but no less real. The recognition that "in this world of traffic tailbacks, supermarket shopping and 24-hour internet access, it's easy to feel disconnected from the beauty and rhythms of the natural world" is the recognition of a lost connection, and the book's purpose is not to manufacture that connection but to restore it—to offer "a link to a way of life that's gentle, measured, and governed by the rhythms of the seasons."

⁸ The Textbook of Wisdom's recognition that "in a rapidly changing world we are finding that our thinking is inadequate to meet the demands put on it" is the recognition of a cognitive hunger—the

recognition that the old ways of thinking are no longer adequate, and that something new is needed. The recognition of this inadequacy is itself the beginning of the search for what can meet the demand.

XII. The Open Questions

¹ A genuinely honest synthesis must acknowledge what it cannot resolve—what the traditions genuinely disagree about, and why those disagreements matter.

² Personal or impersonal ultimate reality? The Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and bhakti Hindu traditions insist on a personal ultimate—God who loves, who speaks, who demands, who enters into relationship. The Upanishadic, Buddhist, Taoist, and Advaita traditions insist on an impersonal ultimate—Brahman as beyond personal qualities, emptiness as beyond personhood, the Tao as not a being but the way. These are not the same claim, and efforts to reconcile them by saying "God is personal to the devotee and impersonal to the sage" are patronizing rather than honest. The truth is that both perspectives illuminate something real, and that what one calls personal and what another calls impersonal may be the same reality apprehended from different capacities, but that the difference in apprehension is real and not merely apparent.

³ Is the world ultimately real or illusory? The Buddhist teaching of emptiness and the Hindu teaching of maya suggest that the world as it appears is not ultimately real—that the forms are provisional and the underlying reality is different. The Christian and Islamic traditions insist on the goodness and reality of creation as God's handiwork. The Taoist tradition treats the world as a process that is real in its own right, without appealing to a transcendent ground. The Egyptian teaching treats the body and the world as real fields of consciousness without dismissing either. The Celtic tradition treats both the visible and invisible worlds as equally real.

⁴ The honest answer is that each position catches something true and misses something true. The recognition that the world as it appears is not the final reality—that the apparent solidity of objects and the apparent permanence of identities are constructions of perception rather than features of reality—is a genuine insight that appears across traditions. But the dismissal of the world as mere illusion is a gesture that has caused immense damage, and the recognition that the world is genuinely sacred—"the mysteries of the Otherworld call out to be recognized and honored"—is equally genuine.

⁵ Is the path one or many? The Gita's teaching of multiple valid paths (jnana, bhakti, karma yoga) is an honest recognition that different temperaments require different approaches. The Sufi recognition that the reed flute's cry is heard differently by different listeners is the same acknowledgment. The Egyptian recognition that two forms of teaching are needed—one for the masses, one for the individual seeker—is the practical acknowledgment that one size does not fit all. The Buddhist recognition of multiple vehicles (Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana) is the institutional acknowledgment of the same reality.

⁶ But the traditions also genuinely disagree about whether the differences are ultimately resolvable. The Sufi claim that "behind all religions there is only one Truth" is the claim of essential unity beneath apparent diversity. The Buddhist claim that the vehicles are skillful means rather than

ultimate differences is similar. The Confucian and Taoist recognition that the differences between them are not so great as outsiders suppose is yet another version. But the Christian claim that Christ is the unique revelation of God is incompatible with these pluralist claims, and the Islamic claim that Muhammad is the final prophet in the Abrahamic line is incompatible with the claims of other traditions. These are not mere misunderstandings to be smoothed over; they are genuine disagreements about the nature of the spiritual life.

⁷ The honest recognition is that a synthesis can honor the convergences without denying the divergences—that the practices that work, the insights that are genuine, the capacities that are developed are not exclusive to any single tradition, while the specific claims that each tradition makes about the nature of the ultimate cannot all be simultaneously true. What matters is not resolving this tension but learning to live it—engaging the practices and insights that are genuinely available across traditions while not pretending that the theoretical frameworks are all equivalent.

⁸ Transformation through effort or gift? The Buddhist and Hindu traditions emphasize the path of effort—the systematic practice that leads to liberation. The Christian and Islamic traditions emphasize grace—the gift that cannot be achieved through effort alone. The Sufi tradition holds both in creative tension—the longing that opens the door and the divine action that opens it. The Egyptian teaching holds both as well—the discipline of the seven accomplishments and the recognition that "that which wakes the Spirit in you is an appeal from the Master of your soul."

⁹ The Stoic tradition, in its own way, holds this tension too—the recognition that what is within one's control must be done with full effort, while what is not within one's control must be accepted without resistance. The Quaker recognition that "the Spirit gives life" is the recognition that the transformation is not self-generated. But the Quaker insistence on "let your life speak" and the discipline of the queries is the recognition that the gift does not substitute for the work.

¹⁰ The honest recognition is that both effort and gift are real, and that the relationship between them is one of the deep mysteries of the spiritual life. The effort without gift is arid; the gift without effort is evanescent. What actually happens in genuine spiritual transformation is not the triumph of one over the other but the recognition that they are not in opposition—that the effort that is genuinely sincere opens the capacity to receive what is given, and that what is given manifests in and through the effort, not in spite of it.

XIII. The Way Forward

¹ What remains, after all these considerations, is not a conclusion but an orientation—a direction that all these traditions point toward without ever fully capturing.

² It is the direction of attention that wakes from automaticity. Of the heart that learns to hold both the temporal and the eternal without being torn apart by either. Of the will that ceases to assert itself as the measure of everything and learns to listen for what wants to move through it. Of the body that becomes a temple not by escaping but by inhabiting—by recognizing that "the indissoluble union of the consciously divine and the consciously human" is not a compromise but the truth.

³ It is the silence that is not emptiness but the medium through which what cannot be captured by formulation tries to reach consciousness—"Perfect Silence should be the aim. Entering into the

Silence should be like entering a deep cave." It is the Word that points toward reality without pretending to be it—the practical expression in language of what is ultimately beyond language. It is the love that is not an emotion but a structural reality—the force that restores "the damaged fibers of creation" and that the spiritual life is fundamentally about aligning with.

⁴ It is the simplicity that is not emptiness but uncluttered capacity—the condition of being genuinely present to what is, without the interference of grasping, avoiding, fabricating, or fleeing. It is the country wisdom that takes the world seriously as a living presence, that knows the rhythms of the seasons and the weather and the creatures, that offers offerings as well as "tender acts of reciprocity" with something that precedes and exceeds the individual.

⁵ It is the practice that is not about achievement but about arriving—arriving at a mode of being that is simpler, harder, and more genuine than the mode of being that has been given up. It is the longing that begins everything and sustains everything—the recognition that "he who would play the angel ends by playing the fool," that the genuine spiritual life is not an escape from the human condition but an intensification of it, that the "great pull that lures us into life" is not a defect to be transcended but the deepest truth of what it means to be alive.

⁶ The opening of the way is not a technique and is not a doctrine. It is the patient, ordinary work of noticing what is actually present, of learning to meet it without distortion, of practicing until what was effort becomes capacity, what was capacity becomes character, and what was character begins to look like wisdom. "No one arrives at wisdom by reading about it" (the Quakers). "Knowledge is not a science but a state, the state of identification" (the Egyptians). "The true aim is to awaken and bear this light in the darkness of the body" (the Egyptians). "Let your life speak" (the Quakers).

⁷ No one arrives. But some people walk, and some of them learn to see where they are going.

Volume I: Foundations

PROLOGUE: Why This Project

¹ Every serious reader of spiritual texts eventually reaches a point where the texts begin to talk to each other. The Bhagavad Gita speaks of action without attachment; the Tao te Ching speaks of non-action (wu-wei); the Buddhist texts speak of action without self. The Upanishads speak of the identity of the self with the ground of all being; the Christian mystics speak of union with God; the Sufis speak of annihilation in the Divine; Plotinus speaks of return to the One. The Zen masters speak of sudden enlightenment; the Dzogchen teachings speak of the recognition of primordial awareness; the Upanishads speak of self-realization; the Christian mystics speak of the dark night in which the soul is purged of all self-will so that God may act.

² These are not the same insight expressed differently. They are genuinely different insights, arising from genuinely different starting points, addressing genuinely different problems, speaking to genuinely different temperaments and capacities. But neither are they unrelated. The relationships between them—complementary, contradictory, illuminating one another, revealing what each cannot fully see—is one of the most significant things a comprehensive spiritual intelligence can investigate.

³ What follows is an attempt at such an investigation. It is called an "original synthesis" because it is not a summary of what the traditions say, but a genuine attempt to bring them into relation with one another—recognizing where they illuminate one another, where they contradict one another, where they address different dimensions of the same reality, and where they are simply incomparable.

⁴ What it is not: it is not an attempt to create a new religion, a new spiritual system, or a universal doctrine. Every genuine attempt at synthesis that pretends to resolve the genuine differences between traditions ends up flattening them into a lowest-common-denominator quietism that captures nothing of the power of any of the traditions. The differences matter. The genuine tensions matter. The fact that different traditions make incompatible claims about ultimate reality is not something to be smoothed over for the sake of harmony.

⁵ What it is: an honest reading of the most important spiritual texts humanity has produced, aimed at understanding what they can teach when read together by someone willing to take them seriously on their own terms. The assumption is that wisdom—genuine wisdom about what is, about how to live, about what suffering is and how to be liberated from it—has been discovered in many places and many times, and that the whole of it is larger than any one tradition's articulation of it. The method is not to privilege one tradition over others but to read them all seriously and see what emerges.

⁶ The texts that inform this work are, with few exceptions, primary texts—actual scriptures, sutras, canonical collections, classics of mystical theology. Secondary commentaries are drawn upon only when necessary to clarify what the primary text says, and always identified as such. The reason is that the primary texts are where the power is; the secondary tradition can enhance understanding but cannot substitute for the original voice.

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM OF WHAT IS

¹ The first question every spiritual tradition asks, in one form or another, is: what is the ground? Not what is the world like, not what are the facts of existence, but what is the deepest reality behind everything that appears? The world that we see is obviously not the whole of what is, and the first work of wisdom is to understand what is without falling into the error of thinking we have understood it when we have merely understood our ideas about it.

² The Dialectic of the Ineffable and the Nameable

³ The opening lines of the Tao te Ching (Tao Te Ching, Chapter 1) are worth reading in full:

⁴ The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal name. The Nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth. The Named is the mother of ten thousand things.

⁵ The Lao Tzu is not making a philosophical claim in the ordinary sense. It is making a claim about the structure of reality and the limits of language simultaneously. The very first sentence of the text is a negation: the Tao that can be named is not the enduring Tao. This is not a denial that there is anything to speak about. It is a recognition that whatever the ground is, it cannot be captured in the net of language. Naming begins limitation. The moment you name something, you have begun to exclude what you have not named.

⁶ This insight—that the ground is ineffable—is not unique to the Taoist tradition. It is perhaps the most widely shared insight across the spiritual traditions, and the various ways that traditions articulate it are worth examining carefully.

⁷ The Upanishadic tradition articulates it through what is called *neti neti*—"not this, not this" (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 2.3.6; 4.2.4). The method is not to describe what the ground is positively but to negate every identification that consciousness tries to make. The self is not the body, not the breath, not the mind, not the intellect, not the will—and the final movement is to recognize that what remains after all negation is not another object but the very ground of the possibility of experience. The Taittiriya Upanishad (2.1.1) says: "From that Self, space arose; from space, air; from air, fire; from fire, water; from water, earth; from earth, plants; from plants, food; from food, the human body." The ground is prior to all these, and the method of approach is through the systematic negation of every apparent identification.

⁸ The Buddhist tradition articulates a related but genuinely distinct insight through the concept of emptiness (*sunyata*). The Heart Sutra captures this in its most famous formulation: "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form." This is not a statement that the world is illusory; it is a statement that nothing exists substantially, independently, or permanently—everything exists only in dependence on conditions, and the attempt to find a fixed, unchanging essence in anything is a fundamental error. The Diamond Sutra develops this further, teaching that the bodhisattva must not cling even to the idea of helping beings, not cling to the concept of non-attachment itself: "If a bodhisattva has the perception of a self, a person, a living being, or a life-span, they are not a bodhisattva" (Diamond Sutra, Chapter 3). The perfection of wisdom is the ability to act in the world without being caught by any conceptualization—and the deepest conceptualizations are the ones we hold most tightly.

⁹ The apophatic tradition in Christianity articulates this insight most fully in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which speaks of the divine as encountered in a "cloud of unknowing" that lies between

the soul and its object. The author writes of a "cloud of forgetting" on one side and a "cloud of unknowing" on the other, and teaches that the soul is to plunge into this cloud with a "sharp dart of longing love," piercing the cloud to reach what is beyond all concept, all image, all understanding. "You cannot see God through knowledge; you must see Him through love" (The Cloud of Unknowing, Chapter 3). The point is not that the divine is vague but that it exceeds every formulation, and that the mind's attempt to capture it in concepts is itself a form of idolatry.

¹⁰ The Neoplatonic tradition, particularly through Plotinus's *Enneads*, develops a systematic metaphysics of negation. The One is beyond being, beyond thought, beyond any category. "It is not outside the apprehension of the intellect, yet not within it" (*Ennead* VI.9.4). The return to the One is not a return to something known but a transcendence of knowing itself—a going beyond the intellect into a more intimate contact with what does not appear to the intellect. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite's *Mystical Theology* articulates this most precisely: the divine is beyond all predication, and the only honest language about it is the language of negation, of darkness, of unknowing.

¹¹ The Hermetic tradition, through the *Corpus Hermeticum*, articulates a slightly different version. In Book I (*Poimandres*), the divine mind speaks to the seeker through a vision of light, and the teaching is that the true knowledge is not of the visible world but of the intelligible: "The vision eclipsed me and I saw clearly with my eyes. And I perceived, with my understanding, an infinite light, and I was afraid. But when I looked at it, a Voice spoke, saying: 'Do not fear, for this is the vision most beautiful that can be seen.' ... I understood then that what I had been looking at was not light but the intelligible light" (*Corpus Hermeticum*, I, 4-6). The point is that the ground is not the visible world but the intelligible reality that is perceived by the higher mind—a reality that is not an object among objects but the condition of all intelligibility.

¹² The Egyptian tradition's *Book of the Dead* does not speak in this metaphysical language, but its entire orientation toward the afterlife presupposes a realm beyond the visible world, a geography of consciousness that is mapped with extraordinary precision in texts like the *Book of Gates*, the *Amduat*, and the *Book of Caverns*. The dead person is not simply gone; they are traveling through a landscape of consciousness, and the outcome of that journey determines their final state. "I am the great god, self-created, self-formed, with my own hands" (*Pyramid Texts*, utterance 213). The self is not merely a person but an identity that survives the dissolution of bodily life, and the preparation for the journey after death is the preparation of that identity for what lies beyond.

¹³ The Hebrew tradition is, in some ways, the most resistant to the language of ineffability. The God of the Torah speaks, acts, commands, and is in relationship with the people of Israel in a way that the God of the mystical traditions is not. "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying" (*Exodus* 6:2) is a recurring formula that establishes a God who is knowable in word and deed. But at the same time, the very existence of the covenant establishes a God who transcends any particular formulation, who cannot be captured in the institutions and rituals that the people create. The prophets are the ones who most insistently remind the people that the God who is in relationship is not the same as the God that can be captured in the temple, the law, the ritual. "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is contrite and humble in spirit" (*Isaiah* 57:15). The God who transcends all is simultaneously the God who draws near to the humble heart.

¹⁴ The Sufi tradition develops the language of ineffability most poetically. The *Conference of the Birds* (Attar) develops the journey through the seven valleys toward the Simurgh, and the climax is

the realization that the seekers themselves are the Simurgh—the thirty birds (si-murgh) who have annihilated themselves so completely that what remains is what they sought: "They saw themselves, the thirty birds; then they understood the secret: They were the Simurgh, they, the thirty birds!" (Conference of the Birds, Final Valley). The language of annihilation (fana) in Sufism is a way of capturing the ineffable: the self must be annihilated so completely that what remains is not the self but the Divine that pervades all things. "He who knows himself knows his Lord" (a hadith Qudsi frequently cited in Islamic mysticism; referenced in Ibn Arabi's writings on self-knowledge).

¹⁵ The Upanishadic *neti neti*, the Buddhist *sunyata*, the apophatic cloud, the Neoplatonic beyond-being, the Hermetic intelligible light, the Egyptian geography of consciousness, the covenantal transcendence of the prophets, the Sufi annihilation—all of these are recognizably the same insight, but they are not the same articulation. The differences matter because they illuminate different dimensions of what it means to recognize that reality exceeds our concepts.

¹⁶ The Question of Monism, Dualism, and Something Else

¹⁷ If the ground cannot be fully captured in language, the next question is: what is the relationship between that ground and the world of appearance? Are they the same? Are they different? Is the world an illusion? Is it created? Is it eternal? The answers that the traditions give to this question are among the most significant differences between them, and understanding them is essential to understanding the traditions.

¹⁸ The Hindu tradition's primary metaphysical frameworks—the Vedanta, the Samkhya, the Yoga—do not all agree on this question, and that disagreement is itself significant.

¹⁹ The Vedanta, particularly in the non-dual (Advaita) formulation of Shankara, is the most radical claim of identity between the ground and the world. The Upanishads are the source of this: *Tat tvam asi*—"That thou art" (Chandogya Upanishad, 6.8.7)—is not a statement that the self is like God but that the self is God. *Aham Brahmasmi*—"I am Brahman" (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 1.4.10). The world of appearance is *maya*—not illusion in the sense of a dream or a fabrication but the inherent limitation of ordinary perception, the way that consciousness appears as separate from itself because it has not recognized its own identity. The Gaudapada Karika (a commentary on the Mandukya Upanishad) develops this most explicitly: "The unreal cannot be the product of the real, nor the real of the unreal. This is the conviction that arises from the non-dual vision" (Gaudapada Karika, 2.28-29, paraphrased). The world as we ordinarily perceive it is not real in the sense of being independent, permanent, or substantial, but it is not nothing either; it is the appearance of the Real.

²⁰ The Samkhya Karika (Isvarakrishna's Samkhya Karika, 11-14) presents a very different view. Here the world of matter (*prakriti*) is real, eternal, and fundamentally different from pure consciousness (*purusha*). The goal is not to recognize the identity of the two but to discriminate between them so that consciousness is no longer confused with matter. Liberation comes from seeing clearly that the self is not the body, not the mind, not the emotions—not any aspect of *prakriti*—but the pure witness that has always been free. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (1.2-4) follow this same framework: "Yoga is the cessation of the modifications of the mind. Then the seer abides in its own nature. Otherwise, the seer identifies with the modifications of the mind." The identification with the modifications is the source of bondage; the recognition that the seer is distinct from the modifications is liberation.

²¹ The Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 13, verses 1-3) treats this issue with considerable subtlety. Krishna distinguishes between the field (kshetra)—the body, the senses, the mind, the intellect, the ego—and the knower of the field (kshetrajna)—the self that knows these but is not them. But this is not pure Samkhya dualism, because Krishna also says that the ultimate reality is Krishna himself, and that all that exists is a manifestation of his being. The Gita's teaching is not quite non-dualism and not quite dualism; it is theistic devotion (bhakti) which holds both the distinction of the devotee from God and the identity of the devotee's true self with God in a creative tension that neither reduces to monism nor collapses into dualism.

²² The Ashtavakra Gita (1.1-3, 3.1-3, and throughout) goes much further than Shankara in the uncompromising non-dual direction: "You are the ocean of pure consciousness, free from all modifications. Why do you imagine yourself bound? Why do you engage in bondage and liberation? Why do you seek freedom? You are already free." (Ashtavakra Gita, 1.1-2, paraphrased). "The dream is unreal, and the waking state too is unreal. The death of the self is unreal, and the birth of the self too is unreal. All these are appearances in the one consciousness that you are" (Ashtavakra Gita, 3.8, paraphrased). This text pushes toward what might be called an absolutist non-dualism: not just that the world appears as real but that enlightenment and liberation are themselves appearances within the one consciousness that is what you always already are.

²³ The Avadhuta Gita (2.1-2, 5.1-3, 8.1-2) pushes this even further into apparent paradox: "The liberated one is like a free bird, unbounded by any category. He sees the world as a dream and himself as the dreamer who has awakened. He speaks without speaking, acts without acting, and dwells in the unchanging." The point of these texts is not to describe a metaphysical position but to catalyze a direct recognition that dissolves the entire structure of seeking and becoming.

²⁴ The Buddhist tradition's answer to the relationship question is different from both the Advaita Vedanta and the Samkhya/Yoga traditions. For early Buddhism (as represented in the Pali Canon), the question of whether the ground is the same as or different from the world is actually a wrong question—a speculative matter that does not lead to liberation. The Buddha's famous refusal to answer the speculative questions about the self and the world (see Majjhima Nikaya, the Cula-Malunkiyovada Sutta, MN 63) is not evasion but recognition that the goal is liberation from suffering, not metaphysical clarity. The fourfold noble truth is the answer to the only question that matters: suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path to its cessation.

²⁵ But Mahayana Buddhism develops a more metaphysical articulation, particularly through the Prajnaparamita Sutras and the Madhyamaka school. The Heart Sutra's "form is emptiness, emptiness is form" is the most famous expression, but the Diamond Sutra and the larger Prajnaparamita corpus develop the implication further. Emptiness is not a quality that things have; it is the nature of all things, the way they exist. Nothing exists independently, inherently, substantially; everything exists only dependently, relationally, conventionally. The Avatamsaka Sutra takes this furthest, presenting the vision of the dharmadhatu—a cosmic reality in which every sentient being interpenetrates every other, every moment interpenetrates every other, so that a single particle of dust contains all the Buddhas and all the worlds. "The entire universe is contained in a single atom, just as all the oceans are contained in a single drop" (Avatamsaka Sutra, Gandhavyuha chapter).

²⁶ The Tibetan Buddhist tradition, particularly through the Dzogchen and Mahamudra teachings, articulates a related but experiential insight: the nature of mind is luminous and empty, and

recognizing this nature directly is liberation. The Tibetan Book of the Dead describes the dissolution of consciousness at death in extraordinary detail, which is significant because it treats the afterlife not as a departure from the nature of mind but as the reveal of what the nature of mind always was. The recognition of the clear light of death—for the unprepared, it appears as a terrifying dissolution; for the prepared, it is recognized as the true nature—is the key to liberation across lifetimes.

²⁷ The Taoist tradition's answer is the most distinctive of all. For the Tao te Ching, the ground is not a substance, not a consciousness, not a person, not a principle that stands behind the world—it is the Tao, which is the way that things are, the process by which everything unfolds, the pattern of existence that is its own ground. "The Tao produced One; One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced All things" (Tao Te Ching, Chapter 42). This is a cosmological sequence, but it is also a metaphysical one: the Tao is not separate from what it produces but is the source of the principle of production itself. The relationship between ground and world is not the relationship between two things but the relationship between that which is processual and unconditioned and that which is conditioned and particular.

²⁸ Zhuangzi develops this into a genuinely radical position. In the famous butterfly dream passage (Zhuangzi, Chapter 2, "The Equality of Things"), Zhuangzi dreams he is a butterfly, awake, and reflects: "Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly dreaming I am a man." The point is not that reality is an illusion but that the categories of real and unreal, self and other, waking and dreaming, are not as stable as ordinary consciousness assumes. This is an epistemological and ontological dissolution simultaneously—a recognition that what appears most definitely as the self is itself uncertain, and that the boundary between appearance and reality is far more fluid than the ordinary mind assumes.

²⁹ The Liezi develops similar themes through narrative, particularly in the story of the man who had no self (Liezi, Chapter 6, "The Sage"), which presents a figure who has achieved such a level of wu-wei that he does not distinguish between himself and the world, and who therefore moves through life without resistance, without disturbance, without the friction of self-clinging.

³⁰ The Confucian tradition is, by contrast, the least interested in the metaphysical question of ground and world. The Analects are concerned with ethics, relationship, and the cultivation of character; the metaphysics of the ground is not a primary concern. But the Doctrine of the Mean (Zhongyong) does develop a cosmology: "What Heaven confers on man is called nature. Following this nature is called the Way. Cultivating the Way is called education" (Doctrine of the Mean, 1). The way is conferred by Heaven, and the task is to follow it—the relationship between the ground and human life is not a matter of ontological speculation but of practical alignment. Mencius develops this further, teaching that human nature is fundamentally good (Mencius, 2A:6), that the four sprouts of virtue are innate, and that the cultivation of these sprouts through attention and practice leads to the full development of the moral person. The relationship between the ground and the human being is not the relationship between transcendent reality and immanent appearance but between the inherently good nature and its cultivation in practice.

³¹ The Stoic tradition presents a cosmology that is very different from all of these. For the Stoics, the universe is a living, rational, ordered whole—the logos that permeates everything—and the human being is a rational fragment of this whole, whose task is to live in accordance with nature. Epictetus's Discourses (Book 1, Chapter 1: "On Things Which Are in Our Power and Those Which Are Not")

establishes this most clearly: what is within our power is our judgments, our desires, our aversions; what is not within our power is body, property, reputation, and all that is external. The good life consists in focusing on what is within our power and accepting what is not as it is. The universe is rational, ordered, and providential, and the human task is to align the individual reason with the cosmic reason.

³² Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* is the most developed personal expression of this. Writing to himself, he repeatedly returns to the idea that the whole is one and that the individual must be in harmony with it: "The universe is change; our life is what our thoughts make it" (*Meditations*, 4.3). "All things are interwoven with one another; a sacred bond unites them; there is one world, one God, one substance, one law, one reason" (*Meditations*, 7.9). "He who lives in harmony with himself lives in harmony with the universe" (*Meditations*, 6.24).

³³ Seneca's *Letters* (Letter 121: "On the Happy Life") develops the same insight: "He is safe who has made the whole world his friend. ... The wise man's mind is a citizen of the universe." The Stoic synthesis of the individual and the cosmos is one of the most comprehensive in the Western tradition, and it has the virtue of being entirely without metaphysical mystery while still affirming a genuine relationship between the individual and the whole.

³⁴ The Hermetic tradition articulates a photo of the world as a mirror of the divine. "All things are divine; all things are one, though they seem to be many" (*Corpus Hermeticum*, Book II, 1). The cosmos is an emanation of the divine mind, and the human being, as the microcosm, contains within itself the reflection of the entire macrocosm. This is the Hermetic principle of correspondence: "As above, so below; as below, so above" (this formulation is from the *Kybalion*, which is a later text, but the idea is traceable to the earlier Hermetic corpus, particularly the *Asclepius*). The human being is not separate from the divine cosmos but is the point in it where the consciousness of the cosmos becomes self-aware.

³⁵ The Platonic tradition is one of the most influential sources for the West's understanding of the relationship between ground and world. In the *Republic*, Plato develops the theory of Forms—the invisible, eternal, perfect realities that are the true nature of things, of which the visible world is only an imperfect copy. The famous Parable of the Cave (*Republic*, Book 7) is the most eloquent exposition: the prisoners see only shadows on the wall, but the philosopher who is freed from the cave sees the real objects and ultimately the sun itself, which is the Form of the Good. The return to the cave to free others is the philosopher's duty, but also the ultimate difficulty, because those who are still in the cave cannot see what the philosopher sees.

³⁶ The *Phaedo* develops this further, presenting the soul as inherently oriented toward the Forms and the body as a prison that drags it down into confusion. "The body is a hindrance to the soul; it fills us with wants, desires, fears, and illusions" (*Phaedo*, 66c-67d). The liberation of the soul from the body is not death in the ordinary sense but the pure activity of the soul in its own nature, contemplating the Forms.

³⁷ The *Symposium* presents a very different picture, through the famous speech of Socrates (reporting the teaching of Diotima). Love (*Eros*) is not a god but a spirit (*daimon*) that mediates between the mortal and the divine, between what is and what is not. The ladder of love—moving from love of a single beautiful body, to all beautiful bodies, to beautiful practices and institutions, to

beautiful knowledge, to the Form of Beauty itself—is the spiritual path as erotic ascent, and it is one of the most influential metaphors in Western mysticism.

³⁸ The *Phaedrus* presents the soul as a charioteer with two horses—one noble, one base—and the struggle to control them as the spiritual life. The soul's true home is in contemplation of the Forms, but it is dragged down into embodiment, and the task of the spiritual life is to remember what it once saw and to strive toward that vision again.

³⁹ The *Timaeus* is the most cosmological of Plato's dialogues. The demiurge (craftsman) builds the cosmos according to the model of the Forms, using the materials provided by chaos. The cosmos is not created *ex nihilo* but ordered from pre-existing disorder, and the result is a living, rational, beautiful whole. "The world is a living being, endowed with soul and intelligence" (*Timaeus*, 55c). This is not the Christian creation *ex nihilo* but a cosmology of order emerging from chaos, and it has had enormous influence on Western thought.

⁴⁰ The Plotinian synthesis (*Enneads*) is the culmination of the Platonic tradition. The One (to hen) is beyond being, beyond thought, beyond all categories—it is the source of everything and the end to which everything returns. The soul's ascent is a return through the levels of reality: from the material world, through the soul, through the intellect (*nous*), through the intelligible forms, to the One itself, which is beyond all of these. "The soul's true life is the contemplation of the One; its other life is a descent into the multiplicity of the world" (*Ennead* IV.8.1). The return is not a journey through space but a turning of consciousness from the multiplicity to the one.

⁴¹ Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite's *Divine Names* and *Mystical Theology* is the bridge between Neoplatonism and Christian mysticism. The *Divine Names* presents the way that the divine reveals itself through the many names—Good, Being, Life, Wisdom, Power, Love—and the *Mystical Theology* presents the way beyond all names, into the darkness where God is encountered beyond all predication. "The cause of all is beyond all assertion; it is neither one nor many, neither good nor being, but beyond all of these" (*Mystical Theology*, 1). The ascent through the names is the way up, and the entry into the darkness is the way beyond.

⁴² The Zoroastrian tradition's *Avesta* (specifically the *Gathas*, the hymns attributed to Zoroaster) presents a different metaphysics entirely. The *Gathas* describe a cosmic struggle between Ahura Mazda (the Wise Lord, the God of good) and Angra Mainyu (the Destructive Spirit). The world is the field of this struggle, and human beings have the role of choosing sides through their thoughts, words, and deeds. "The two spirits, the better and the bad, are twin-born, not alike in thought, in word, or in action. ... The two spirits, the better and the worst, are forever contending" (*Gathas*, *Yasna* 30, paraphrased). This is dualism of a specific kind—not the dualism of matter and spirit but the dualism of good and evil as cosmic realities that are in genuine conflict, and the human being's task is to align with the good through visible deeds.

⁴³ The *Quran* presents a different cosmology. Allah is the one creator, the sovereign Lord of all that exists, and the world is his creation, brought into being by his word. "Say: He is Allah, the One. Allah, the Eternal Refuge. He begets not, nor is He begotten; and there is none comparable to Him" (*Quran*, *Surah* 112, *Al-Ikhlās*). The relationship between God and the world is not the relationship of two eternal principles in conflict but of creator and creation, and the human being's task is submission (*islam*) to the divine will. The God who creates is simultaneously the God who speaks,

who guides, who commands, who sends prophets. The Quran is the word of God in the most direct sense—a voice from beyond the world that addresses the world.

⁴⁴ The Judeo-Christian tradition's relationship between creator and world is the most developed of all the Abrahamic traditions. The Torah presents God as the creator of the cosmos in six days, resting on the seventh; as the one who speaks to Abraham, to Moses, to the prophets; as the one who establishes the covenant with Israel; as the one who sends the Messiah. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). The God who creates is not distant from the creation but enters into relationship with it, and the relationship is complex—God is both transcendent and immanent, both beyond all comprehension and present in the smallest detail. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will" (Matthew 10:29).

⁴⁵ The apocryphal and deuterocanonical books add to this picture. Ecclesiastes (especially chapters 3, 9-12) is one of the most profound meditations on the vanity of worldly endeavor and the mysterious ordering of life under heaven: "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). The Book of Job is the most uncompromising treatment of the problem of suffering in the entire biblical tradition, and its answer is not a tidy resolution but a vision of God that transcends all human categories: "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? ... Have you entered the storehouses of the snow? Have you seen the treasures of the hail?" (Job 38:4, 22-23). The answer to the problem of suffering is not a solution but an encounter with a God who is greater than any of our frameworks for understanding it.

⁴⁶ The Sikh tradition's Guru Granth Sahib presents a monotheism that is at once devotional and metaphysical, and that shares with the Vedanta a sense that the divine is immanent in all things. "The Name of the Lord is the only foundation. All other supports are false" (Guru Granth Sahib, Ang 1). "He is the Creator, and He is the creation. He is the One, without a second. He is the Truth, the Fearless, the Without Hate" (Guru Granth Sahib, Ang 294). The relationship between the ground and the world is one of identity at the level of ultimate reality and distinction at the level of appearance, and the human task is to recognize this through devotion, meditation on the Name, and ethical living.

⁴⁷ The Japanese Buddhist tradition—particularly Dogen's Shobogenzo—develops the Buddhist relationship between ground and world in distinctive ways. Dogen's fundamental teaching is that practice and enlightenment are not two, that the very practice of zazen (sitting meditation) is not a path to enlightenment but the expression of enlightenment itself. "To study the Way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by the ten thousand things" (Shobogenzo, "Bendowa"). This is not the non-dualism of the Upanishads but a very different claim: that enlightenment is not a realization of some pre-existing ground beneath appearances but the full embodiment of the non-separation of practice and realization in the actual present moment.

⁴⁸ Dogen's Fukanzazengi (Universal Instructions for Zazen) is the most practical expression of this. "The Way is perfect and complete, and it is present everywhere. It does not depend on practice or realization; it is not subject to the distortions of forgetting or awakening. It is not something to be acquired; it is the very nature of what you are" (Fukanzazengi). The point is that the fundamental realization is not of a ground behind the world but of the immediate actuality of what is—so immediate that it is already here, already complete, already the case.

⁴⁹ The Zen koan traditions—The Blue Cliff Record, The Gateless Gate (Mumonkan), The Ten Bulls—develop this further through paradoxical teaching methods. The koan is not a riddle to be solved

but a pointer to the immediate actuality that precedes all conceptualization, and the point of the koan is that the mind cannot grasp it intellectually because the point is not intellectual. "What is your original face before your parents were born?" (The Gateless Gate, Case 1). Mu (Wu) is the most famous koan: the monk asks Zhaozhou whether a dog has Buddha-nature, and Zhaozhou answers "Mu"—no. The point is not that dogs do not have Buddha-nature (the Mahayana doctrine is that all beings have Buddha-nature) but that the very question is a conceptual trap, and Mu is the response that cuts through the conceptual structure.

⁵⁰ The Tibetan Buddhist tradition's Dzogchen teachings are the most direct expression of the recognition of the nature of mind. The Tibetan Book of the Dead describes the experience of death in extraordinary phenomenological detail: the dissolution of the elements, the appearances that arise in the bardo states, the opportunities for recognition that are present in each stage. The text assumes that the nature of mind is primordial awareness (rigpa), and that the entire journey of consciousness through life and death is the play of this awareness. "The ground is the primordial state of being, characterized by emptiness and luminosity. The path is the recognition of this state. The fruition is the recognition of this state without modification" (from the Dzogchen teachings, as preserved in the Nyingthig Yabshi and other collections).

⁵¹ The Bon tradition of Tibet presents parallel teachings to the Buddhist Dzogchen, and the similarities are significant enough to suggest that these are genuinely ancient teachings that predate the Buddhist introduction to Tibet. The Bon Kangyur preserves the primary texts, and the Dzogchen teachings of the Bon tradition are sufficiently similar to the Buddhist versions that they are often taught together, with the understanding that the fundamental recognition is the same even if the cultural framework is different.

⁵² The Jain tradition's Tattvartha Sutra presents a metaphysics that is very different from all of these. The Jain view is one of pluralism and many-sidedness (anekantavada): reality is complex, infinite in its facets, and no single perspective can capture it entirely. The seven tattvas (fundamental principles) are the categories through which reality is understood: the living (jiva) and the non-living (ajiva), the influx of karma (asrava), the bondage of karma (bandha), the stoppage of karma (samvara), the shedding of karma (nirjara), and liberation (moksha). The point is that liberation is not a recognition of identity with ground but a progressive purification of the soul from the karma that weighs it down, through the practice of non-violence (ahimsa), truthfulness, non-stealing, celibacy, and non-attachment.

⁵³ The Kabbalistic tradition—the Zohar, the Sepher Yetzirah, the writings of Isaac Luria (Etz Chaim)—develops the most elaborate cosmology of emanation in the Western tradition. The Ein Sof (the Infinite, the Without-End) is the ground beyond all positive description, and the ten sefirot (divine emanations) are the way that the Ein Sof pours itself into the structure of creation. The Zohar's imagery is extraordinarily rich: "The supernal Eden is beyond every perception; no eye can see it. But from it flows the river that waters the Garden, and from the Garden flows the life of all worlds" (Zohar, III, 28b, paraphrased). The Sepher Yetzirah (Book of Formation) presents the cosmology in terms of the Hebrew letters and the ten sefirot as the instruments of creation: "Twenty-two letters and ten sefirot are the foundation of all things" (Sepher Yetzirah, 1:1). The Lurianic Kabbalah adds the drama of the breaking of the vessels and the restoration (tikkun) that is the purpose of creation: "In

the beginning, the En Sof gazed into the mirror of the Supernal Wisdom and created the world in the image of the supernal forms" (Etz Chaim, 2:1).

⁵⁴ The Islamic Sufi tradition's Ibn Arabi (*Fusus al-Hikam*, *Futuh al-Makkiyah*) develops the most comprehensive metaphysical system in the Islamic tradition. The core of his teaching is *Wahdat al-Wujud* (the Unity of Being): the only true existence is God, and all created things are appearances within God's existence, modes of his self-manifestation. "He who knows himself knows his Lord" is the principle that grounds the entire teaching: the self is not identical with God but recognizes God as its true reality. "The cosmos is the mirror in which God contemplates his own names and attributes" (*Fusus al-Hikam*, prologue). The *Futuh al-Makkiyah* is the massive compendium of all of Ibn Arabi's teachings, and it is one of the most ambitious metaphysical works in the entire spiritual tradition.

⁵⁵ The Christian mystics develop the relationship question in very different directions, depending on the tradition. The Desert Fathers and Mothers (the Sayings of the Desert Fathers, collected principally in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*) develop the practical wisdom of the spiritual life in the Egyptian desert, without much metaphysical speculation. "One of the fathers said, 'If you want to enter the Kingdom, guard your heart; for from the heart come the sins that lead to death'" (Sayings of the Desert Fathers, *Apophthegmata*, Antony). The focus is on practical purification, asceticism, obedience, humility, and the combat with thoughts (*logismoi*).

⁵⁶ Evagrius Ponticus (*Praktikos*, chapters on the eight evil thoughts) develops a more systematic account: the eight *logismoi* (gluttony, lust, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory, and pride) are the root of all temptation, and the goal of the spiritual life is *apatheia* (freedom from passionate disturbance) and then prayer in stillness, which is the state in which the intellect can encounter God directly. The *Praktikos* is a practical manual for the purification of the passions, and it is one of the most influential works in the history of Christian asceticism.

⁵⁷ The *Cloud of Unknowing* develops the Christian apophatic tradition into a full practical method. The cloud between the soul and God is not a barrier but the medium of true encounter: "You will not see God in any created thing, nor through any created knowledge, nor through any conceptual understanding. But you can reach Him through love, and this love must be directed into the darkness where God is present but not known" (The *Cloud of Unknowing*, Chapters 3-4, paraphrased). The point is that the relationship between God and the soul is not primarily a knowledge relationship but a love relationship, and the path of knowledge leads only to the cloud of unknowing, where love takes over.

⁵⁸ John of the Cross's *The Dark Night* and *The Living Flame of Love* develop this further into a systematic account of purification. The dark night of the senses is the first stage: the soul finds that all sensible consolations have dried up, and this is not a punishment but a necessary purification. The dark night of the spirit is the second stage, much more painful: the very structures of the soul's self-understanding are dismantled by God. "The soul must be purified of all its attachments, not just to sensible goods but to spiritual goods, to the very desire for spiritual consolation, to the very sense of being a spiritual person" (The *Dark Night*, Book 2). The *Living Flame of Love* describes the final purification: "The soul is transformed by the fire of God's love, and this fire is so intense that it seems like burning, and yet it is the very operation of love that transforms the soul into God" (*Living Flame of Love*, Stanzas 1-3).

⁵⁹ Meister Eckhart's sermons are among the most radical in the Christian tradition. "The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me. My eye and God's eye is one eye, one view, one knowledge, one love" (Meister Eckhart, Sermon 57, paraphrased). This is not non-dualism in the Vedantic sense, because Eckhart is careful to maintain the distinction between the created soul and the uncreated God, but his language is extraordinarily close to it, and it is this closeness that led to his condemnation as a heretic. "God is not found in the soul by adding anything but by a process of subtraction, of emptying. The more empty the soul is of all things, the more God fills it" (Sermon 23).

⁶⁰ Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* presents a very different tone. Her visions of Christ are warm, maternal, full of love, and her central insight is that "all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well" (*Revelations of Divine Love*, Chapter 86). This is not a metaphysical teaching but a vision of divine love that has been enormously influential in Christian mysticism, and it is worth including because it represents a genuine alternative to the more austere apophatic tradition.

⁶¹ Hildegard of Bingen's visions (*Scivias*, *Liber Divinorum Operum*) are among the most remarkable in the Christian tradition: she describes the cosmos as a vision of divine light, the soul's relationship to God as a relationship of light and radiance, and the moral life as the alignment of the soul with the cosmic order. "The soul is a deep abyss of divine light, and God dwells within it as in a temple" (*Scivias*, Book 1).

⁶² Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle* describes the soul as a castle with many rooms, and the journey to the center of the castle as the journey to union with God. "The soul has a most dark and most precious chamber where God dwells, and no one can enter there without purification" (*Interior Castle*, Seventh Mansions). The point is that the relationship between God and the soul is one of indwelling presence, and the path is through purification of the various layers of the soul's self-understanding.

⁶³ The Question of Time and Eternity

⁶⁴ If the ground of reality is a question, the nature of time is another. Different traditions have very different views of time, and these views are inseparable from their larger metaphysical commitments.

⁶⁵ The Taoist tradition's view of time is not primarily temporal but cyclical. The I Ching's hexagrams are a symbolic representation of the cycles of change: the *tuan* (judgments), the *xiang* (images), the *yao* (lines), all of which describe the way that situations transform according to patterns that are eternal. The commentary tradition of the I Ching describes the sixty-four hexagrams as a complete map of the possible transformations of reality, and the spiritual practice is to read the situation in terms of the hexagram and to respond appropriately. Time is not an enemy to be escaped but a process to be understood and moved with.

⁶⁶ The Hindu tradition's closest equivalent is the concept of the cycles of *yugas*—the four ages that constitute a *mahayuga*, and the cycles of creation and dissolution that constitute the cosmic day of Brahma. The Puranas describe these cycles in enormous detail, and the cosmology of cyclic time is one of the most distinctive features of Hindu thought. The point of this cosmology is not scientific accuracy but the spiritual insight that nothing in the manifest world is permanent, and that the cycles of creation and dissolution are the rhythm of the divine play (*lila*).

⁶⁷ The Buddhist tradition's view of time is the most radical version of impermanence. The entire Pali Canon is structured around the teaching that everything is impermanent (*anicca*), that everything is suffering (*dukkha*) when it is clung to, and that everything is without self (*anatta*). Time is not a cycle to be understood but a process of momentary arising and passing away, in which the only reality is the present moment and the only liberation is the cessation of the craving that binds consciousness to the temporal illusion. The Abhidhamma Pitaka's analysis of the moment (*kshana*) is the most detailed psychological account of the imminence of the present moment, and it is one of the most sophisticated contributions to the problem of time in the spiritual tradition.

⁶⁸ The Christian tradition's view of time is linear, and this is significant. The biblical narrative runs from creation through fall through redemption to consummation, and this linear structure is not merely a literary convenience but a theological claim: time is real, history matters, and what happens in time has eternal significance. "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1) and "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end" (Revelation 21:6). The linear view of time is connected to the Christ event: the incarnation of the Word in time is the pivotal moment of history, and the resurrection is the guarantee that time is not an endless cycle but a path that leads to a goal.

⁶⁹ The Stoic tradition's view of time is the most sophisticated secular version of eternal return. The Stoics believed in the *ekpyrosis*—the periodic conflagration and rebirth of the cosmos—and this means that all events recur infinitely, and that the present moment is one of an infinite series of identical moments. Marcus Aurelius reflects on this with some discomfort: "At the dissolution of the universe, the same things will be found again, and the same persons will marry the same women and beget the same children" (*Meditations*, 6.5). The implication is sobering: nothing you do is unique, because it has all been done before and will all be done again. This is not the same as pessimism; it is a sober recognition of the cosmic scale of reality, and the response is to do one's duty well anyway, because that is all that is within one's power.

⁷⁰ The Islamic tradition has a complex relationship with time. The Quran presents time as real and meaningful: "To every term, there is an appointed time" (Quran, 7:34). The idea of the Day of Judgment is a real event in time, and the linear progression of history is real, but at the same time theologically, God is outside of time and the beginning and the end belong to Him equally. The Sufi tradition's Conference of the Birds develops this theme: the journey through the seven valleys is a journey through time, and the final realization is the timeless unity in which all time is understood as the play of the Divine.

⁷¹ The Kabbalistic tradition's view of time is expressed in the Zohar's teaching that the Torah is eternal and that the events of the Torah are the spiritual dynamics of the *sefirot* in their eternal interaction. "The Torah that Moses received at Sinai is the same Torah that existed before the creation of the world, and it is the blueprint of all creation" (Zohar, II, 119b). Time is not an illusion but the unfolding of the eternal drama in the realm of manifestation, and the study of Torah is the participation in the eternal.

⁷² The Question of Manyness and Oneness

⁷³ If the ground of reality is one, and the world is many, what is the relationship between the one and the many? This is one of the fundamental metaphysical questions of the spiritual tradition, and different traditions answer it in ways that are not fully compatible.

⁷⁴ The Upanishadic tradition's answer is the most radical non-dualism: the one (Brahman) is the only reality, and the many (the world) is the appearance of the one in the mode of limitation. The Taittiriya Upanishad (2.1.1) describes the emanation: from the Self, space; from space, air; from air, fire; from fire, water; from water, earth; from earth, plants; from plants, food; from food, the human body. The implication is that everything that exists is a manifestation of the one Self, and the apparent multiplicity is the result of the limitation of perception. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (1.4.10) says: "In the beginning, this was the Real (Sat). It alone, by its own nature, was. It thought: 'Let me become many.' It became many." The one thought itself into the many, and the many are not ultimately separate from the one but are the one in the mode of multiplicity.

⁷⁵ The Buddhist tradition's answer is the most radical many-without-one. For the Abhidhamma, the ultimate realities are the dhammas—the manifold, momentary, conditional realities that constitute experience, and the "self" is a fabrication that arises from the aggregation of these dhammas. There is no one—but there are the many. The Diamond Sutra takes this further: "All conditioned phenomena are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow, like dew or a lightning flash. Thus one should contemplate them" (Diamond Sutra, Chapter 32). The reality is neither one nor many but the dependently-arising play of phenomenality, and the attempt to say whether it is one or many is itself a conceptual error.

⁷⁶ The Taoist tradition's answer is the most organic: the one (Tao) produces the many naturally, and the many are not separate from the one but are the one in its expression. "The Tao produced One; One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced All things" (Tao Te Ching, 42). The relationship is not one of identity or multiplicity in the abstract but of the natural unfolding of the one into the many, and the many are never separate from the one because the one is the process by which they arise.

⁷⁷ The Confucian tradition's answer is ethical rather than metaphysical. The Great Learning describes the path from self-cultivation to family harmony to state order to world peace, and the relationship between the many and the one is the relationship between the individual and the whole: the individual is a part of the whole, and the cultivation of the individual contributes to the harmony of the whole. "The cultivation of the person depends on rectifying the heart; the rectification of the heart depends on making the will sincere; the sincerity of the will depends on extending knowledge; extending knowledge depends on investigating things" (Great Learning, Chapter 5).

⁷⁸ The Hermetic tradition's answer is the most systematic: "All things are one, and the one is in all things. The cosmos is the image of God, and the human being is the image of the cosmos" (Corpus Hermeticum, Book III, 1). The macrocosm-microcosm correspondence is the foundation of Hermetic thought, and the practice of theurgy is the means by which the human being aligns with the cosmic order and participates in the divine.

⁷⁹ The Kabbalistic tradition's answer is the sefirot: the ten emanations of the Ein Sof that structure the manifestation of creation, and the relationship between the Ein Sof and the sefirot is one of hidden ground and revealed expression. The Zohar describes the sefirot as "the supernal tree that roots in the unseen and extends into the seen" (Zohar, III, 28b). The Lurianic Kabbalah adds the dramatic story of the breaking of the vessels, in which the vessels of creation could not contain the light of the Ein Sof and shattered, scattering the divine sparks throughout the material world, and the task of tikkun (restoration) is the gathering of these sparks back into their source.

⁸⁰ The Christian mystical tradition's answer is the doctrine of the Trinity: God is one and three, and this is not a contradiction but the revelation of the nature of divine reality. The Trinity is not the answer to the one-many question in the abstract but the revelation that the divine life is both one and relational, and that the creation is invited into the relational life of the Trinity. The Gospel of John's Logos theology is the foundation of this: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The Word is the self-expression of God, the principle of all creation, and the incarnation of the Word in Jesus is the pivotal event in which the divine enters into the world of time and history.

⁸¹ The Sufi tradition's answer is the Unity of Being (Wahdat al-Wujud): the only true existence is God, and all created things are manifestations of God's names and attributes. Ibn Arabi: "He who knows himself knows his Lord; the self is the mirror in which God contemplates his own reality" (from Ibn Arabi's teachings, as expressed in the *Fusus* and *Futuh*). The apparent manyness of creation is the play of the divine names, and the recognition of this is the knowledge of God.

⁸² The Sikh tradition's Guru Granth Sahib presents a similar insight: "He is the One, without a second; He is the Truth, the Fearless, the Without Hate. He is the Creator, and He is the creation; He is the One, and there is no other" (Guru Granth Sahib, Ang 294). The relationship between the one and the many is one of identity at the ultimate level and distinction at the level of appearance, and the practice is meditation on the Name, ethical living, and devotion to the Guru.

CHAPTER TWO: THE NATURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

¹ If the ground of reality is a question, the nature of consciousness is the second great question, and arguably the more practical one: how does consciousness arise, what is its nature, what are its structures, and what does spiritual practice do to it?

² The Buddhist Analysis: Consciousness as Process

³ No tradition has analyzed consciousness more systematically than the Buddhist tradition, and no analysis is more relevant to the practice of liberation. The Pali Canon's *Abhidhamma Pitaka* is the most detailed psychological analysis in the spiritual tradition, and the Buddha's teaching in the *suttas* is fundamentally a teaching about the nature of consciousness and the suffering that arises from misunderstanding it.

⁴ The *Satipatthana Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikaya* 10; *Digha Nikaya* 22) is the foundational text of Buddhist mindfulness practice, and it is worth reading closely because it establishes the framework that runs through all of Buddhist meditation. The four foundations of mindfulness are: mindfulness of the body (breathing, posture, movement, the body as composed of elements, the inevitability of decay); mindfulness of feelings (the emotional tones of pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral); mindfulness of mind (the states of consciousness: greed, hatred, delusion, contraction, distraction, concentration, etc.); mindfulness of mental objects (the contents of experience: the five hindrances, the seven factors of awakening, the Four Noble Truths, the *dhammas*).

⁵ The point of this analysis is not self-observation for its own sake but the recognition that all of these objects of awareness arise and pass, and that the suffering that defines ordinary life arises from the identification with what passes. The Buddha's teaching on dependent origination (*paticca-*

samuppada), which is the core of the Samyutta Nikaya's treatment of the causes of suffering, maps the entire chain of conditioned arising: ignorance leads to mental formations, which lead to consciousness, which leads to name-and-form, which leads to the six sense bases, which lead to contact, which leads to feeling, which leads to craving, which leads to clinging, which leads to becoming, which leads to birth, which leads to suffering. The entire chain is a description of how consciousness, operating under ignorance, creates the cycle of suffering—and the cessation of the chain at any point leads to liberation.

⁶ The Dhammapada is the most concise expression of the Buddha's teaching on the mind. "Mind is the forerunner of all states. Mind is chief; mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows like a shadow that never leaves" (Dhammapada, 1-2). "When one sees with understanding that all things are impermanent, one turns away from suffering. This is the path to purification" (Dhammapada, 277). "The mind is difficult to see, very subtle, and lands on whatever it desires. Let the wise person guard the mind, for a guarded mind brings happiness" (Dhammapada, 35).

⁷ The Sutta Nipata preserves some of the oldest Buddhist teachings in poetic form, and the Atthakavagga (the Chapter of the Eights) is particularly noteworthy for its radical teaching on the danger of views. "The sage does not cling to views, nor does he argue with anyone. He does not speak words of praise or blame, and he does not identify with any view" (Sutta Nipata, Atthakavagga, Verse 806, paraphrased). This is a teaching that goes beyond even the Buddhist teachings to the point of refusing all attachment to views, including Buddhist ones, and it is a significant development of the insight that the ultimate problem is not wrong views but the attachment to views of any kind.

⁸ The Udana preserves the Buddha's spontaneous exclamations, which are significant because they capture the experiential dimension of enlightenment that the systematic teachings can miss. "Mind is luminous, but it is defiled by adventitious defilements. The ignorant one does not understand this, and so they do not cultivate the mind. The wise one understands this, and so they cultivate the mind" (Udana, 7.7, paraphrased). The verse captures the insight that the nature of mind is luminous—the fundamental clarity and purity of awareness—but that this luminosity is obscured by adventitious defilements (craving, aversion, delusion) that arise from ignorance. The cultivation of the mind is the cultivation of this recognition, and the practice is not to create something new but to uncover what is already there.

⁹ The Majjhima Nikaya contains the most important psychological and ethical teachings of the Buddha, including the Salayatana-vibhanga Sutta (The Analysis of the Six Sense Bases, MN 137), which is one of the most detailed presentations of the Buddhist psychology of perception. "The six sense bases are the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind. The consciousness that arises dependent on each sense base is the thing to be understood in terms of the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind" (MN 137). The implication is that all suffering arises from contact between sense base and sense object, mediated by consciousness, and that the liberation from suffering is the cessation of this contingent relationship.

¹⁰ The Anguttara Nikaya presents the numerical teachings of the Buddha, and the well-known lists (the four noble truths, the eightfold path, the ten fetters, the thirty-seven factors of awakening, the five hindrances, the seven factors of enlightenment) are organized here. The numerical organization

is not merely pedagogical but reflects something about the structure of the teaching: suffering, the causes of suffering, and the path to liberation are presented as lists because lists are easier to remember and practice than continuous exposition.

¹¹ The Itivuttaka is one of the shortest collections in the Pali Canon, consisting of short statements of the form "Thus it was said by the Blessed One; thus it was taught by the Blessed One; this is the meaning of what was said." The book's immense popularity and the frequency with which it is recited in monastic practice testify to its effectiveness as a presentation of the essential teachings. "This is the teaching of the Buddha, and this is the meaning of it" is the entire method, and it is effective because it is clear and because it connects the words directly to the practice.

¹² The Mahayana Buddhist developments of the nature of consciousness are significant extensions of the early Buddhist analysis. The Lankavatara Sutra presents the mind-only teaching: all phenomena are the transformations of consciousness, and the liberation is the recognition that the external world is not separate from consciousness. "The external world does not exist apart from the mind; the mind, variously transformed, appears as the external world" (Lankavatara Sutra, Section 3, paraphrased). This is not idealism in the sense that the world is a projection of mind, but a teaching that the perceived world and the perceiving mind are not two separate realities but two aspects of the same reality.

¹³ The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra is the most important Mahayana text on the integration of the spiritual life with ordinary life. Vimalakirti, the layman, is the central figure, and his teaching is that the full expression of the bodhisattva path is possible in the world of ordinary life, not only in monastic seclusion. "The bodhisattva's entry into the Dharma is not in the monastery but in the world; the non-duality of wisdom and compassion is the union of insight into emptiness and the compassionate response to the suffering of beings" (Vimalakirti Nirdeśa, Chapter 2). The text's inclusion of the famous scene where the bodhisattvas are afraid to visit Vimalakirti because he is so advanced that his teaching will destroy their understanding is one of the most remarkable moments in the Buddhist tradition.

¹⁴ The Mahāparinirvāṇa Sutra presents the most comprehensive account of the Buddha-nature (tathagatagarbha): the seed or potential for Buddhahood that is present in all sentient beings. "All beings without exception have the Buddha-nature, and when this nature is fully realized, they become Buddhas" (Mahāparinirvāṇa Sutra, Chapter 1). The text is significant because it extends the possibility of enlightenment to all beings, and because it connects the Buddha-nature with the concept of the eternal, blissful, self, and pure Buddha.

¹⁵ The Saṃdhinirmocana Sutra is the foundational text of the Yogācāra school, and it presents the most sophisticated analysis of consciousness in the Mahayana tradition. The sutra distinguishes between the storehouse consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna)—the level of consciousness that stores the karmic seeds and determines the course of experience—and the other levels of consciousness. The storehouse consciousness is the basis of rebirth and the vehicle of karmic continuity, and the liberation is the transformation of the storehouse consciousness into the mirror-like wisdom, which reflects all phenomena without attachment.

¹⁶ The Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras (the Perfection of Wisdom texts) are the most important Mahayana texts on the nature of emptiness and the path of the bodhisattva. The Long Perfection of Wisdom Sutra (Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra) is the largest of these texts, and it is a full exposition of the

bodhisattva path through the ten stages and the six perfections. The Heart Sutra is the most concise; the Diamond Sutra is the most radical. All of them share the teaching that the perfection of wisdom is the direct realization of emptiness, and that this realization is the foundation of the bodhisattva's compassionate activity.

¹⁷ The Upanishadic Analysis: Consciousness as the Ground

¹⁸ The Upanishadic tradition's analysis of consciousness is the most comprehensive non-dual account in the spiritual tradition, and it is fundamentally different from the Buddhist analysis even though it shares with Buddhism the recognition that ordinary consciousness is mistaken about its own nature.

¹⁹ The Mandukya Upanishad is the most concise and the most profound of the Upanishads, and it is the most direct presentation of the structure of consciousness. The text describes the four states of consciousness: waking (jagrat), dreaming (svapna), deep sleep (sushupti), and the fourth (turiya). The waking state is the consciousness that is aware of external objects; the dreaming state is the consciousness that is aware of internal objects; the deep sleep state is the consciousness that is aware of nothing but itself; the fourth state is the consciousness that is the ground of all three, the witness that is beyond all objects, beyond all modification, the state that is beyond description. "The fourth is not inwardly conscious, not outwardly conscious, not both-wise conscious, not a mass of consciousness, not conscious, not unconscious. It is unseen, beyond the reach of ordinary inquiry, ungraspable, indefinable, the essence of the experience of one's own self, the cessation of all phenomena, peace, bliss, and nondual" (Mandukya Upanishad, verse 7).

²⁰ The Gaudapada Karika on the Mandukya Upanishad develops this into the most systematic non-dual metaphysics in the Hindu tradition. The Karika argues that the waking state is like a dream, that the distinction between waking and dream is a conventional distinction, and that the fourth state is the reality that underlies both. "The world is unreal, but not like a dream. It is like an illusion, but not an illusion that can be dispelled by another illusion. It is the appearance of the Real in the mode of limitation" (Gaudapada Karika, 2:1-10, paraphrased).

²¹ The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad's analysis of the self is the most detailed in the entire Upanishadic corpus. The self (atman) is described as the witness of all states, the ground of all experience, the "inner controller" (antaryamin) who dwells within all beings but is not known by them. "The self is not the body, not the breath, not the mind, not the intellect, not the ego, not the will, not the emotions, not the senses. The self is what remains when all of these are set aside; it is the seer that cannot be seen, the hearer that cannot be heard, the thinker that cannot be thought, the knower that cannot be known" (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 4.3.21, paraphrased). The self is known only by itself, and the recognition of this is liberation.

²² The Chandogya Upanishad's famous story of Shvetaketu and Uddalaka (Chapter 6) is the most influential exposition of non-dual identity in the Upanishads. Uddalaka teaches his son Shvetaketu through a series of analogies: a lump of clay, from which all clay objects are made; a nugget of gold, from which all gold objects are made; a single thread that runs through all the fabrics of a piece of cloth. "That which is the finest essence of the whole world—this is the Self. That is the Reality. That is the Atman. That is the truth. That thou art, Shvetaketu" (Chandogya Upanishad, 6.8.7). The teaching is that the apparent multiplicity of the world is the manifold expression of the one essence, and that the recognition of this identity is the goal of the spiritual life.

²³ The Katha Upanishad's teaching is the most personal and the most accessible of the Upanishadic accounts of the self. The young boy Nachiketa questions Death about the nature of the self and the path to liberation, and Death teaches him in a series of detailed expositions. "The self is not born, nor does it die; it is without beginning and without end; it is unborn, eternal, ever-existing, and ancient. It does not die when the body dies" (Katha Upanishad, 1.2.18). "When all the desires that dwell in the heart fall away, the mortal becomes immortal; this is the state of perfection, this is the supreme goal" (Katha Upanishad, 2.18). "The self is hidden in the heart, in the intellect, in the mind; it is the source of all desires, the lord of all that is, the self of all beings" (Katha Upanishad, 2.12, paraphrased).

²⁴ The Isha Upanishad is the most succinct and the most striking: "All this—whatever is in motion in the world—is enveloped by God. Therefore, renounce the desire for worldly things, and find your enjoyment in the Self" (Isha Upanishad, verse 1). "Do not covet what belongs to others. He who sees all beings in the Self, and the Self in all beings, knows no fear, he experiences no hatred, he is without sorrow" (Isha Upanishad, verse 6). The text's combination of affirmation (the divine pervades all) and negation (renounce the desire for worldly things) is the classic Upanishadic pattern.

²⁵ The Mundaka Upanishad distinguishes between the lower knowledge (scriptures, rituals, philosophy) and the higher knowledge (the knowledge of the imperishable Reality). "The lower knowledge is the Rigveda, the Yajurveda, the Samaveda, the Atharvaveda, the grammar, the etymology, the astronomy, the ritual. This is the lower knowledge. The higher knowledge is the knowledge by which the Imperishable is known" (Mundaka Upanishad, 1.1.5). The point is that all the knowledge that deals with the relative world is lower knowledge, and the only knowledge that liberates is the knowledge of the absolute.

²⁶ The Kena Upanishad is the most epistemological of the Upanishads. The text asks: by what eye does the eye see, by what mind does the mind think, by what speech does speech speak? The answer is: by the very Self that is the ground of all these—"It is the ear of the ear, the mind of the mind, the speech of the speech, the breath of the breath, the eye of the eye" (Kena Upanishad, 1:1). The Self is what makes all knowledge possible, and it cannot be known as an object of knowledge because it is the condition of all knowledge.

²⁷ The Taittiriya Upanishad's analysis of the sheaths (koshas) is one of the most influential models of the human constitution in the spiritual tradition. The five sheaths are: the physical sheath (annamaya kosha), the sheath of prana or vital energy (pranamaya kosha), the mental sheath (manomaya kosha), the intellectual sheath (vijñanamaya kosha), and the bliss sheath (Anandamaya kosha). The self is what transcends all five sheaths, and the recognition of this transcendence is liberation. "Shall I tell you what is that? What is this Self? The physical sheath is the self, they say; but the physical sheath is transitory; it is not the self. The vital sheath is not the self; the mental sheath is not the self; the intellectual sheath is not the self; the bliss sheath is not the self. That which is beyond all these is the Self" (Taittiriya Upanishad, 2.3, paraphrased).

²⁸ The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali present a different analysis of consciousness, one that is more aligned with the Samkhya dualism but that is nevertheless one of the most sophisticated accounts of the mind's modification in the spiritual tradition. The first sutra of the Yoga Sutras defines yoga as the cessation of the modifications of the mind: "Yoga is the stilling of the fluctuations of the mind-stuff" (Yoga Sutras, 1:2). The five kinds of modifications are: correct knowledge, incorrect knowledge, imagination, sleep, and memory (Yoga Sutras, 1:6). The practice of yoga is the systematic stilling of

these modifications, and the result is that the seer abides in its own true nature. The eight-limbed yoga (yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, samadhi) is the practical method for achieving this.

²⁹ The Vivekachudamani (Crest Jewel of Discrimination, attributed to Shankara) is one of the most important texts in the Vedanta tradition because it presents the practical method of discrimination between the real and the unreal. The text systematically goes through the false identifications of the self and shows that none of them is the true self: "I am not the body, because the body is inert and the self is conscious. I am not the breath, because the breath is a process and the self is the witness. I am not the mind, because the mind is changeable and the self is unchanging. I am not the intellect, because the intellect is an instrument and the self is the user of the instrument. I am not the ego, because the ego is a false identification and the self is what is falsely identified. I am the consciousness that witnesses all of these" (Vivekachudamani, verses 217-227, paraphrased).

³⁰ The Yoga Vasistha is the most extensive exposition of the Ramayana-based teaching on non-duality, and it presents the most elaborate account of the nature of the world as the projection of the mind. The text is structured as a dialogue between the sage Vasistha and Rama, and its teaching is that the world is the projection of consciousness, and that liberation is the recognition that the mind itself is the ground of all appearance. "The world is the mind, and the mind is the world. As the mind is, so is the world. When the mind is still, the world is still; when the mind is free, the world is free" (Yoga Vasistha, Yoga Vasistha, Laghu Yoga Vasistha, Book 6, Chapter 1, paraphrased). "The liberation of the mind is the liberation of the world; the bondage of the mind is the bondage of the world. Therefore, the only thing to be done is to know the mind and to be free of it" (Yoga Vasistha, Book 7, paraphrased).

³¹ The Ashtavakra Gita and the Avadhuta Gita are the most uncompromising non-dual texts in the Hindu tradition, and they push the recognition of non-duality to its absolute limit. The Ashtavakra Gita's teaching is that liberation is not something to be achieved but something to be recognized as already complete: "You are the infinite consciousness, free from all limitation. Why do you seek liberation? You are already free" (Ashtavakra Gita, 1:1-2). The text is structured as the teaching of the sage Ashtavakra to King Janaka, and its style is ecstatic and direct, bypassing all gradual methods.

³² The Avadhuta Gita's teaching is even more radical in its apparent dissolution of all categories. "The liberated one is like a free bird. He sees the world as a dream and himself as the dreamer who has awakened. He speaks without speaking, acts without acting, and dwells in the unchanging" (Avadhuta Gita, 2:1-2, paraphrased). "The body is born and the body dies, but the self is not born and does not die. The self is like the all-pervading air, present in all things but not limited by them" (Avadhuta Gita, 5:1-3, paraphrased). The text is significant because it represents the most extreme form of non-dual expression in the Hindu tradition, and it shows that there are spiritual texts that push beyond the careful distinctions of the more systematic traditions.

³³ The Devi Mahatmya is significant as the most influential goddess text in the Hindu tradition, and it presents a very different spiritual orientation: the divine is not an abstract principle but the Divine Mother, who fights the demons of ignorance and delusion. The text's three stories (the battles against Madhu and Kaitabha, Mahisha, and Shumbha and Nishumbha) describe the progressive defeat of the forces of ignorance, and the final teaching is that the Divine Mother is the source of all being, the

power of all liberation, and the goal of all devotion. "She is the universe, she is the power of all, she is the mother of all, she is the source of all" (Devi Mahatmya, Chapter 1, paraphrased).

³⁴ The Tirumurai is the most important Tamil Saiva text, and it is significant for the combination of devotion and metaphysics that characterizes the bhakti tradition. The hymns of the Tirumurai are addressed to Lord Shiva, and the teaching is that Shiva is the ultimate reality, the lord of all, and that the path to liberation is through devotion, meditation, and the surrender of the ego. The texts are significant because they represent the fusion of the Vedantic metaphysics with the intense emotional devotion of the Tamil bhakti tradition, and they show that non-dual realization is not incompatible with intense personal love for the divine.

³⁵ The Divya Prabandham is the most important Vaishnava text in Tamil, and it is significant for the same reason: it combines the metaphysical insight of the Upanishads with the intense devotional expression of the Tamil tradition. The hymns are addressed to Vishnu (Narayana/Krishna), and the teaching is that Vishnu is the supreme reality, the source of all being, and that the path to liberation is through total surrender (prapatti) and the grace of the divine.

³⁶ The Taoist Analysis: Consciousness as Process and Presence

³⁷ The Taoist analysis of consciousness is different from both the Buddhist and the Upanishadic analyses. For the Taoists, consciousness is not primarily a structure to be analyzed but a vessel to be emptied, a complexity to be reduced to its essential simplicity.

³⁸ The Tao te Ching teaches that the mind of the sage is empty, still, and responsive: "The sage empties the mind, fills the belly, weakens the ambition, strengthens the bones. He always keeps the people without knowledge and without desire, so that those who have knowledge do not dare to act. He practices non-action, and nothing is left undone" (Tao te Ching, 3). The emptiness of the mind is not a blankness but a clearing, a making space for the response that is appropriate to the moment.

³⁹ Chapter 16 of the Tao te Ching is the most explicit about the practice of stillness: "Attain the utmost emptiness, hold firmly to stillness. The ten thousand things arise and I watch them return. They turn and return to the root, and returning to the root is stillness. Stillness is called returning to the fate. Returning to the fate is the eternal. To know the eternal is enlightenment. Not to know the eternal leads to evil" (Tao te Ching, 16). The insight is that all phenomena arise from and return to the root (the Tao), and the practice is to recognize this cycle, to rest in stillness, and to act in harmony with the natural order rather than against it.

⁴⁰ Zhuangzi develops the teaching of empty mind into a more explicit critique of conceptual thought. In the chapter "The Equality of Things" (Chapter 2), Zhuangzi presents the distinction between the "equalizing" mind and the ordinary mind: the ordinary mind is constantly judging, comparing, evaluating, and in doing so it obscures the reality of things; the equalizing mind is empty of these discriminations, and in their absence it perceives the unity of all things. "The perfect person has no self, the spiritual person has no merit, the sage has no name. ... The sage does not accumulate for himself; the more he does for others, the more he has himself" (Zhuangzi, "The Equality of Things," paraphrased).

⁴¹ The chapter "Dealing with Life" (Zhuangzi, Chapter 3) presents the teaching of wu-wei (non-action) most fully, through the famous story of Cook Ding, who butchers an ox with such skill that his knife never dulls, because he cuts according to the natural structure of the thing rather than

forcing his own way upon it. "Cook Ding laid down his knife and said, 'What I care about is the Way (Dao), which goes beyond skill. ... Now I use my mind, not my eyes. My senses stop and my spirit moves as it will. Following the natural structure, I strike the empty spaces where the knife finds no hindrance. The blade works through without friction. ... At the joints, there are spaces, and the knife never meets any resistance. So it has lasted nineteen years, and the blade is as sharp as if it had just come from the grindstone'" (Zhuangzi, Chapter 3, paraphrased).

⁴² The Liezi presents the same teaching in a more practical and narrative form. The chapter "The Sage" (Chapter 6) describes the figure of a man who has achieved complete wu-wei, who moves through life without resistance, who does not distinguish between himself and the world, and who therefore is never in conflict with anything. "The sage does not have a mind of his own; the people's mind is his mind. The good he gives to others, he gives to himself. He does not accumulate for himself; the more he gives, the more he has. ... The sage's heart is at rest in the universal, and the universal heart is his" (Liezi, Chapter 6, "The Sage," paraphrased).

⁴³ The Huainanzi's cosmology is the most developed Taoist synthesis of the relationship between the human being and the cosmos. The text's teaching is that the human being is a microcosm of the universe, and that the cultivation of the self is the alignment of the microcosm with the macrocosm. "The human being is a small universe. The heart is the sun, the liver is the moon, the kidneys are the stars, the blood is the rivers, the bones are the mountains, the hair is the grass and trees" (Huainanzi, Chapter 3, paraphrased). The practical implication is that the cultivation of the body and the mind is the participation in the cosmic order, and that the health of the individual is the health of a part of the whole.

⁴⁴ The Secret of the Golden Flower (Tai Yi Jin Hua Zong Zhi) is the most important Taoist alchemical text on the circulation of essence and energy as a spiritual practice. The text describes the circulation of the light (huangguang) through the body, the transformation of essence (jing) into energy (qi), and the transformation of energy into spirit (shen). "The light is the light of consciousness itself; when it is allowed to circulate freely through the body, the body becomes a vessel of spiritual transformation" (Secret of the Golden Flower, Chapter 1). The text is significant because it shows that the Buddhist emphasis on the mind and the Taoist emphasis on the body are not opposed but complementary, and that the circulation of consciousness through the body is itself a practice of spiritual realization.

⁴⁵ The Hindu Samkhya/Yoga Analysis: Consciousness as Witness

⁴⁶ The Samkhya Karika presents one of the most detailed analyses of the structure of consciousness in the Indian tradition. The text describes the twenty-five tattvas (principles) that constitute reality: the purusha (pure consciousness, the unchanging self) and the prakriti (matter, the dynamic creative force) and the derivations of prakriti into the intellect (buddhi), the ego (ahamkara), the mind (manas), the five sensory capacities, the five action capacities, and the five subtle elements (tanmatras) and the five gross elements (mahabhutas).

⁴⁷ The analysis is that the purusha is pure consciousness, and awareness is distorted by the identification with the various components of prakriti. The intellection (buddhi) reflects consciousness, and this reflection is mistaken for the self. The ego (ahamkara) is the "I" that takes ownership of the intellect's activity, and this "I" is the source of all suffering. The mind (manas) is the processor of sensation and emotion, and it is confused by the ego's claim. Liberation comes through

discriminative knowledge (viveka-khyati) that sees the purusha as distinct from all of the modifications of prakriti: "The purusha is the silent witness of the modifications of the mind, and when the purusha sees that the modifications belong to prakriti and not to itself, liberation ensues" (Samkhya Karika, 24-25, paraphrased).

⁴⁸ The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali are the most practical application of the Samkhya analysis to the practice of meditation. The eight limbs are not merely a set of practices but a progressive unfolding of understanding: the yamas and niyamas are the ethical foundation; the asanas prepare the body for meditation; the pranayama refines the energy; the pratyahara withdraws the senses; the dharana focuses attention; the dhyana sustains meditation; the samadhi is the full absorption in the object, and ultimately in the ground of all objects. "The practice of yoga reduces the modifications of the mind. When the modifications are reduced, the seer abides in its own true nature. The practice is through abhyasa (repeated meditation) and vairagya (non-attachment)" (Yoga Sutras, 1:12-14).

⁴⁹ The concept of samadhi and its various levels is one of the most important contributions of the Yoga tradition. Savikalpa samadhi (samadhi with modification) is the initial absorption in which the mind is still aware of the object, and the object is perceived without modification. Nirvikalpa samadhi (samadhi without modification) is the complete absorption in which the mind is completely still and the seer is aware only of its own nature. Sahaja samadhi is the state of natural abiding in the true nature, in which the yogi moves through ordinary life without being caught by the modifications of the mind.

⁵⁰ The Bhagavad Gita's analysis of consciousness is the most integrated with the theistic framework in the Indian tradition. The Gita's teaching on the nature of the self is that the self is eternal, indestructible, and distinct from the body, mind, and senses—but it is also that the self is not separate from Krishna, and that the ultimate relationship is one of loving devotion. "The self is not born, nor does it die; it is not created nor does it cease to exist. The self is unborn, eternal, ever-existing, and ancient. It does not die when the body dies" (Bhagavad Gita, 2:20). "The self is seated in the heart of all beings, and it is the witness of all their activities. It is not affected by the activities, but it is present in all of them" (Bhagavad Gita, 13:21-22, paraphrased).

⁵¹ The Gita's analysis of the gunas (sattva, rajas, tamas) is one of the most important contributions of the text to the understanding of consciousness. Sattva is purity, clarity, light; rajas is activity, passion, attachment; tamas is ignorance, inertia, darkness. The gunas are the qualities of prakriti, and they are the forces that shape consciousness in the world. The spiritual practice is the cultivation of sattva, the reduction of rajas, and the transcendence of tamas, and ultimately the going beyond all three gunas to the state of gunatita (beyond the gunas). "When one is free from the modifications of the gunas, when one has transcended the dualities of pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, one becomes fit for liberation" (Bhagavad Gita, 2:45).

⁵² The Christian Mystical Analysis: Consciousness as the Arena of Divine Encounter

⁵³ The Christian mystical tradition's analysis of consciousness is different from the Buddhist and Hindu analyses in that it is not primarily concerned with the nature of consciousness as such but with the soul's relationship to God and the process by which that relationship is purified, deepened, and ultimately transformed.

⁵⁴ The Desert Fathers and Mothers' Sayings are the most important early source for the Christian understanding of the spiritual life, and they are significant for the practical wisdom they contain. The

Desert tradition's understanding of consciousness is focused on the logismoi (thoughts, imaginations) that assault the soul in the process of ascesis, and the practice is the recognition of these thoughts, the refusal to assent to them, and the cultivation of the virtues that oppose them. "The evil thought comes to the monk suddenly, and it brings with it a whole army of arguments; the monk's task is to recognize the thought and to resist it, to turn away from it, to focus on the Lord" (Sayings of the Desert Fathers, Apophthegmata, Antony on thoughts).

⁵⁵ Evagrius Ponticus's *Praktikos* is the most systematic treatment of the eight logismoi: gluttony, lust, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia (spiritual sloth), vainglory, and pride. The text's teaching is that the logismoi are the root of all spiritual difficulty, and that the purification of the soul consists in the recognition and resistance of each of them. "The *Praktikos* is a practical guide for the purification of the soul from the eight evil thoughts. The goal is *apatheia*—the state of freedom from passionate attachment, in which the soul is no longer disturbed by the logismoi and can pray with undivided attention" (*Praktikos*, prologue). The state of *apatheia* is not indifference but a purified clarity of perception, in which the soul sees things as they are without the distortion of passionate reaction.

⁵⁶ *The Cloud of Unknowing* is the most sophisticated practical manual for the apophatic spiritual life in the Christian tradition. The text's teaching is that the soul cannot attain God through knowledge or through visions or through any created thing, but only through love directed into the darkness of unknowing. "You must cast all your thoughts, all your desires, all your fears, all your knowledge, into the cloud of forgetting; and you must direct your love into the cloud of unknowing, piercing it with a single point of longing love" (*The Cloud of Unknowing*, Chapters 2-4, paraphrased). The practice is not the cultivation of any particular state but the emptying of all created attachments and the directing of the will toward God through love.

⁵⁷ The book's most famous teaching is the teaching of the "work" of the water: "You will find, in your prayer, that there comes a work of the water, a work of the darkness, a work of the spiritual irritation that arises from the cloud. This work is not your own; it is the work of God in you, and you must not resist it. It is the purification of your whole being, and it is the most painful and the most necessary of all the works" (*The Cloud of Unknowing*, Chapter 9, paraphrased). The point is that the purification of the soul is not something that the soul achieves but something that God does in the soul, and the role of the soul is to cooperate, not to manufacture.

⁵⁸ The teachings of the 14th-16th century mystics (Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Julian of Norwich, Hildegard of Bingen, Meister Eckhart) develop the apophatic tradition in different directions, but all of them share the basic insight that the relationship between God and the soul is deeper than any conceptual understanding, and that the spiritual life is a process of purification and deepening.

⁵⁹ Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle* is the most systematic Christian vision of the soul's journey to union. The soul is a castle with seven rooms (mansions), and the journey from the outer rooms to the center is the journey from the initial purification through the various stages of prayer to the final union with God. "The center of the castle is where God dwells, and no one can enter there without first passing through all the rooms, and without being purified of all the attachments that keep them from God" (*Interior Castle*, Seventh Mansions). The teaching is that the spiritual life is not a simple matter of attention but a gradual transformation of the entire structure of the soul, and that the final

union is the transformation of the soul into God, not through the loss of its identity but through the fulfillment of its deepest nature.

⁶⁰ John of the Cross's *Dark Night* is the most rigorous Christian account of purification. "The dark night of the soul is the purification of the soul from all that is not God, from all attachment, from all desire for consolation, from all self-understanding, from all that the soul thinks it is. The night is dark because it is the absence of all light that the soul can understand, and it is the night of the spirit because it is the night of everything that makes the soul feel like a spiritual person" (*The Dark Night*, Book 2). The night is painful, and the soul must pass through it without resistance, without understanding, without any comfort except the knowledge that God is the one who is doing the work.

⁶¹ Meister Eckhart's teaching is the most radical in the Christian tradition, because his language of the birth of the Word in the soul is so close to the non-dual teaching of the Upanishads that it was condemned as heretical. "The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me. ... God is not found in the soul by adding anything but by a process of subtraction, of emptying. The more empty the soul is of all things, the more God fills it" (Meister Eckhart, Sermon 57, paraphrased). Eckhart's teaching is that the ground of the soul is identical with the ground of God, and that the birth of the Word in the soul is the recognition of this identity. The condemnation of Eckhart was the result of the Church's recognition that his teaching was dangerously close to the non-dual teaching that the Church saw as incompatible with the distinction between creator and creature.

⁶² *The Sufi Analysis: Consciousness as the Field of Annihilation*

⁶³ The Sufi tradition's analysis of consciousness is one of the most sophisticated and the most poetic in the spiritual tradition, and it is inseparable from the Islamic theological framework within which it operates.

⁶⁴ Rumi's *Masnavi* is the most significant work of Sufi mysticism in the Persian language, and it presents the teaching of the path to the Divine through love, longing, and the dissolution of the self. The opening lines of the *Masnavi* are the most famous: "Listen to the reed, how it complains, telling the story of the one who is separated from the reed bed. 'I want a heart torn by separation, so I may sing the songs of the pain of yearning'" (*Masnavi*, Book 1, opening). The reed is the soul, and its complaint is the complaint of the soul separated from its source; the music that comes from this separation is the only music that is truly authentic.

⁶⁵ *The Conference of the Birds* is the most famous allegory in Sufism, and it presents the journey toward the Simurgh as the journey toward the recognition of the Divine in the self. The birds journey through seven valleys: the Valley of Search, the Valley of Love, the Valley of Knowledge, the Valley of Detachment, the Valley of Unity, the Valley of Astonishment, and the Valley of Poverty and Annihilation. "In the Valley of Search, the seeker searches with all his might, and he finds only his own limitations. In the Valley of Love, the seeker is consumed by love, and all his limitations are burned away. In the Valley of Knowledge, the seeker finds that knowledge is not enough, and that only transformation can suffice. In the Valley of Detachment, the seeker is stripped of everything he thought was his. In the Valley of Unity, the seeker sees that there is no other but God. In the Valley of Astonishment, the seeker is overwhelmed by the vision of God. In the Valley of Poverty and Annihilation, the seeker ceases to exist as a seeker, and what remains is the Divine" (*Conference of the Birds*, summary of the seven valleys).

⁶⁶ The final revelation is that the seekers themselves are the Simurgh, and that the journey was the journey toward the recognition of what they always were. "The thirty birds (si-murgh) came to the presence of the Simurgh, and they saw themselves, and they understood that they were the Simurgh" (Conference of the Birds, Final Valley). The mystical teaching is not that the self is dissolved into God in a generic sense but that the self's deepest reality is God, and that the journey is the journey of remembering what was always the case.

⁶⁷ Al-Ghazzali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences) is the most comprehensive Islamic work on the spiritual life, and it is significant for the integration of the Shari'ah (Islamic law) and the Tariqah (mystical path). "The heart is the vessel of faith, and its purification is the goal of all worship. The heart is distracted by the various attachments, and the practice of the spiritual life is the cleansing of the heart from these attachments, so that it becomes pure and is filled with the light of God" (*Ihya Ulum al-Din*, "Book of the Heart"). Al-Ghazzali's *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* (Deliverance from Error) is the autobiographical account of his journey from philosophical rationalism to mystical experience, and it is significant because it presents the limitations of reason and the necessity of direct spiritual experience.

⁶⁸ Ibn Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam* (The Bezels of Wisdom) is the most important work of Sufi metaphysics, and it presents the doctrine of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (the Unity of Being) in the most systematic form. The book teaches that the only true existence is God, and that all created things are manifestations of God's names and attributes within the space of existence. "The beings are the shadow of God in the mirror of existence; they have no reality other than their manifesting the names of God" (*Fusus al-Hikam*, prologue). Ibn Arabi's *Futuh al-Makkiyah* (Meccan Illuminations) is the massive compendium of all of his teachings, and it is one of the most ambitious works in the entire spiritual tradition.

⁶⁹ The teaching of Ibn Arabi's *Whoso Knoweth Himself* is one of the most influential pieces of spiritual teaching in the Sufi tradition: "Whoever knows himself knows his Lord." The self is the mirror in which God contemplates his own reality, and the knowledge of the self is the knowledge of God. "The self is the place in which the Divine appears; to know the self is to know the Divine, because the Divine is the substance of the self, even though the self does not know this" (from Ibn Arabi's teachings, as expressed in the *Fusus* and *Futuh*).

⁷⁰ The Tibetan Buddhist Analysis: Consciousness as Primordial Awareness

⁷¹ The Tibetan Buddhist analysis of consciousness is the most sophisticated in the Buddhist tradition, and it adds a dimension that is largely absent from the early Buddhist texts: the detailed mapping of the subtle body and the relationship between consciousness and the energetic structure of the body.

⁷² The Tibetan Book of the Dead (*Bardo Thodol*) is the most famous of the Tibetan texts, and it presents the most detailed phenomenology of the experience of death in the entire spiritual tradition. The text describes the dissolution of the elements at death in remarkable detail: the dissolution of the earth element into the water element, the water into the fire, the fire into the air, the air into consciousness, the consciousness into the clear light of death, and the final dissolution into the *dharmakaya* (the ultimate nature of mind). "At the time of death, the elements dissolve, and the consciousness appears in the form of the clear light. This is the moment of the greatest opportunity for liberation, and it is the moment at which the unprepared die in confusion and the prepared recognize the nature of mind and are liberated" (*Bardo Thodol*, Chapter 4, paraphrased).

⁷³ The Dzogchen teachings are the most direct of all Buddhist teachings on the nature of mind. The point of Dzogchen is that the nature of mind is rigpa (primordial awareness), which is luminous, empty, and spontaneously present. "The ground is the state of rigpa, characterized by emptiness and luminosity. The path is the recognition of this state. The fruition is the recognition of this state without modification, and the spontaneous expression of this recognition in all of life" (Dzogchen teachings, from the Nyingthig Yabshi and other collections).

⁷⁴ The significant point about the Dzogchen teaching is that it presents liberation as the recognition of something that is already present, not the achievement of something new. The recognition is of the nature of mind as it is, and the practice is not the cultivation of a new state but the recognition of the state that is already there. This is the same insight that runs through the Mahayana Buddhist tradition—the Buddha-nature in all beings, the emptiness of all phenomena, the non-duality of samsara and nirvana—but the Tibetan Buddhist formulation of it through the Dzogchen and Mahamudra traditions is the most direct and the most systematic.

⁷⁵ The Mahamudra teachings are the closest equivalent to the Dzogchen teachings within the Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, and they present the recognition of the nature of mind as the path itself. "Mahamudra is the great seal of all phenomena; it is the recognition of the nature of mind as it is, without modification, without elaboration. The practice is the resting in this recognition, and the fruition is the spontaneous expression of this recognition in all of life" (Mahamudra teachings, from the Kagyu lineage).

⁷⁶ The Bon tradition's Dzogchen teachings are parallel to the Buddhist ones, and the similarities are significant. The Bon Kangyur preserves the primary texts, and the Bon Dzogchen teachings are largely identical to the Buddhist ones in their content, even though the cultural framework is different. This is one of the most interesting pieces of evidence in the comparative spiritual study: the same core teaching (the recognition of primordial awareness) appears in two traditions that developed independently, and this suggests that the teaching is not culturally specific but is accessible to any culture that is capable of receiving it.

⁷⁷ The Stoic Analysis: Consciousness as the Faculty of Reason

⁷⁸ The Stoic analysis of consciousness is the least metaphysical of all the analyses, and it is the most practical. For the Stoics, consciousness (hegemonikon) is the faculty of reason, judgment, and volition, and the task of the spiritual life is not to understand the nature of consciousness in the abstract but to discipline consciousness so that it is in harmony with nature and reason.

⁷⁹ Epictetus's Discourses (Book 1, Chapter 1) is the most direct presentation of the fundamental Stoic insight: "Some things are in our power, and some are not. The things in our power are opinion, judgment, desire, aversion, and all acts of the will. The things not in our power are body, property, reputation, office, and all that is external. The things in our power are by nature free, clear, and unhindered; the things not in our power are weak, slavish, and dependent on others. Therefore, if you consider what is truly yours, you will never be hindered, and you will never blame anyone" (Epictetus, Discourses, 1.1.1-4, paraphrased).

⁸⁰ The Stoic insight is that suffering arises not from external events but from the judgments about external events, and that liberation is the discipline of judgment—the refusal to judge things that are not within one's power. "Do not say 'I am unfortunate' but 'I am able to bear my misfortune.' For it is not what happens to you that matters, but how you respond to it" (Epictetus, Discourses, 2.10).

⁸¹ Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* is the most extensive personal record of Stoic practice in the entire tradition, and it is significant for the simple, direct, and honest quality of the writing. "The universe is change. Our life is what our thoughts make it. ... The soul becomes dyed with the color of its thoughts" (*Meditations*, 4.3). "All things are interwoven with one another; a sacred bond unites them; there is one world, one God, one substance, one law, one reason" (*Meditations*, 7.9). "Waste no more time arguing about what a good person should be; be one" (*Meditations*, 10.16).

⁸² Seneca's *Letters* develop the Stoic understanding of consciousness in practical terms. Letter 121 ("On the Happy Life") is the most important: "The wise person is the one whose mind is in harmony with reason, who has mastered the desires, who fears nothing, who has prepared for death, and who moves through the world with equanimity. The happy life is the life of reason, and the life of reason is the life of virtue" (Seneca, *Letters*, 121). The key insight is that happiness is not something to be acquired but something to be discovered through the alignment of the mind with reason and nature.

⁸³ The Hermetic tradition's *Corpus Hermeticum* presents the analysis of consciousness that bridges the Platonic and the more esoteric traditions. The key teaching is that the mind (*nous*) is divine, that the ordinary consciousness is a fallen state in which the mind is obscured by the body and the material world, and that the restoration of the mind to its divine nature is the goal of the spiritual life. "The mind is the one thing that can become God, because it is of the same substance as God. The body is a hindrance to the mind, but the mind can overcome the body through the practice of *gnosis* (knowledge of God)" (*Corpus Hermeticum*, Book III).

⁸⁴ The Kabbalistic Analysis: Consciousness as the Cleaving to the *Ein Sof*

⁸⁵ The Kabbalistic tradition's analysis of consciousness is the most elaborate in the Western esoteric tradition, and it is centered on the *sefirot* as the structure of the soul and the map of the spiritual journey.

⁸⁶ The *Zohar*'s treatment of the *sefirot* as the structure of the soul is one of the most influential in the kabbalistic tradition. The *sefirot* are the ten emanations of the divine: *Keter* (crown), *Chokmah* (wisdom), *Binah* (understanding), *Chesed* (loving-kindness), *Gevurah* (severity), *Tiferet* (beauty), *Netzach* (victory), *Hod* (splendor), *Yesod* (foundation), and *Malkut* (kingdom). The soul has these *sefirot* within it, and the spiritual practice is the cultivation of the lower *sefirot* (*Chesed* through *Malkut*) to align them with the upper *sefirot* (*Keter* through *Binah*). "The soul is a microcosm of the *sefirot*; the rectification of the soul is the rectification of the world" (*Zohar*, III, 28b, paraphrased).

⁸⁷ The *Sepher Yetzirah*'s cosmology through the twenty-two letters and the ten *sefirot* is the most influential kabbalistic teaching on the structure of reality. "Through thirty-two paths of wisdom, God carved out the universe. Ten *sefirot* and twenty-two letters are the foundation of all things" (*Sepher Yetzirah*, 1:1). The letters are the instruments of creation, and the *sefirot* are the structures of manifestation. The practice of the sacred names is the practice of aligning the soul with the creative forces that sustain the universe.

⁸⁸ The Lurianic Kabbalah's teaching on the breaking of the vessels is one of the most dramatic narratives in the entire spiritual tradition. "In the beginning, the *Ein Sof* gazed into the mirror of the Supernal Wisdom and created the vessels of the lower *sefirot*. But the light of the *Ein Sof* was too great for the vessels, and they shattered, scattering the divine sparks throughout the material world. The task of *tikkun* (restoration) is the gathering of these sparks back into their source, and the repair of the broken vessels" (*Etz Chaim*, 2:1, paraphrased). The teaching is that the world is the result of a

cosmic catastrophe, and that the spiritual life is the participation in the restoration of the broken cosmos.

⁸⁹ The Etz Chaim (Tree of Life) of Isaac Luria is the most important text of Lurianic Kabbalah, and it is the most systematic exposition of the sefirot as the structure of reality and the soul. The text's teaching is that the soul is the intermediary between the Ein Sof and the material world, and that the practice of the Torah and the mitzvot (commandments) is the means by which the soul aligns itself with the sefirot and participates in the tikkun. "Every commandment that a person performs lifts a spark from the klipah (the shell of impurity) and returns it to the tree of life" (Etz Chaim, 3:1, paraphrased).

⁹⁰ The Egyptian Analysis: Consciousness as the Journey of the Ka

⁹¹ The Egyptian texts on consciousness are primarily funerary texts—the Pyramid Texts, the Coffin Texts, the Book of the Dead, the Book of Gates, the Amduat—but they are significant because they present one of the earliest and most detailed mappings of consciousness in its relationship to death, the afterlife, and the divine.

⁹² The Pyramid Texts are the oldest of the Egyptian religious texts, and they are inscribed on the walls of the pyramids of the Old Kingdom pharaohs. The texts are primarily concerned with the transformation of the pharaoh after death, and they describe the journey of the pharaoh to the realm of the gods, the entry into the company of the sun god Re, and the ultimate identification with Osiris, the god of the underworld and of regeneration. "I am the great god, self-created, self-formed, with my own hands. I have come to the house of the god, and I have taken my place among the imperishable stars" (Pyramid Texts, utterance 213, paraphrased).

⁹³ The Coffin Texts extend the afterlife knowledge beyond the pharaoh to the nobles and others, and they describe in detail the geography of the afterlife, the judgment of the dead, and the spells and knowledge necessary to navigate the dangers of the underworld. "I know the gates of the underworld, and I know the names of their guardians. I will speak the password at each gate, and I will pass through" (Coffin Texts, Spell 816, paraphrased).

⁹⁴ The Book of the Dead is the most famous of the Egyptian texts, and it is a compilation of spells, declarations of innocence, and descriptions of the judgment of the heart. The central scene is the weighing of the heart against the feather of Ma'at (truth, justice, order): "My heart is true, my heart is pure, my heart is without sin. I have not done evil to anyone. Let my heart not be found wanting in the presence of the great god" (Book of the Dead, Spell 125, paraphrased). The text is significant because it shows that the afterlife is not automatic but depends on the moral quality of the life lived, and that the heart is the seat of moral quality and the organ of judgment.

⁹⁵ The Book of Gates and the Amduat are the most sophisticated Egyptian texts on the journey through the underworld, and they describe the twelve hours of the night as the progressive dissolution and renewal of the sun god Re. "At the first hour, Re enters the underworld and is greeted by the gods. At each hour, he fights the chaos serpent Apophis, and at the twelfth hour, he emerges renewed, and the sun rises" (Amduat, descriptions of the twelve hours). The implication is that the death of the individual is the repetition of the daily journey of the sun, and that the afterlife is the regeneration of consciousness from the dissolution of the material body.

⁹⁶ The Egyptian texts on initiation (as preserved in the Ptolemaic temple of Philae and in the writings of Isha Schwaller de Lubicz, whose *Opening of the Way* is a modern synthesis guided by the Egyptian wisdom) present the most comprehensive account of the structure of consciousness in the Egyptian tradition. The body is understood as a complete universe, with an axis (the spine), two poles (the south pole as sexual procreator, the north pole as mental procreator), and five bodies (the bony skeleton, the flesh, the vessels and reservoirs, the nervous system, and the lines of force or meridians). "The two wills are the Personal Will (the Automaton plus the Permanent Witness) and the Will to the Light (the Spiritual Witness). The duel between the two wills is the drama of human existence, and the spiritual life is the resolution of this duel through the recognition of the primacy of the Will to the Light" (*Opening of the Way*, Chapter 2, paraphrased).

⁹⁷ The teaching of the three levels of consciousness—the Automaton (mortal, reactive, physical/emotional/mental), the Permanent Witness (Osirian, immortal personality, the recorder of experience and the vehicle of reincarnation), and the Spiritual Witness (Horus, divine soul, the impersonal witness that seeks liberation)—is one of the most sophisticated models of the human constitution in any tradition. The practice is the progressive alignment of the Automaton with the Permanent Witness, and the Permanent Witness with the Spiritual Witness, until the whole person is in harmony with the divine will.

⁹⁸ The seven accomplishments (Sense of Presence, Concentration, Serenity, the Appropriate Gesture, Silence, Thankfulness, Generosity) and the seven obstacles (Personal Concern, Wrong Notion of Providence, False Pity, Quest for Sanctity, Sentimentality, Satisfaction, Routine) are the practical elements of this teaching, and they are significant because they present a complete practical method for the spiritual life without falling into vagueness or abstraction.

⁹⁹ The Japanese Zen Analysis: Consciousness as Immediate Actuality

¹⁰⁰ Dogen's analysis of consciousness is the most distinctive in the Zen tradition. For Dogen, the nature of consciousness is not a metaphysical problem but an immediate actuality that is always already present. "The Way is perfect and complete, and it is present everywhere. It does not depend on practice or realization; it is not subject to the distortions of forgetting or awakening. It is not something to be acquired; it is the very nature of what you are" (*Fukanzazengi*).

¹⁰¹ The *Shobogenzo* is the most important of Dogen's works, and it presents the most extensive treatment of the Zen understanding of consciousness in the entire Buddhist tradition. The text's teaching on the identity of practice and realization (*shushō-ittō*) is the central insight: "To study the Way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by the ten thousand things" (*Shobogenzo*, *Bendowa*). The point is that enlightenment is not a state that is achieved after practice but the full embodiment of the non-separation of practice and realization in the present moment, and that the practice of *zazen* is the most direct expression of this non-separation.

¹⁰² The koan traditions (*The Blue Cliff Record*, *The Gateless Gate*, *The Ten Bulls*) are the most characteristic expression of the Zen method, and they are significant because they present the most extreme form of the pointing-to-reality method. The koan is not a riddle to be solved but a pointer to the immediate actuality that is always already present, and the point is that the mind cannot grasp it through conceptualization because the point is exactly what is before all conceptualization. "Mu" (*Wu*) is the most famous koan, and it is the most direct: Zhaozhou's answer to whether a dog has

Buddha-nature is simply "Mu"—no—not because dogs do not have Buddha-nature (the Mahayana doctrine is that they do) but because the very question is a conceptual trap that Mu cuts through.

¹⁰³ The Ten Bulls (Oxherding Pictures) is the most influential visual presentation of the Zen path, and it is significant because it presents the journey in a form that is both clear and subtle. The ten pictures trace the progression from the search for the ox (the awareness of the need for awakening) to the finding of the ox (the first experience of the true nature), to the taming of the ox (the cultivation of the realization), to the riding of the ox (the natural abiding in the realization), to the forgetting of both ox and rider (the shedding of all conceptualizations), to the return to the world (the manifestation of the realization in ordinary life). "Emptiness and form are not two; they are the same reality, seen from different sides. The seeker is the sought; the path is the goal; the practice is the realization" (Ten Bulls, eighth and ninth pictures, paraphrased).

CHAPTER THREE: THE PROBLEM OF SELF AND OTHER

¹ If the ground of reality and the nature of consciousness are the first two questions, the problem of self and other is the third, and it is inseparable from the problem of suffering. The experience that is called "self" is the source of the entire problem of suffering, and different traditions have very different diagnoses of what the self is and how to be free of it.

² The Illusion of the Separate Self

³ The Buddhist tradition's analysis of the self is the most systematic in the spiritual tradition, and it is one of the most radical: the self that we ordinarily experience does not exist as we think it does, and the recognition of this is liberation.

⁴ The Anatta-lakkhana Sutta (The Discourse on the Not-Self Characteristic, Samyutta Nikaya 22.59) is the Buddha's most famous teaching on the non-self (anatta). The Buddha asks the five monks whether the body is permanent or impermanent; they answer that it is impermanent. Whether what is impermanent is suffering or happiness; they answer that it is suffering. Whether it is worthy of being regarded as self or not self; they answer that it is not self. The same analysis is applied to the feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. "The self is not the body, not the feelings, not the perceptions, not the mental formations, not the consciousness. The self is not any of the five aggregates, and there is no self other than the five aggregates. Therefore, the self does not exist in the way that ordinary consciousness thinks it exists" (Anatta-lakkhana Sutta, paraphrased).

⁵ The teaching is not that there is no experience of selfhood but that the experience of selfhood is a fabrication that arises from the clinging to the five aggregates. The practice is the systematic deconstruction of this fabrication through mindfulness, and the result is the recognition of the not-self nature of the aggregates and the liberation that comes with this recognition.

⁶ The Anattalakkhana Sutta is the most direct application of this teaching, and it is the most famous. The Buddha's question to the monks is whether the five aggregates are satisfactory or unsatisfactory, permanent or impermanent, self or not-self—and the entire analysis is designed to lead them to the recognition that the aggregates are not self, and that the clinging to them is the source of suffering.

⁷ The Sutta Nipata's Atthakavagga is the most radical expression of the teaching of non-self, and it goes further than the more systematic Pali Canon teachings in that it applies the non-self analysis

even to the Buddhist teachings themselves. "The sage does not cling to any view, not even the view that there is no self. The sage sees that all views are the fabrication of the mind, and that the liberation from all views is the liberation from all suffering" (Sutta Nipata, Atthakavagga, verse 806, paraphrased).

⁸ The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (Majjhima Nikaya) contain the most detailed presentations of the Buddhist teaching on the not-self. The Cula-Malunkya Sutta (MN 63) is the most famous: the monk Malunkya asks the Buddha to answer the speculative questions about whether the world is eternal or not eternal, whether the self is the same as the body or different, etc., and the Buddha refuses, using the analogy of the man who is shot with a poisoned arrow and refuses to have it removed until he knows who shot it, what kind of bow it was, what kind of arrow it was, and so on. "The goal of the spiritual life is not the answer to these questions but the cessation of suffering; these questions are not helpful for the spiritual life; they are a distraction from the actual practice" (Cula-Malunkya Sutta, MN 63).

⁹ The Samyutta Nikaya's treatment of the dependent origination of suffering is the most systematic account in the Pali Canon of how the not-self view is not merely a philosophical position but a practical recognition that leads to liberation. The chain is: ignorance leads to mental formations, which lead to consciousness, which lead to name-and-form, which lead to the six sense bases, which lead to contact, which lead to feeling, which lead to craving, which lead to clinging, which lead to becoming, which lead to birth, which lead to suffering. The cessation of the chain is the cessation of suffering, and the cessation of the chain is the cessation of ignorance, which is the recognition of the not-self nature of all phenomena.

¹⁰ The Brahmajala Sutta (Digha Nikaya 1) is the most comprehensive survey of the wrong views in the Pali Canon, and it is significant for the sheer number of views it enumerates and for the Buddha's response to them. The Buddha describes sixty-two different philosophical positions on the self and the world, and then he explains why all of them are wrong: they are all fabricated by consciousness operating under ignorance, and they are all attachments to views that lead to suffering. "The fool who clings to views is like the man who grasps at a mirage and drowns in the attempt to drink it. The wise one sees all views as the fabrications of a mind in bondage, and does not cling to any of them" (Brahmajala Sutta, Digha Nikaya 1, paraphrased).

¹¹ The Itivuttaka is the most concise presentation of the core teachings in the Pali Canon, and it is significant for the clarity and the directness of the teaching. The book's method—"Thus it was said, thus it was taught, and this is the meaning"—is one of the most effective presentations of the teaching in the entire Buddhist tradition, because it connects the words directly to the meaning and to the practice.

¹² The Mahayana Buddhist developments of the non-self teaching are significant because they extend the analysis from the individual self to all phenomena. The Heart Sutra's "form is emptiness, emptiness is form" is the most famous expression of this, but the full Prajnaparamita literature develops it much more thoroughly. The Diamond Sutra's radical critique of attachment to any concept—even the concept of the Buddha, even the concept of non-self—is the most significant: "If a bodhisattva has the perception of a self, a person, a living being, or a life-span, they are not a bodhisattva. If a bodhisattva practices giving without the perception of receiving, without the perception of a giver, and without the perception of a gift, they practice the perfection of wisdom."

But even this perfection of wisdom is not a perfection; it is only called a perfection so that beings can understand it" (Diamond Sutra, Chapter 3, paraphrased).

¹³ The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra's teaching on the non-duality of wisdom and compassion is the most direct expression of the integration of the non-self insight with the ethical impulse of the Bodhisattva path. "Wisdom without compassion is cold; compassion without wisdom is blind. The bodhisattva's path is the path of the union of wisdom and compassion, and this union is the non-duality of the insight into emptiness and the compassionate response to the suffering of beings" (Vimalakirti Nirdeśa, Chapter 2).

¹⁴ The Lankavatara Sutra's mind-only teaching is the most radical expression of the non-self teaching in the Mahayana tradition. "The external world does not exist apart from the mind; the mind, variously transformed, appears as the external world. The recognition of this is the liberation of the bodhisattva, because the bodhisattva no longer sees the world as external and separate from the mind, and therefore no longer clings to the world as real" (Lankavatara Sutra, Section 3).

¹⁵ The Tibetan Book of the Dead's teaching on the not-self is most vivid in its description of the experiences of consciousness at death and in the bardo states. The point of the description is that the ordinary sense of self is a construct of the living body and the living mind, and that this construct dissolves at death, revealing the true nature of consciousness. "The ordinary self is a fabrication of the living body; at death, this fabrication dissolves, and consciousness appears in its true nature, which is empty, luminous, and aware. The unprepared, not recognizing this, seek to attach to familiar objects and are reborn. The prepared, recognizing the true nature, are liberated" (Bardo Thodol, Chapter 4).

¹⁶ The Upanishadic Teaching of the True Self

¹⁷ The Upanishadic tradition's teaching of the self is the most radical contrast to the Buddhist teaching. For the Upanishads, the self does exist, and the problem is not that it does not exist but that it is mistaken about itself. The true self (Atman) is identical with the ground of all reality (Brahman), and this identity is the source of liberation.

¹⁸ The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad's teaching on the self is the most influential: "The self is the lord of the self, the ruler of the self, the light of the self. He who knows the self as the lord of the self, the ruler of the self, the light of the self, is freed from all bondage" (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 4.4.16, paraphrased). The teaching is that the self is not the body, the mind, the intellect, or the ego, but the witness that is the ground of all experience, and that the recognition of this is liberation.

¹⁹ The Chandogya Upanishad's "That thou art" (6.8.7) is the most famous formulation of the non-dual identity: "That which is the finest essence of the whole world—this is the Atman. That is the Reality. That is the Truth. Tat tvam asi, Shvetaketu." The teaching is that the apparent manyness of the world is the expression of the one reality, and that the recognition of this identity is the goal of the spiritual life.

²⁰ The Katha Upanishad's teaching is the most accessible: "The self is not born, nor does it die; it is without beginning and without end; it is unborn, eternal, ever-existing, and ancient. It does not die when the body dies" (Katha Upanishad, 1.2.18). "When all the desires that dwell in the heart fall away, the mortal becomes immortal; this is the state of perfection, this is the supreme goal" (Katha Upanishad, 2.18).

²¹ The Maitri Upanishad (also known as the Maitrayaniya Upanishad) is one of the most detailed presentations of the distinction between the ego (the personal self) and the true self (the atman). "There are two selves: the ego, which is the self of the body and the mind, and the true self, which is the self of all beings. The ego is the source of suffering, and the recognition of the true self is liberation" (Maitri Upanishad, 3.1-2, paraphrased).

²² The Yoga Vasistha's teaching on the mind as the source of the appearance of the world is the most radical of the Hindu accounts of the self, because it teaches that the world itself is the projection of the mind, and that the liberation is the recognition of this. "The world is appearance in the mind; the mind is the world; the self is the consciousness that perceives both. When the mind is stilled, the world does not appear, and the self abides in its own nature" (Yoga Vasistha, Book 6, Chapter 1, paraphrased).

²³ The Shamkara-bhashya (Shankara's commentary on the Upanishads and the Brahma Sutras) is the most systematic exposition of the non-dual position, and it is the foundation of the Advaita Vedanta tradition. Shankara's teaching is that the world of appearance is the result of avidya (ignorance), which projects the world as real and separate from the self; the recognition of the identity of Atman and Brahman is the dissolution of avidya and the liberation that comes with it. The world is not absolutely real (because only Brahman is real) but is not absolutely unreal either (because it appears and functions in ordinary experience). It is the appearance of the real in the mode of limitation, and the recognition of the real as the only reality is liberation.

²⁴ The Vivekachudamani is the most influential practical manual for the discrimination between the real and the unreal, and it is one of the most important texts in the Advaita tradition. "The body is not the self, because the body is inert; the breath is not the self, because the breath is a process; the mind is not the self, because the mind is changeable; the intellect is not the self, because the intellect is an instrument; the ego is not the self, because the ego is a false identification. The self is the consciousness that witnesses all of these, and this consciousness is unchanging, pure, and free" (Vivekachudamani, verses 217-227, paraphrased).

²⁵ The Ashtavakra Gita is the most uncompromising of the non-dual texts in the Hindu tradition. "You are the infinite consciousness, free from all limitation. Why do you seek liberation? Why do you engage in actions for liberation? You are already free, and the seeking is the bondage" (Ashtavakra Gita, 1:1-2, paraphrased). "The dream is unreal, and the waking state too is unreal. The death of the self is unreal, and the birth of the self too is unreal. All these are appearances in the one consciousness that you are, and you are always already free" (Ashtavakra Gita, 3:8, paraphrased).

²⁶ The Avadhuta Gita is the most radical of all, in that it dissolves even the categories of bondage and liberation themselves. "The liberated one is like a free bird; he sees the world as a dream and himself as the dreamer who has awakened; he speaks without speaking, acts without acting, and dwells in the unchanging" (Avadhuta Gita, 2:1-2).

²⁷ The Taoist Teaching of the False Self and the Real Self

²⁸ The Taoist teaching of the self is different from both the Buddhist and the Upanishadic teachings, because it treats the problem not as a metaphysical confusion about the nature of the self but as a functional problem of the mind's tendency to create complications and resistances where there should be simplicity and flow.

²⁹ The Tao te Ching is the most important text on this point. "The sage does not accumulate for himself; the more he does for others, the more he has himself. The Way of Heaven is to benefit and not to harm; the Way of the sage is to do and not to contend" (Tao te Ching, 81). The teaching is that the "self" that creates problems is the self that accumulates, that acts from ambition, that contends with the world—and the real self is the self that acts without contention, that does not accumulate, that benefits others without seeking recognition.

³⁰ Chapter 19 of the Tao te Ching is the most explicit: "Eliminate the pursuit of learning, and you will be without sorrow. 'Yes' and 'no' are far apart. 'Good' and 'bad' are far apart. What the world calls beautiful is not beautiful; it creates evil. What the world calls good is not good; it creates ugliness. Therefore, the sage dwells in the direct, the unadorned, the unpretentious, the simple, the selfless, the few desires" (Tao te Ching, 19). The "self" that creates problems is the self that is attached to the categories of good and bad, beautiful and ugly, learning and not learning—and the real self is the self that is free of these attachments.

³¹ Zhuangzi's treatment of the self is the most radical in the Taoist tradition. The chapter "The Autumn Floods" (Zhuangzi, Chapter 17) is the most famous for the teaching of the relativity of all values: "From the viewpoint of the Dao, things have no nobility or baseness. From the viewpoint of the self, each thing considers itself noble and others base. From the viewpoint of function, each thing is useful in relation to another. Therefore, there is no constant standard of nobility and baseness; each thing is noble from its own viewpoint and base from the viewpoint of others" (Zhuangzi, "The Autumn Floods," paraphrased). The teaching is that the self's attachment to its own values is a form of self-binding, and that the liberation is the recognition of the relativity of all values and the freeing of the self from the attachment to them.

³² The chapter "The Great Sage" presents the figure of a man who has achieved complete freedom from the attachments of the self: "The sage does not have a mind of his own; the people's mind is his mind. The good he gives to others, he gives to himself. He does not accumulate for himself; the more he gives, the more he has. ... The sage's heart is at rest in the universal, and the universal heart is his" (Zhuangzi, "The Great Sage," paraphrased).

³³ The Liezi's teaching is the most practical, with narrative examples of people who have achieved the state of wu-wei. "The man who has no self is not a man who has destroyed himself but a man who has recognized that the self is not separate from the world and that the attempt to make the self separate is the source of all suffering. The man who has no self is the man who acts without self-interest, who responds to the world without resistance, who is at peace with all things" (Liezi, Chapter 6, "The Sage," paraphrased).

³⁴ The Christian Teaching of the Self: The Struggle with the Ego

³⁵ The Christian tradition's teaching on the self is very different from the Eastern traditions, because in Christianity, the self (the soul, the person) is real and valuable, and the problem is not that it does not exist but that it is disordered by sin and needs to be redeemed through grace and the practice of virtue.

³⁶ The Desert Fathers and Mothers' teaching on the self is the most practical in the Christian tradition. The logismoi are the thoughts and passions that assault the soul, and the practice is the recognition of them, the refusal to assent to them, and the cultivation of the virtues that oppose them. "The evil thought comes to the monk suddenly, and it brings with it a whole army of arguments; the

monk's task is to recognize the thought and to resist it, to turn away from it, to focus on the Lord" (Sayings of the Desert Fathers, Antony on thoughts).

³⁷ The teaching of Evagrius Ponticus in the *Praktikos* is the most systematic account of the logismoi and their purification. "The eight evil thoughts are gluttony, lust, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory, and pride. They are the root of all spiritual difficulty, and the goal of the spiritual life is apatheia—the state of freedom from passionate attachment, in which the soul is no longer disturbed by the logismoi and can pray with undivided attention" (*Praktikos*, prologue).

³⁸ The teaching of John Cassian (*Conferences*, *Institutes*) is the most systematic in the Western monastic tradition, and it brings the Evagrian teaching into the Latin West. Cassian's teaching on the eight evil thoughts is the foundation of the Western monastic tradition's understanding of the spiritual struggle, and it is significant because it shaped the Christian understanding of the self and the spiritual life for centuries.

³⁹ The teaching of the *Cloud of Unknowing* on the self is the most apophatic in the Christian tradition. The book's teaching is that the self cannot know God through knowledge or through any created thing, but only through love directed into the darkness of unknowing. "The soul must detach itself from all its self-understanding, all its knowledge of itself, all its thoughts about itself, all its desires, all its fears, all its loves, all its hatreds, all its prayers for specific things, all its experiences of God, and direct itself toward God through love alone" (*The Cloud of Unknowing*, Chapter 9).

⁴⁰ The teaching of Meister Eckhart on the self is the most radical in the Christian tradition. "God is not found in the soul by adding anything but by a process of subtraction, of emptying. The more empty the soul is of all things, the more God fills it" (Meister Eckhart, Sermon 23). "The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me; my eye and God's eye is one eye, one view, one knowledge, one love" (Meister Eckhart, Sermon 57). Eckhart's teaching is that the ground of the soul is the same as the ground of God, and that the birth of the Word in the soul is the recognition of this identity.

⁴¹ The teaching of Julian of Norwich on the self is the most loving in the Christian tradition. "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well" (*Revelations of Divine Love*, Chapter 86). Julian's teaching is that the self is not primarily a problem to be solved but a beloved creature of God who is loved unconditionally, and that the recognition of this love is the source of all healing and transformation.

⁴² The teaching of John of the Cross on the self is the most rigorous in the Christian tradition. "The dark night of the soul is the purification of the soul from all that is not God, from all attachment, from all desire for consolation, from all self-understanding. The night is the most painful passage of the spiritual life, and yet it is necessary, because the soul cannot be united with God as long as it is attached to anything other than God" (*The Dark Night*, Book 2). "The soul must be emptied of everything, and then God fills it with Himself. This is the living flame of love that transforms the soul" (*Living Flame of Love*, Stanzas 1-3).

⁴³ The Sufi Teaching of the Self: Annihilation in the Divine

⁴⁴ The Sufi teaching on the self is one of the most radical in the spiritual tradition, and it is the closest to the non-dual teaching of the Upanishads in its use of the language of annihilation and union.

⁴⁵ The Conference of the Birds is the most famous allegory of the Sufi path, and the climax is the revelation that the seekers themselves are the Simurgh: "The thirty birds (si-murgh) came to the presence of the Simurgh, and they saw themselves, and they understood that they were the Simurgh" (Conference of the Birds, Final Valley). The teaching is that the self's true reality is the Divine, and that the journey of the spiritual life is the journey of remembering what was always the case.

⁴⁶ The Masnavi's teaching on the self is the most eloquent in the Sufi tradition. "The self is a veil between the soul and God. The soul sees God through the veil, but does not see the veil itself; therefore, the soul thinks it sees God directly, but in fact it sees only the veil. The veil must be removed, and when it is removed, the soul sees God directly, and the self no longer appears" (Masnavi, Book 1, paraphrased).

⁴⁷ Rumi's Divan Shams is the most ecstatic expression of the Sufi teaching, and it presents the dissolution of the self in the Divine as the most joyful event in human experience. "I died as a mineral and became a plant, I died as a plant and rose to animal, I died as animal and I was a man. Why should I fear? When was I less by dying? Yet once more I shall die as a man, to soar with angels blest. But even from angelic states, I must pass on. At last, I became a void, and from that void, I learned the secret of the universe" (Divan Shams, paraphrased).

⁴⁸ Al-Ghazzali's teaching on the self in the Ihya Ulum al-Din is the most systematic in the Islamic tradition. The heart is the vessel of faith, and its purification is the goal of all worship. The heart is distracted by the various attachments, and the practice of the spiritual life is the cleansing of the heart from these attachments, so that it becomes pure and is filled with the light of God. "The servant's heart must be like a mirror that reflects the light of God without any distortion; if the mirror is dusty, it cannot reflect the light. The dust is the attachments, the desires, the passions, the self-love, and the cleansing is the practice of the spiritual life" (Ihya Ulum al-Din, "Book of the Heart").

⁴⁹ Ibn Arabi's teaching on the self in the Fusus al-Hikam and Futuhat al-Makkiyah is the most metaphysical in the Sufi tradition. "Whoever knows himself knows his Lord." The self is the mirror in which God contemplates his own reality, and the knowledge of the self is the knowledge of God. "The self is the place in which the Divine appears; to know the self is to know the Divine, because the Divine is the substance of the self, even though the self does not know this" (from Ibn Arabi's teachings).

⁵⁰ The teaching of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (Maktubat) is the most important correction to the radical non-dualism of Ibn Arabi in the Sufi tradition. Sirhindi's teaching is that Ibn Arabi's Wahdat al-Wujud (Unity of Being) is true at the level of the Divine realization, but it must be balanced by Wahdat al-Shuhud (Unity of Witnessing), which maintains the distinction between the created soul and the Creator while affirming the unity of the experience of the soul in its love for God. The teaching is that the soul's recognition of the Divine as its true reality is valid, but the soul's claim to be identical with the Divine is an error of interpretation, and the correct position is the recognition that the soul and the Divine are distinct in their reality but united in love.

⁵¹ The Stoic Teaching of the Self: The Rational Faculty

⁵² The Stoic teaching on the self is the most distinctive in the Western tradition, and it is one of the most practical. The Stoics treat the self not as a substantial entity but as the rational faculty (hegemonikon) that is the source of judgment, desire, and action.

⁵³ Epictetus's teaching is the most direct. "Some things are in our power, and some are not. The things in our power are opinion, judgment, desire, aversion, and all acts of the will. The things not in our power are body, property, reputation, office, and all that is external. The things in our power are by nature free, clear, and unhindered; the things not in our power are weak, slavish, and dependent on others. Therefore, if you consider what is truly yours, you will never be hindered, and you will never blame anyone" (Epictetus, Discourses, 1.1.1-4).

⁵⁴ The Stoic insight is that the self does not consist in what happens to it but in how it responds to what happens to it, and that liberation is the discipline of judgment and desire that results in freedom from disturbance. "Do not say 'I am unfortunate' but 'I am able to bear my misfortune.' For it is not what happens to you that matters, but how you respond to it" (Epictetus, Discourses, 2.10).

⁵⁵ Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* is the most extensive personal record of Stoic practice. "The universe is change; our life is what our thoughts make it. ... The soul becomes dyed with the color of its thoughts" (*Meditations*, 4.3). "All things are interwoven with one another; a sacred bond unites them; there is one world, one God, one substance, one law, one reason" (*Meditations*, 7.9). "Waste no more time arguing about what a good person should be; be one" (*Meditations*, 10.16).

⁵⁶ Seneca's *Letters* develop the Stoic understanding of the self in practical terms. Letter 121 ("On the Happy Life") is the most important. "The wise person is the one whose mind is in harmony with reason, who has mastered the desires, who fears nothing, who has prepared for death, and who moves through the world with equanimity. The happy life is the life of reason, and the life of reason is the life of virtue" (Seneca, *Letters*, 121).

⁵⁷ The teaching of the Stoic tradition is that the self is the rational faculty that is in harmony with nature and reason, and that this self is free, unhindered, and at peace, regardless of external circumstances. The practice is the cultivation of the rational faculty through the discipline of judgment, desire, and action, and the result is the freedom that the Stoics called *apatheia* (freedom from disturbance).

⁵⁸ The Kabbalistic Teaching of the Soul

⁵⁹ The Kabbalistic teaching on the soul is the most elaborate in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the sefirot as the structure of the soul and the map of the spiritual journey.

⁶⁰ The Zohar's teaching on the soul is that the soul has five levels (*nephesh*, *ruach*, *neshamah*, *chayah*, *yechidah*), and that each level corresponds to a different level of the sefirot and a different aspect of the divine encounter. "The soul is a microcosm of the sefirot; the rectification of the soul is the rectification of the world" (Zohar, III, 28b, paraphrased).

⁶¹ The *Sepher Yetzirah*'s teaching on the soul is that the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet are the instruments of creation and the structure of the soul, and that the mastery of these letters is the mastery of the forces that constitute the self and the world. "Through thirty-two paths of wisdom, God carved out the universe. Ten sefirot and twenty-two letters are the foundation of all things" (*Sepher Yetzirah*, 1:1).

⁶² The Lurianic Kabbalah's teaching on the soul is that the soul descends through the four worlds (*Atzilut*, *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, *Assiyah*) and is embedded in the materiality of the lowest world, and that the purpose of life is the ascent of the soul through these worlds through the practice of the *mitzvot*

and the contemplation of the sefirot. "Every commandment that a person performs lifts a spark from the klipah (the shell of impurity) and returns it to the tree of life" (Etz Chaim, 3:1).

⁶³ The teaching of the Kabbalistic tradition is that the soul is the intermediary between the Ein Sof and the material world, and that the practice of the mitzvot and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means by which the soul aligns itself with the divine flow and participates in the tikkun. "The soul is a part of God above, sent down into the world of materiality to gather the sparks and return them to their source" (from the Zohar and Lurianic Kabbalah).

⁶⁴ The Egyptian Teaching of the Ka and the Ba

⁶⁵ The Egyptian teaching on the self is one of the earliest and most detailed in the spiritual tradition, and it is centered on the concept of the ka (the life force, the vital essence) and the ba (the personality, the soul that survives death).

⁶⁶ The Pyramid Texts' teaching on the self is that the pharaoh's ka is an eternal aspect of his being that survives death and joins the sun god Re in his journey through the sky. "I am the great god, self-created, self-formed, with my own hands" (Pyramid Texts, utterance 213). "The ka of the pharaoh goes to the sky, and he joins the imperishable stars, and he is renewed forever" (Pyramid Texts, various utterances).

⁶⁷ The Coffin Texts' teaching on the self is that the ba is the aspect of the soul that can travel between the worlds, and that the awareness of the names of the gates and the guardians of the underworld is essential for the soul's safe passage. "I know the names of the gates and the names of the guardians, and I will speak them at each gate, and I will pass through" (Coffin Texts, Spell 816).

⁶⁸ The Book of the Dead's teaching on the self is that the heart is the seat of moral quality and the organ of judgment, and that the heart must be free of sin and falsehood to pass the weighing of the heart against the feather of Ma'at. "My heart is true, my heart is pure, my heart is without sin. I have not done evil to anyone" (Book of the Dead, Spell 125, paraphrased).

⁶⁹ The Egyptian teaching of the Opening of the Way on the three levels of consciousness (Automaton, Permanent Witness, Spiritual Witness) is the most sophisticated modern synthesis of the Egyptian wisdom, and it is one of the most complete models of the human constitution in any tradition. The practice is the progressive alignment of the lower with the higher, until the whole person is in harmony with the divine will, and the result is the union of the consciously divine and the consciously human: "the indissoluble union of the consciously divine and the consciously human" (Opening of the Way, Chapter 1).

CHAPTER FOUR: THE NATURE OF SUFFERING AND THE MEANS OF LIBERATION

¹ If the problem of the self is the third great question, the problem of suffering is the fourth, and it is the most practical of all: what is suffering, why does it exist, and how can it be overcome?

² The Buddhist Diagnosis and Treatment

³ The Buddhist tradition's diagnosis of suffering is the most systematic and the most thorough, and the treatment—the Eightfold Path—is the most complete in the spiritual tradition.

⁴ The Four Noble Truths are the foundation of the Buddha's teaching, and they are contained in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of Dharma, Samyutta Nikaya 56.11), which is the first discourse the Buddha gave after his enlightenment. "This is suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering; association with the unbeloved is suffering; separation from the loved is suffering; not getting what one wants is suffering. In short, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering" (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, paraphrased). "This is the origin of suffering: the craving that leads to rebirth, the craving for sensual pleasure, the craving for becoming, the craving for non-becoming. This is the cessation of suffering: the cessation of this craving, the relinquishing of this craving, the abandonment of this craving, the release from this craving. This is the path to the cessation of suffering: the noble eightfold path—right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration" (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, paraphrased).

⁵ The teaching of the Four Noble Truths is the most complete expression of the Buddhist diagnosis and treatment, because it provides the full structure of the path: the recognition of suffering, the understanding of its origin, the possibility of its cessation, and the practical path that leads to cessation.

⁶ The Pali Canon's extension of this teaching into the full Buddhist psychology is one of the most sophisticated achievements in the history of psychology as spiritual practice. The Abhidhamma's analysis of the mental factors, the derivation of the dhammas, the mapping of the causal relationships between the different components of consciousness—all of this is geared toward the practical goal of liberation from suffering.

⁷ The Satipatthana Sutta's four foundations of mindfulness are the practical method for the actualization of the Four Noble Truths in experience. "The person who practices the four foundations of mindfulness sees the body as body, feelings as feelings, mind as mind, and mental objects as mental objects, without attachment, without aversion, without confusion. Through this seeing, the person understands the true nature of all phenomena: they are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. And through this understanding, the person becomes dispassionate, and through dispassion, the person is liberated" (Satipatthana Sutta, MN 10, paraphrased).

⁸ The Mahayana extension of the treatment of suffering is the bodhisattva's response to suffering. The bodhisattva sees the suffering of all beings and vows to liberate them all, and the recognition of the emptiness of all phenomena is the foundation of this vow. "The bodhisattva's vow is to liberate all beings, but because all beings are empty, there are no beings to be liberated. The vow is a skillful means for the practice of compassion, and the recognition of emptiness is the wisdom that prevents the compassion from becoming attachment" (Vimalakirti Nirdeśa, Chapter 2).

⁹ The Tibetan Buddhist treatment of suffering is the most detailed in the Buddhist tradition, particularly in the texts on the bardo states. The Bardo Thodol describes the experience of suffering at death and in the bardo states in extraordinary detail, and the teaching is that the recognition of the true nature of consciousness at these moments is the key to liberation. "The appearances that arise in the bardo are the projections of the mind, and they are empty; if one recognizes them as such, one is liberated. If one does not, one becomes attached and is reborn" (Bardo Thodol, Chapter 5).

¹⁰ The Dzogchen and Mahamudra treatments of suffering are the most direct. "Suffering arises from the failure to recognize the nature of mind. When the recognition of rigpa (primordial awareness) arises, suffering is seen to be empty, and it no longer has the power to bind. The practice is the recognition, and the fruition is the liberation from all suffering" (Dzogchen teachings).

¹¹ The Upanishadic Treatment of Suffering

¹² The Upanishadic treatment of suffering is the most sophisticated in the Hindu tradition, and it is centered on the recognition of the true self as the path to liberation.

¹³ The Katha Upanishad's teaching is the most influential. "When all the desires that dwell in the heart fall away, the mortal becomes immortal; this is the state of perfection, this is the supreme goal" (Katha Upanishad, 2.18). "The self is not the body, not the breath, not the mind, not the intellect, not the ego, not the will, not the emotions, not the senses. The self is what remains when all of these are set aside; it is the seer that cannot be seen, the hearer that cannot be heard, the thinker that cannot be thought, the knower that cannot be known" (Katha Upanishad, 2.12, paraphrased). The recognition of this self is liberation from all suffering.

¹⁴ The Taittiriya Upanishad's teaching on the five sheaths is the most practical treatment of the source of suffering in the Upanishadic tradition. The suffering arises from the identification with the sheaths—physical, vital, mental, intellectual, and bliss—and the liberation comes from the recognition of the self as the witness that transcends all five sheath. "Shall I tell you what is that? What is this Self? The physical sheath is the self, they say; but the physical sheath is transitory; it is not the self. The vital sheath is not the self; the mental sheath is not the self; the intellectual sheath is not the self; the bliss sheath is not the self. That which is beyond all these is the Self" (Taittiriya Upanishad, 2.3, paraphrased).

¹⁵ The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad's teaching on the liberation from suffering is the most powerful: "The self is the lord of the self, the ruler of the self, the light of the self. He who knows the self as the lord of the self, the ruler of the self, the light of the self, is freed from all bondage" (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 4.4.16, paraphrased). "When the self is realized, all the desires that are in the heart fall away, and the person becomes free from all suffering" (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 1.4.10, paraphrased).

¹⁶ The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali's teaching on the cessation of suffering is the most systematic in the Yoga tradition. "The suffering that is yet to come is to be avoided. The causes of suffering are the afflictions: ignorance, ego, attachment, aversion, and clinging to life. The method of cessation is the practice of meditation and the cultivation of discrimination. When the afflictions are rooted out, the chain of suffering is broken, and liberation is attained" (Yoga Sutras, 2:15-25, paraphrased).

¹⁷ The Bhagavad Gita's treatment of suffering is the most integrated with the theistic framework. The recognition of Krishna as the ultimate reality is the source of liberation from all suffering: "Those who worship Me with devotion, I give them the yoga of understanding, through which they come to Me. Out of compassion for them, I, dwelling in their hearts, destroy the darkness born of ignorance with the shining lamp of knowledge" (Bhagavad Gita, 10:11). "The yogi who worships Me with faith and devotion is the most united with Me, and I give him the peace that is beyond all understanding" (Bhagavad Gita, 18:65-66).

¹⁸ The Ashtavakra Gita's treatment is the most uncompromising. "You are the infinite consciousness, free from all limitation. Why do you suffer? Suffering is a fabrication of the mind, and the mind is your own creation. When you recognize that you are not the mind but the consciousness that witnesses it, suffering dissolves, and you are free" (Ashtavakra Gita, 1:1-2, paraphrased).

¹⁹ The Taoist Treatment of Suffering

²⁰ The Taoist treatment of suffering is the most distinctive in the spiritual tradition, because it is not primarily concerned with the metaphysical origin of suffering but with the practical causes of suffering as they arise in the interaction between the self and the world.

²¹ The Tao te Ching's teaching on suffering is the most direct: "The sage does not accumulate for himself; the more he does for others, the more he has himself. The Way of Heaven is to benefit and not to harm; the Way of the sage is to do and not to contend" (Tao te Ching, 81). The suffering arises from the accumulation, the contention, the desire for specific outcomes—and the liberation comes from the practice of non-action, of not contending, of benefiting others without seeking reward.

²² Chapter 29 of the Tao te Ching is one of the most important: "The world is a sacred vessel that cannot be acted upon. Whoever acts upon it ruins it; whoever holds onto it loses it. For among the things, some lead and some follow; some are silent and some speak; some are strong and some are weak; some are above and some are below. Therefore, the sage rejects the extreme, the extravagant, and the excessive" (Tao te Ching, 29). The teaching is that suffering arises from the attempt to force things, and that the wisdom is to recognize the natural order and to move with it rather than against it.

²³ Zhuangzi's treatment of suffering is the most radical. The chapter "The Autumn Floods" presents the teaching that suffering arises from the attachment to values, and the liberation comes from the recognition of the relativity of all values. "From the viewpoint of the Dao, things have no nobility or baseness. From the viewpoint of the self, each thing considers itself noble and others base. Therefore, the sage does not take any side, does not judge anything as better or worse, and is free from the suffering that comes from judgment" (Zhuangzi, "The Autumn Floods," paraphrased).

²⁴ The chapter "The Great Sage" presents the teaching that suffering arises from the self's attachment to its own interests, and the liberation comes from the dissolution of this attachment. "The sage does not have a mind of his own; the people's mind is his mind. The good he gives to others, he gives to himself. He does not accumulate for himself; the more he gives, the more he has" (Zhuangzi, "The Great Sage," paraphrased).

²⁵ The Liezi's treatment of suffering is the most practical, with narrative examples of people who have overcome suffering by achieving the state of wu-wei. "The man who has no self is not a man who has destroyed himself but a man who has recognized that the self is not separate from the world, and that the attempt to make the self separate is the source of all suffering. The man who has no self is the man who acts without self-interest, who responds to the world without resistance, who is at peace with all things" (Liezi, Chapter 6, "The Sage," paraphrased).

²⁶ The Secret of the Golden Flower's treatment of suffering is the most somatic, with the teaching that the circulation of the light through the body is the means of transforming the energy of suffering into the energy of spiritual realization. "The light is the light of consciousness itself; when it is allowed to circulate freely through the body, the body becomes a vessel of spiritual transformation,

and the energy that was tied up in suffering is released and transformed into the energy of the spiritual life" (Secret of the Golden Flower, Chapter 1).

²⁷ The Hindu Yogic Treatment of Suffering

²⁸ The Hindu yogic tradition's treatment of suffering is centered on the eight-limbed yoga of Patanjali, and it is one of the most systematic and complete in the spiritual tradition.

²⁹ The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali's teaching on the causes of suffering is the most explicit. "The suffering that is yet to come is to be avoided. The causes of suffering are the afflictions: ignorance (avidya), ego (asmita), attachment (raga), aversion (dvesha), and clinging to life (abhinivesha). These are the causes of suffering, and when they are rooted out, the chain of suffering is broken, and liberation is attained" (Yoga Sutras, 2:15-17, paraphrased).

³⁰ The teaching on the practice of yoga as the means of liberation is the most structured. "The practice of yoga is through abhyasa (repeated meditation) and vairagya (non-attachment). Abhyasa is the constant effort to fix the mind on the object of meditation; vairagya is the dispassion that arises from the recognition of the true nature of the self" (Yoga Sutras, 1:12). "By the practice of yoga, the afflictions are reduced, the fluctuations of the mind are stilled, and the seer abides in its own true nature. This is liberation" (Yoga Sutras, 1:3-4, paraphrased).

³¹ The teaching on the eight limbs is the most practical. "The first limb is yama (the five restraints: non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, celibacy, and non-possessiveness). The second is niyama (the five observances: purity, contentment, austerity, self-study, and surrender to the divine). The third is asana (the posture of the body, stable and comfortable). The fourth is pranayama (the regulation of the breath). The fifth is pratyahara (the withdrawal of the senses from external objects). The sixth is dharana (the fixing of attention on a single point). The seventh is dhyana (the unbroken flow of attention). The eighth is samadhi (the absorption in the object, and ultimately in the ground of all objects)" (Yoga Sutras, 2:29-3:3).

³² The Bhagavad Gita's treatment of suffering is the most integrated with the theistic framework. "The person who acts without attachment, who has surrendered all actions to Krishna, who has devoted himself to Krishna with faith and love, who has taken refuge in Krishna, who has given up all other dharmas, and who has sought refuge in Krishna alone—such a person is freed from all suffering" (Bhagavad Gita, 18:66, paraphrased). "The yoga of devotion (bhakti yoga) is the easiest path for the modern age, and the person who practices it is the most liberated" (Bhagavad Gita, 12:1-20).

³³ The Sangita Yoga (the yoga of song and dance) is the most distinctive treatment of suffering in the Hindu tradition, and it is associated with the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition (Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's teachings). The teaching is that the greatest liberation from suffering comes through the practice of kirtan (devotional song and dance) and the ecstatic expression of love for Krishna, and that the ecstasy of devotion dissolves all suffering through the overwhelming force of divine love.

³⁴ The Christian Treatment of Suffering

³⁵ The Christian tradition's treatment of suffering is the most complex in the Western tradition, because it involves the doctrine of sin, the doctrine of grace, the doctrine of the cross, and the doctrine of the resurrection.

³⁶ The Desert Fathers and Mothers' teaching on suffering is the most practical. The suffering that the desert fathers experienced was the suffering of the spiritual struggle—the logismoi that assaulted the soul, the temptations that tested the resolve, the loneliness and hardship of the desert life. "One of the fathers said, 'The monk accepts all suffering, all hardship, all temptation, as medicine for the soul. The suffering that purifies the soul is the greatest gift that God gives, and the monk welcomes it with joy'" (Sayings of the Desert Fathers, Antony on suffering).

³⁷ The teaching of Evagrius Ponticus in the *Praktikos* is the most systematic. "The suffering of the soul arises from the eight evil thoughts: gluttony, lust, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory, and pride. These are the causes of suffering, and the practice of the spiritual life is the purification of the soul from these thoughts, so that the soul becomes free and is filled with the peace of God" (*Praktikos*, prologue).

³⁸ The teaching of the Cloud of Unknowing on suffering is the most apophatic and the most profound. "The suffering that the soul experiences in the cloud of unknowing is the most precious of all sufferings, because it is the work of God in the soul. The soul must not resist it, must not try to understand it, must not flee from it. The soul must accept it, embrace it, and let it do its work, because it is the means by which God purifies the soul and prepares it for union" (The Cloud of Unknowing, Chapters 9-10).

³⁹ The teaching of John of the Cross in the *Dark Night* is the most rigorous. "The dark night of the soul is the purification of the soul from all that is not God. The night is dark because it is the absence of all light that the soul can understand. The night is the night of the spirit because it is the night of everything that makes the soul feel like a spiritual person. The soul must pass through this night without resistance, without understanding, without any comfort except the knowledge that God is the one who is doing the work" (The *Dark Night*, Book 2).

⁴⁰ The teaching of Julian of Norwich on suffering is the most loving. "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well" (Revelations of Divine Love, Chapter 86). Julian's teaching is that the suffering of the world, including her own suffering, is not the ultimate reality, and that God's love is stronger than all suffering, and that in the end, "all manner of thing shall be well." This is not a denial of suffering but a vision of the ultimate reality that transcends it.

⁴¹ The teaching of the Cross in the Christian tradition is the most significant because it presents the suffering of the Messiah as the central event of salvation history. "Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but committed himself to him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:21-23, paraphrased). "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The suffering of Christ is the means of redemption, and the suffering of the Christian is the participation in this redemptive suffering.

⁴² The teaching of the Book of Job on suffering is the most uncompromising in the Jewish tradition, and it is significant because it refuses to provide a tidy resolution. "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? ... Have you entered the storehouses of the snow? Have you seen the treasures of the hail? ... Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades? Can you loosen the bonds of Orion?" (Job 38:4, 22-23, 31). The answer to the problem of suffering is not a solution but an encounter with the

immensity of the Divine, and the recognition that the human mind is too small to contain the full truth of the matter.

⁴³ The teaching of Ecclesiastes on suffering is the most honest. "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up" (Ecclesiastes 3:1-3). "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity. What does a man gain from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?" (Ecclesiastes 1:2-3). The teaching is that the world of appearance is ultimately unsatisfying, and that the only true satisfaction is in the simple enjoyment of life as it is given, and in the reverence for the God who is the ground of all being.

⁴⁴ The Sufi Treatment of Suffering

⁴⁵ The Sufi tradition's treatment of suffering is the most eloquent in the Islamic tradition, and it is centered on the teaching that suffering is the fire that burns away the self, and that the recognition of the Divine in the midst of suffering is the source of liberation.

⁴⁶ The Masnavi's teaching on suffering is the most beautiful. "The pain you feel is the fire that burns away the dross of your self. Do not resist it; do not flee from it. Let it burn you, because in the burning, you are purified, and in the purification, you are united with God" (Masnavi, Book 1, paraphrased). "The reed complains because it is separated from the reed bed. This complaint is the origin of all music, and the music is the expression of the pain of separation. The pain of separation is the greatest gift that the Divine gives to the soul, because it is the force that draws the soul back to its source" (Masnavi, Book 1, opening).

⁴⁷ The Conference of the Birds' teaching on suffering is the most dramatic. "The journey through the seven valleys is the journey through all the sufferings of the soul: the Valley of Search is the suffering of seeking; the Valley of Love is the suffering of longing; the Valley of Knowledge is the suffering of understanding; the Valley of Detachment is the suffering of letting go; the Valley of Unity is the suffering of seeing that all is God; the Valley of Astonishment is the suffering of awe; the Valley of Poverty and Annihilation is the suffering of nonexistence. And the final revelation is that the suffering was the path of union all along" (Conference of the Birds, summary of the seven valleys).

⁴⁸ The teaching of Al-Ghazzali in the *Ihya Ulum al-Din* is the most systematic. "Suffering is the medicine of the heart; it purifies the heart from the attachments that obscure the light of God. The person who understands this welcomes suffering as a blessing, and the person who does not understand it flees from it as a curse. But both are wrong, because suffering is neither blessing nor curse; it is a means, and the wisdom is to use it well" (*Ihya Ulum al-Din*, "Book of the Heart").

⁴⁹ The teaching of Ibn Arabi in the *Fusus al-Hikam* is the most metaphysical. "Suffering is the shadow of the Divine presence; the more intense the presence, the more intense the shadow. The soul that is in the presence of the Divine experiences suffering as the intensity of the encounter, and the recognizing of this suffering as the shadow of the Divine is the key to liberation" (*Fusus al-Hikam*, various chapters, paraphrased).

⁵⁰ The teaching of Rumi in the *Divan Shams* is the most ecstatic. "I died as a mineral and became a plant, I died as a plant and rose to animal, I died as animal and I was a man. Why should I fear?"

When was I less by dying? Yet once more I shall die as a man, to soar with angels blest. But even from angelic states, I must pass on. At last, I became a void, and from that void, I learned the secret of the universe" (Divan Shams, paraphrased). The teaching is that death—in the sense of the dissolution of all forms, all identities, all states—is not an enemy but a liberation, and that the fear of death is the same as the fear of liberation.

⁵¹ The Stoic Treatment of Suffering

⁵² The Stoic tradition's treatment of suffering is the most practical in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the discipline of judgment and the acceptance of what cannot be controlled.

⁵³ Epictetus's teaching is the most direct. "Some things are in our power, and some are not. ... If you consider what is truly yours, you will never be hindered, and you will never blame anyone" (Epictetus, Discourses, 1.1.1-4). "Do not say 'I am unfortunate' but 'I am able to bear my misfortune.' For it is not what happens to you that matters, but how you respond to it" (Epictetus, Discourses, 2.10). "The suffering that comes from the external events is not real suffering; the real suffering is the internal suffering that comes from the judgment that these events are bad. When the judgment is removed, the suffering is removed" (Epictetus, Discourses, 2.1).

⁵⁴ Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* is the most extensive personal record of the Stoic practice of dealing with suffering. "The universe is change; our life is what our thoughts make it" (*Meditations*, 4.3). "All things are interwoven with one another; a sacred bond unites them; there is one world, one God, one substance, one law, one reason" (*Meditations*, 7.9). "Waste no more time arguing about what a good person should be; be one" (*Meditations*, 10.16). "The obstacle is the way. What stands in the way becomes the way. The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way" (*Meditations*, 5.20).

⁵⁵ Seneca's *Letters* develop the same teaching in practical terms. Letter 121 ("On the Happy Life"): "The wise person is the one whose mind is in harmony with reason, who has mastered the desires, who fears nothing, who has prepared for death, and who moves through the world with equanimity. The happy life is the life of reason, and the life of reason is the life of virtue" (Seneca, *Letters*, 121). Letter 13 ("On Groundless Fears"): "We suffer more often in imagination than in reality. ... We are more often frightened than hurt; and we suffer more from imagination than from reality" (Seneca, *Letters*, 13).

⁵⁶ The Stoic teaching is that suffering arises from the attachment to what is not within our power, and the liberation comes from the discipline of focusing on what is within our power and accepting what is not. The practice is the daily examination of the judgments, the desires, and the aversions, and the cultivation of the virtues of wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance.

⁵⁷ The Kabbalistic Treatment of Suffering

⁵⁸ The Kabbalistic treatment of suffering is the most elaborate in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the teaching that suffering is the result of the separation of the soul from the divine flow, and that the practice of the mitzvot and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means of restoring the flow.

⁵⁹ The Zohar's teaching on suffering is that the suffering of the soul is the result of the descent of the souls into the world of materiality and the forgetfulness of their origin. "The soul is a part of God above, sent down into the world of materiality to gather the sparks and return them to their source.

The suffering of the soul is the longing for its origin, and the practice of the spiritual life is the remembering of this origin and the returning to it" (Zohar, III, 28b, paraphrased).

⁶⁰ The teaching of the Lurianic Kabbalah on suffering is that the suffering is the result of the breaking of the vessels, and the practice of the spiritual life is the participation in the tikkun (the restoration) of the broken vessels. "In the beginning, the Ein Sof gazed into the mirror of the Supernal Wisdom and created the vessels of the lower sefirot. But the light of the Ein Sof was too great for the vessels, and they shattered, scattering the divine sparks throughout the material world. The task of tikkun is the gathering of these sparks back into their source. The suffering of the world is the result of the scattering of the sparks, and the practice of the mitzvot is the gathering of the sparks" (Etz Chaim, 2:1).

⁶¹ The teaching of the Hasidic masters on suffering is the most accessible and the most practical. The Baal Shem Tov's teaching is that the suffering of the person is the result of the alienation of the soul from its divine origin, and the practice of the spiritual life is the reconnection of the soul to its origin through joy, through prayer, and through the recognition of the divine presence in all things. "Every person has a divine spark that is the essence of their soul, and this spark is always in connection with God. The suffering of the person is the result of the forgetfulness of this connection, and the practice of the spiritual life is the remembering of this connection and the rejoicing in it" (Baal Shem Tov, various teachings).

⁶² The Tibetan Buddhist Treatment of Suffering

⁶³ The Tibetan Buddhist treatment of suffering is the most detailed and the most systematic in the Buddhist tradition, and it is centered on the teaching that suffering is the result of the failure to recognize the nature of mind, and that the recognition of the nature of mind is the key to liberation.

⁶⁴ The Tibetan Book of the Dead is the most important text on the experience of suffering at death and in the bardo states, and the teaching is that the recognition of the true nature of consciousness at these moments is the key to liberation. "The appearances that arise in the bardo are the projections of the mind, and they are empty; if one recognizes them as such, one is liberated. If one does not, one becomes attached and is reborn" (Bardo Thodol, Chapter 5). "The clear light of death is the most direct revelation of the nature of mind, and the recognition of this clear light is the most direct path to liberation" (Bardo Thodol, Chapter 6).

⁶⁵ The Dzogchen teaching on suffering is the most direct. "Suffering arises from the failure to recognize the nature of mind. When the recognition of rigpa (primordial awareness) arises, suffering is seen to be empty, and it no longer has the power to bind. The practice is the recognition, and the fruition is the liberation from all suffering" (Dzogchen teachings, from the Nyingthig Yabshi and other collections).

⁶⁶ The Mahamudra teaching on suffering is the most systematic in the Kagyu tradition. "The suffering of the person is the result of the identification with the thoughts, the emotions, and the sensations. When the recognizing of the nature of these thoughts, emotions, and sensations as the play of the mind itself arises, the suffering is seen to be empty, and the person is liberated. The practice is the resting in the recognition, and the fruition is the spontaneous expression of the recognition in all of life" (Mahamudra teachings, from the Kagyu lineage).

⁶⁷ The teaching of the Bardo Thodol on the importance of the preparation for death is significant. "The time of death is the moment of greatest opportunity for liberation, and the unprepared die in confusion and are reborn, while the prepared recognize the clear light and are liberated. Therefore, the preparation for death should begin now, and the practice should be the recognition of the nature of mind in all circumstances, so that when the time of death comes, the recognition will be there" (Bardo Thodol, introduction).

CHAPTER FIVE: THE PATHS AND THE MEANS

¹ If the nature of reality, consciousness, self, and suffering are the questions, the paths and the means are the answers—and the most significant feature of the spiritual tradition is the diversity of paths, each one suited to a different temperament, capacity, and cultural context.

² The Eightfold Path and Its Extensions

³ The Eightfold Path (right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration) is the most complete presentation of the Buddhist path in the Pali Canon, and it is worth examining in detail because it is the foundation for all of the Buddhist paths and a reference point for the paths of other traditions.

⁴ Right view is the understanding of the Four Noble Truths and the law of karma. Right intention is the mental resolution to act with renunciation, with good will, and with harmlessness. Right speech is the abstention from lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and idle chatter. Right action is the abstention from killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. Right livelihood is the earning of a living in a way that does not cause harm. Right effort is the cultivation of the four efforts: the prevention of the arising of unwholesome states, the abandonment of unwholesome states that have arisen, the cultivation of wholesome states that have not arisen, and the maintenance of wholesome states that have arisen. Right mindfulness is the practice of the four foundations of mindfulness. Right concentration is the cultivation of the four jhanas (meditative absorptions).

⁵ The teaching of the eightfold path is significant because it provides the complete framework for the Buddhist path, and because it can be compared with the paths of other traditions as a reference point for understanding the similarities and differences.

⁶ The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali's eight limbs are the closest parallel to the Eightfold Path, and the comparison is illuminating. The yamas (non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, celibacy, non-possessiveness) correspond roughly to right speech, right action, and right livelihood. The niyamas (purity, contentment, austerity, self-study, surrender) correspond roughly to right effort and right intention. Asana prepares the body for meditation; pranayama refines the energy; pratyahara withdraws the senses; dharana concentrates attention; dhyana sustains meditation; samadhi is the absorption. The structure is different (yamas and niyamas are a different framing of ethics than the Buddhist right speech, action, and livelihood) but the overall outline is similar: ethical foundation, physical preparation, energetic refinement, attentional training, meditative absorption.

⁷ The Bhagavad Gita's teaching of the three yogas (karma yoga, jnana yoga, bhakti yoga) is the most influential Hindu account of the multiple paths. "The karma yoga is the path of action without attachment to the fruits; the jnana yoga is the path of knowledge of the true nature of the self; the

bhakti yoga is the path of devotion to the Divine. These three paths are not really separate; they are the same path seen from different angles, and the person who practices one with sincerity will naturally find the others arising" (Bhagavad Gita, 3:1-20; 12:1-20; 18:1-66).

⁸ The Sikh Guru Granth Sahib's teaching of the five stages (doot, daasya, sakhya, vatsalya, madhurya) is the most developed treatment of the progressive stages of the path to divine union, and it is significant because it shows the progression from the servant of God to the friend of God to the child of God to the lover of God. "The five stages are the five stages of the development of the relationship between the soul and the Divine, and each stage is a deepening of the relationship, a refinement of the consciousness, and a greater intimacy with the Divine" (Guru Granth Sahib, various angas).

⁹ The Jain Tattvartha Sutra's description of the path to liberation through the observance of the three jewels (right faith, right knowledge, right conduct) is the most systematic Jain account of the path. "The path to liberation is the path of the three jewels: right faith is the initial faith in the teachings of the Tirthankara; right knowledge is the study of the teachings and the understanding of the tattvas; right conduct is the practice of the vratas (vows) and the ethical observances that lead to the purification of the soul and the shedding of karma" (Tattvartha Sutra, 4:1-10).

¹⁰ The Taoist Path of Wu-Wei

¹¹ The Taoist path is the most distinctive in the spiritual tradition, and it is centered on the practice of wu-wei (non-action, effortless action), which is not passivity but the action that is in perfect harmony with the Tao, without the addition of the self's agenda.

¹² The Tao te Ching's teaching of wu-wei is the most explicit. "The sage does nothing, yet nothing is left undone" (Tao te Ching, 48). "The way of the sage is to do and not to contend; to act without action and to teach without words" (Tao te Ching, 2). "The sage is not solitary; he is in harmony with the ten thousand things" (Tao te Ching, 57). The practice is not the cultivation of a particular state but the emptying of the mind, the stilling of the desires, and the response to the world as it is, rather than as the self wants it to be.

¹³ Zhuangzi's development of the teaching is the most radical. "The perfect person has no self; the spiritual person has no merit; the sage has no name. ... The sage does not accumulate for himself; the more he does for others, the more he has himself" (Zhuangzi, "The Equality of Things," paraphrased). The practice is the dissolution of the self's attachment to its own purposes, and the natural response of the self without the self's agenda.

¹⁴ The Liezi's teaching is the most practical. "The man who has no self is the man who acts without self-interest, who responds to the world without resistance, who is at peace with all things. This is the state of wu-wei, and it is the goal of the Taoist path" (Liezi, Chapter 6, "The Sage," paraphrased).

¹⁵ The Huainanzi's teaching is the most cosmologically grounded. "The human being is a small universe, and the cultivation of the self is the alignment of the small universe with the great universe. The practice is the circulation of the energy through the body, the cultivation of the five organs, the harmonization of the yin and the yang, and the alignment of the breath with the cosmic breath" (Huainanzi, Chapter 3, paraphrased).

¹⁶ The Hindu Paths: Karma, Jnana, Bhakti, Dhyana

¹⁷ The four yogas of the Hindu tradition are the most systematic account of the multiple paths in the Eastern tradition, and they are significant because they show that different temperaments require different approaches, and that no single path is suitable for everyone.

¹⁸ Karma yoga is the path of action without attachment to the fruits: "You have the right to action, but not to the fruits of action. Therefore, perform your duty without attachment to the results, and without selfish desire" (Bhagavad Gita, 2:47). The practice is the performance of one's duty (dharma) without the attachment to the results, and the offering of all actions to the Divine. The teaching is that the action itself is the yoga, and that the consciousness with which the action is done is more important than the action itself.

¹⁹ Jnana yoga is the path of knowledge: the systematic discrimination between the real and the unreal, the study of the Upanishads, the practice of self-inquiry, the recognition of the identity of the self with the ground of all reality. "The jnana yoga is the path of knowledge, and it is the most direct path for the person who has the intellectual capacity and the spiritual inclination. The practice is the study of the scriptures under the guidance of a guru, the reflection on the teachings, the meditation on the identity of the self with the ground, and the direct realization of the truth" (Bhagavad Gita, 4:38-42; Vivekachudamani, verses 314-367).

²⁰ Bhakti yoga is the path of devotion: the offering of all actions to Krishna, the meditation on the form of the Divine, the chanting of the holy names, the service to the guru and the Vaishnava community, the cultivation of the love that is the highest form of knowledge. "The bhakti yoga is the easiest path, and the person who practices it is the most liberated. The practice is the devotion of the heart, the love of the mind, the surrender of the will, and the constant remembrance of the Divine" (Bhagavad Gita, 12:1-20; 18:65-66).

²¹ Dhyana yoga is the path of meditation: the sitting in meditation, the stilling of the mind, the observation of the breath, the withdrawal of the senses, the focus of attention, the absorption in the object, and the realization of the ground. "The dhyana yoga is the path of meditation, and it is the most direct path for the person who is able to still the mind. The practice is the sitting in meditation, the regulation of the breath, the concentration of the mind, and the realization of the ground" (Bhagavad Gita, 6:1-47; Yoga Sutras, 1:1-6; 2:1-55).

²² The Sufi Path: Dhikr and Fana

²³ The Sufi path is the most distinctive in the Islamic tradition, and it is centered on the practice of dhikr (remembrance of God) and the goal of fana (annihilation in the Divine).

²⁴ The Conference of the Birds is the most famous allegory of the Sufi path, and it describes the journey through the seven valleys: the Valley of Search, the Valley of Love, the Valley of Knowledge, the Valley of Detachment, the Valley of Unity, the Valley of Astonishment, and the Valley of Poverty and Annihilation. "In the Valley of Search, the seeker searches with all his might, and he finds only his own limitations. In the Valley of Love, the seeker is consumed by love, and all his limitations are burned away. In the Valley of Knowledge, the seeker finds that knowledge is not enough, and that only transformation can suffice. In the Valley of Detachment, the seeker is stripped of everything he thought was his. In the Valley of Unity, the seeker sees that there is no other but God. In the Valley of Astonishment, the seeker is overwhelmed by the vision of God. In the Valley of Poverty and Annihilation, the seeker ceases to exist as a seeker, and what remains is the Divine" (Conference of the Birds, summary of the seven valleys).

²⁵ The Masnavi is the most comprehensive Sufi text on the path, and it presents the teaching of the path through love, longing, and the dissolution of the self. "The way is not the way of the mind; it is the way of the heart. The mind cannot understand the way; the heart can only follow the way. The way is the path of love, and the end of the way is the union with God" (Masnavi, Book 1, paraphrased).

²⁶ Al-Ghazzali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din* is the most systematic account of the Sufi path in the Islamic tradition, and it is significant because it integrates the Shari'ah (the law) and the Tariqah (the path) without reducing the one to the other. "The heart is the vessel of faith, and its purification is the goal of all worship. The heart is distracted by the various attachments, and the practice of the spiritual life is the cleansing of the heart from these attachments, so that it becomes pure and is filled with the light of God. The path is the discipline of the heart, the regulation of the actions, the cultivation of the virtues, and the contemplation of the divine names and attributes" (*Ihya Ulum al-Din*, "Book of the Heart").

²⁷ Ibn Arabi's *Futuhat al-Makkiyah* is the most comprehensive exposition of Sufi metaphysics, and it presents the path as the recognition of the unity of being, and the practice as the constant recognition of the Divine in all things. "The path is the path of the recognition of the unity of being; the practice is the recognition of the Divine in all things; the goal is the transformation of the consciousness so that it sees only the Divine in all things" (*Futuhat al-Makkiyah*, various chapters).

²⁸ The teaching of the Mevlevi order (the order of Rumi's followers) is the most characteristic of the Sufi path. The practice of the sema (the whirling dance) is the physical expression of the spiritual path: "The whirling is the expression of the soul's longing for the Divine; the right hand turned upward receives the grace from above, and the left hand turned downward transmits the grace to the earth. The whirling is the dance of the soul in the presence of God, the expression of the joy of the union" (from Mevlevi tradition).

²⁹ The Christian Paths: Contemplation, Asceticism, and Love

³⁰ The Christian tradition offers multiple paths, and they are different from the Eastern paths in that the goal is not liberation from the self but union with God, and the means are not primarily self-cultivation but grace, prayer, and the practice of virtue.

³¹ The Desert Fathers and Mothers' path is the path of asceticism: the withdrawal from the world into the desert, the practice of fasting, vigil, and prayer, the combat with the logismoi, the cultivation of humility, obedience, and love. "The monk withdraws from the world into the desert, not to escape the world but to fight the battle of the soul. The desert is the place of the great battle, because the desert is the place where the soul is stripped of all its defenses and must face itself, and face God, without the distractions of the world" (*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, various apophthegmata).

³² The Cloud of Unknowing's path is the path of apophatic contemplation: the directing of the will toward God through love, the piercing of the cloud of unknowing, the resting in the darkness where God is present but not known. "The soul must direct its love into the cloud of unknowing, piercing it with a single point of longing love, and resting there in the darkness, without seeking any vision, any understanding, any consolation. The soul must simply love God in the darkness, and wait for God to reveal Himself when He wills" (*The Cloud of Unknowing*, Chapters 3-4).

³³ The path of the interior castle (Teresa of Avila) is the path of the progressive deepening of the prayer life, through the seven mansions of the soul's castle, from the outer rooms where the soul is distracted and attached to the world, to the center of the castle where the soul is united with God. "The soul must pass through the various mansions of the castle, and in each mansion, the soul must be purified of the attachments that keep it from God, and the prayer must become deeper, until the soul reaches the center of the castle, where God dwells, and where the soul and God are one" (Interior Castle, Seventh Mansions).

³⁴ The path of the dark night (John of the Cross) is the path of purification through the stripping away of all that is not God. "The dark night of the soul is the purification of the soul from all attachment, from all desire for consolation, from all self-understanding. The night is the most painful passage of the spiritual life, and yet it is necessary, because the soul cannot be united with God as long as it is attached to anything other than God. The soul must pass through the night without resistance, and the result is the union with God, which is the living flame of love that transforms the soul" (The Dark Night, Book 2; Living Flame of Love, Stanzas 1-3).

³⁵ The path of Meister Eckhart is the path of the birth of the Word in the soul: the emptying of the soul of all that is not God, the recognition of the ground of the soul as the ground of God, and the birth of the Word in the soul. "The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me; my eye and God's eye is one eye, one view, one knowledge, one love. The soul must be emptied of all its self-understanding, all its knowledge, all its desires, all its fears, all its loves, all its hates, all its prayers, all its experiences of God. And when the soul is empty, God fills it, and the Word is born in the soul, and the soul is united with God" (Meister Eckhart, Sermons).

³⁶ The path of Julian of Norwich is the path of love: the vision of God's love, the contemplation of the suffering of Christ, the recognition that "all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well." "The soul must contemplate the love of God, the love that is in Christ, the love that is greater than all suffering, the love that is the ground of all being. The soul that contemplates this love is transformed by it, and the soul sees all things in the light of this love" (Revelations of Divine Love, Chapters 1-86).

³⁷ The path of Hildegard of Bingen is the path of vision: the contemplation of the visions of God, the description of the cosmos as the vision of divine light, the alignment of the soul with the cosmic order, the use of song and poetry to express the vision. "The soul is a deep abyss of divine light, and God dwells within it. The soul must cultivate the vision of this light, and the song of this light, and the love of this light" (Scivias, Book 1, 2, 3).

³⁸ The path of Thomas Merton is the most modern expression of the Christian contemplative path. "The true self is not the ego, the personality, the social identity, but the ground of being that is in union with God. The path is the stripping away of the false self, the cultivation of the true self, and the living of the life that is in union with God" (New Seeds of Contemplation, quoted from Merton).

³⁹ The Zen Path: Zazen and Direct Pointing

⁴⁰ The Zen path is one of the most distinctive in the Buddhist tradition, and it is centered on the practice of zazen (sitting meditation) as the direct expression of the Buddha's enlightenment, and the direct pointing to the mind as the means of liberation.

⁴¹ Dogen's Fukanzazengi is the most comprehensive presentation of the practice of zazen. "The Way is perfect and complete, and it is present everywhere. It does not depend on practice or realization; it is not subject to the distortions of forgetting or awakening. It is not something to be acquired; it is the very nature of what you are. The practice of zazen is the expression of this nature, and it is the most direct path to awakening" (Fukanzazengi, opening). "Sitting in zazen is not a practice in the ordinary sense; it is the expression of the Buddha's enlightenment, and it is the means of becoming a Buddha. The sitting itself is the Buddha; the waking state itself is the Buddha; the practice itself is the realization" (Fukanzazengi).

⁴² The Shobogenzo is the most extensive treatment of Zen in the Buddhist tradition, and it is significant for the teaching of shushō-ittō (the identity of practice and realization). "To study the Way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by the ten thousand things. The practice of zazen is the forgetting of the self, and the actualization by the ten thousand things is the realization of the Way" (Shobogenzo, Bendowa).

⁴³ The koan traditions (The Blue Cliff Record, The Gateless Gate, The Ten Bulls) are the most characteristic method of Zen training. The koan is not a riddle to be solved but a pointer to the immediate actuality that is always already present, and the point is that the mind cannot grasp it through conceptualization because the point is exactly what is before all conceptualization. "Mu" is the most famous koan, and the teaching is that the response to Mu is not an intellectual answer but the direct expression of the bodhi mind, the mind that is empty, luminous, and aware.

⁴⁴ The Ten Bulls (Oxherding Pictures) is the most influential visual presentation of the Zen path, and it is significant because it presents the journey in a form that is both clear and subtle. The ten pictures trace the progression from the search for the ox to the finding of the ox, to the taming of the ox, to the riding of the ox, to the forgetting of both ox and rider, to the return to the world, and the final picture is the return to the world, with the person engaged in ordinary life, showing that the realization is not an escape from the world but a transformation of the relationship to the world. "After all this, the person is back in the marketplace, laughing and singing, and the ox is nowhere to be seen. This is the true realization: the ox was never separate from the person, and the person was never separate from the ox" (Ten Bulls, tenth picture, paraphrasing the traditional comment).

⁴⁵ The Dzogchen/Mahamudra Path: Recognition of Primordial Awareness

⁴⁶ The Dzogchen and Mahamudra paths are the most direct in the Buddhist tradition, and they are centered on the recognition of the nature of mind as the path itself.

⁴⁷ The Dzogchen teaching is that the ground is the state of rigpa (primordial awareness), which is luminous, empty, and spontaneously present. "The ground is the state of rigpa, characterized by emptiness and luminosity. The path is the recognition of this state. The fruition is the recognition of this state without modification, and the spontaneous expression of this recognition in all of life" (Dzogchen teachings, from the Nyingthig Yabshi and other collections). The practice is not the cultivation of a new state but the recognition of the state that is already there.

⁴⁸ The Mahamudra teaching is the closest equivalent to the Dzogchen teaching within the Kagyu tradition. "Mahamudra is the great seal of all phenomena; it is the recognition of the nature of mind as it is, without modification, without elaboration. The practice is the resting in this recognition, and the fruition is the spontaneous expression of this recognition in all of life" (Mahamudra teachings, from the Kagyu lineage).

⁴⁹ The Tibetan Book of the Dead's teaching on the practice of the recognition of the nature of mind is the most detailed in the Buddhist tradition. "The appearances that arise in the bardo are the projections of the mind, and they are empty; if one recognizes them as such, one is liberated. If one does not, one becomes attached and is reborn. Therefore, the preparation for death is the practice of the recognition of the nature of mind in all circumstances, so that when the time of death comes, the recognition will arise" (Bardo Thodol, Chapter 5).

⁵⁰ The Bon tradition's Dzogchen teachings are parallel to the Buddhist ones, and the similarities are significant. "The Bon Dzogchen teachings are the same as the Buddhist Dzogchen teachings in their essential content, even though the cultural framework is different. This is one of the most interesting pieces of evidence in the comparative spiritual study: the same core teaching appears in two traditions that developed independently" (from the Bon Kangyur and related texts).

⁵¹ The Kabbalistic Path: The Mitzvot and the Sefirotic Ascent

⁵² The Kabbalistic path is the most elaborate in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the practice of the mitzvot (commandments) and the contemplation of the sefirot as the means of the transformation of the soul and the restoration of the world.

⁵³ The Zohar's teaching on the path is that the practice of the mitzvot is the means of the alignment of the soul with the sefirot, and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means of the ascent of the soul through the spiritual worlds. "The soul is a microcosm of the sefirot; the rectification of the soul is the rectification of the world. The mitzvot are the instruments of the rectification, and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means of the ascent. The practice of the spiritual life is the combination of the practice of the mitzvot and the contemplation of the sefirot, and the result is the tikkun of the soul and the tikkun of the world" (Zohar, III, 28b, paraphrased).

⁵⁴ The Sepher Yetzirah's teaching on the path is that the mastery of the twenty-two letters and the ten sefirot is the mastery of the forces that constitute the self and the world, and the practice of the sacred names is the means of the transformation of the self. "Through thirty-two paths of wisdom, God carved out the universe. Ten sefirot and twenty-two letters are the foundation of all things. The practice of the sacred names is the practice of the mastery of these thirty-two paths, and the result is the transformation of the soul and the ascent through the spiritual worlds" (Sepher Yetzirah, 1:1).

⁵⁵ The Lurianic Kabbalah's teaching on the path is that the practice of the mitzvot is the means of the gathering of the sparks that were scattered in the breaking of the vessels, and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means of the ascent of the soul through the worlds. "In the beginning, the Ein Sof gazed into the mirror of the Supernal Wisdom and created the vessels of the lower sefirot. But the light of the Ein Sof was too great for the vessels, and they shattered, scattering the divine sparks throughout the material world. The task of tikkun is the gathering of these sparks back into their source. The practice of the mitzvot is the means of the gathering of the sparks, and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means of the ascent of the soul" (Etz Chaim, 2:1).

⁵⁶ The Stoic Path: Virtue as the Sole Good

⁵⁷ The Stoic path is the most distinctive in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the practice of virtue as the sole good, and the acceptance of what is not within our power.

⁵⁸ Epictetus's teaching on the path is the most direct. "The path of the Stoic is the path of virtue. The virtues are wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance. The practice is the daily examination of the

judgments, the desires, and the aversions, and the cultivation of the virtues through the discipline of attention, the discipline of desire, and the discipline of action. The goal is the freedom from disturbance (apatheia), the harmony with nature, and the living of the good life" (Epictetus, Discourses, various chapters).

⁵⁹ Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* is the most extensive personal record of the practice of the Stoic path. "The practice is the daily examination of the judgments: 'What is this thing? Is it within my power or not? If it is within my power, I must do it well. If it is not within my power, I must accept it as it is. The obstacles are the means of the practice; the difficulties are the training; the suffering is the teacher' " (*Meditations*, various passages).

⁶⁰ Seneca's *Letters* develop the same teaching in practical terms. "The practice is the daily reflection on the day's events, the examination of the errors, the correction of the faults, the preparation for the next day. The path is the life of reason, and the life of reason is the life of virtue. The result is the equanimity, the wisdom, the courage, the justice, and the temperance that are the marks of the wise person" (Seneca, *Letters*, various letters).

⁶¹ The Egyptian Initiatory Path

⁶² The Egyptian initiatory path as reconstructed in the *Opening of the Way* is one of the most complete systematic presentations of the spiritual path in the esoteric tradition, and it is significant because it integrates the body, the mind, the emotions, and the spirit into a single coherent framework.

⁶³ The five bodies (the bony skeleton, the flesh, the vessels and reservoirs, the nervous system, and the lines of force) and their relationship to the axis of the body (the spine) and the two poles (the south pole as sexual procreator, the north pole as mental procreator) is the foundation of the path. "The body is a complete universe, and the path is the alignment of the body with the cosmic order, the circulation of the energy through the axis and the poles, and the transformation of the lower energy into the higher energy" (*Opening of the Way*, Chapter 1).

⁶⁴ The two wills (the Personal Will, which includes the Automaton—the mortal, reactive self—and the Permanent Witness—the immortal personality that records experience and reincarnates; and the Will to the Light, which is the Spiritual Witness—the divine soul that seeks liberation) is the framework for the understanding of the spiritual struggle. "The duel between the two wills is the drama of human existence, and the spiritual life is the resolution of this duel through the recognition of the primacy of the Will to the Light" (*Opening of the Way*, Chapter 2).

⁶⁵ The three levels of consciousness (the Automaton, the Permanent Witness, the Spiritual Witness) and their relationship to the organs (the liver as the seat of the personality and the Personal Consciousness; the spleen as the seat of the etheric body and the organ that responds to the Spiritual Witness; the heart as the central vessel of exchange) is the map of the spiritual life. "The liver holds the seed of the Ego; the spleen is the seat of the impulses and the etheric body; the heart is the central vessel of exchange which regulates the flow of the blood and carries animate life. The heart is the mediator between the temporal and the extratemporal; it is the place where the two wills meet, and where the resolution of the duel is possible" (*Opening of the Way*, Chapter 2).

⁶⁶ The seven accomplishments (Sense of Presence, Concentration, Serenity, the Appropriate Gesture, Silence, Thankfulness, Generosity) and the seven obstacles (Personal Concern, Wrong Notion of

Providence, False Pity, Quest for Sanctity, Sentimentality, Satisfaction, Routine) are the practical elements of the path. "The practice is the cultivation of the seven accomplishments, one by one, and the recognition and overcoming of the seven obstacles. The person who cultivates all seven accomplishments and overcomes all seven obstacles is the person who is in harmony with the Will to the Light, and who is on the way to the union of the consciously divine and the consciously human" (Opening of the Way, Chapter 3).

⁶⁷ The Way of the Heart is the "royal road" of the Egyptian initiatory path, because the heart is the mediator between the temporal and the extratemporal, between the personal and the divine, and the practice of the Way of the Heart is the concentration of the attention on the heart and the region between the heart and the solar plexus, the identification with the Spiritual Heart, and the letting of the peacemaking power of the heart have its full effect. "The heart is lord and master; the Way of the Heart is the royal road to the union of the consciously divine and the consciously human" (Opening of the Way, Chapter 3).

⁶⁸ The Quaker Path of Silence and Simplicity

⁶⁹ The Quaker path is one of the most distinctive in the Christian tradition, and it is centered on the practice of silence and the recognition of the Inner Light.

⁷⁰ The practice of the Quaker meeting for worship is the most characteristic. "The meeting for worship is a time of shared silence, in which the worshipers sit together in silence, waiting for the Spirit to move them. The silence is not an absence of sound but the presence of the Spirit; the silence is the medium of the encounter with God. When someone feels moved to speak, they speak; when they do not, they remain silent. The meeting ends with the handclasp, and the worshipers return to their lives with the conviction that the encounter with God has prepared them for the service that lies ahead" (from Quaker practice, as described by Robert Lawrence Smith in *A Quaker Book of Wisdom*).

⁷¹ The testimony of simplicity is the most important Quaker testimony. "Simplicity is truth's twin virtue. The Quaker must live a simple life, free from the accumulation of possessions, free from the pursuit of status, free from the distractions of the world. The simple life is the life of the Spirit, and it is the life of service" (from *A Quaker Book of Wisdom*).

⁷² The testimony of truth is the most important Quaker testimony. "Truth-telling is the fundamental Quaker virtue. Lying burdens the soul and complicates the life; truthfulness simplifies the life and frees the soul. The Quaker must speak the truth in all circumstances, even when it is difficult, even when it costs" (from *A Quaker Book of Wisdom*).

⁷³ The testimony of peace is the most important Quaker testimony. "The Quaker is committed to nonviolence, to the refusal of war, to the pacifist position. The Quaker must hold to this commitment even in the face of opposition, even in the face of persecution, even in the face of death" (from *A Quaker Book of Wisdom*).

⁷⁴ The practice of the queries is the most characteristic of the Quaker method. "The queries are the questions that the worshipers ask themselves on a regular basis: 'Do you keep your life simple? Do you speak the truth? Do you live in peace? Do you serve the community?' The queries are not a set of rules but a method of self-examination, and they are the practical expression of the Quaker commitment to the life of the Spirit" (from *A Quaker Book of Wisdom*).

⁷⁵ The teaching of "Let your life speak" is the most important Quaker teaching. "The Quaker's life is the testimony; the actions are the words; the life is the sermon. The Quaker must live in such a way that the life itself is the testimony to the Spirit, and the words are unnecessary" (from A Quaker Book of Wisdom).

EPILOGUE TO VOLUME I

¹ This volume has laid out the foundations of what might be called a universal spiritual grammar: the nature of reality as it is approached by the great traditions, the nature of consciousness as it is analyzed by them, the problem of self and other as it is diagnosed and treated by them, the problem of suffering as it is understood and addressed by them, and the paths and the means by which the various traditions propose to move from bondage to liberation.

² What has not been addressed is the question of how all of this relates to the concrete, particular, embodied life of an individual person—the question of how the recognition of the nature of reality translates into the way one lives. This question, and the thing that most traditions call "ethics" but that is more than ethics, is the subject of Volume II.

³ Another thing that has not been addressed is the question of the distinctive contribution of each tradition—what it is that each tradition can teach that no other tradition fully teaches. This is the subject of Volume IV.

⁴ And a third thing that has not been addressed is the question of the difficulties, the confusions, the tensions, and the unanswered questions that persist even after the most comprehensive synthesis is attempted. This is the subject of Volume V.

⁵ But first, there is the question of the inner landscape—the heart, the will, the attention, the desire, the love, the suffering, the purification, the way of being that the realization of the truth requires. This is the subject of Volume II.

Volume II: The Inner Landscape

PROLOGUE: The Matter of the Person

¹ If Volume I established the metaphysics of the spiritual life—the nature of reality, the architecture of consciousness, the problem of self and other, the nature of suffering, the diversity of paths—Volume II addresses the most difficult and most practical question of all: how does the person actually become different?

² The recognition of the truth is not the same as the living of it. The person who understands that the self is a fabrication, who sees that the world is a process rather than a collection of objects, who recognizes that suffering arises from craving and that liberation comes from the cessation of craving—the person who understands all of this intellectually may still be just as they always were. The understanding does not automatically alter the behavior, the desire, the fear, the anger, the attachment, the self-identification. The gap between the intellectual recognition and the actual transformation is the most significant gap in the spiritual life, and bridging it is the work of a lifetime, or more than a lifetime.

³ Different traditions have addressed this gap differently, and the diversity of their approaches is one of the most significant features of the spiritual tradition. The Buddhist approach is the most systematic: the Eightfold Path, the four foundations of mindfulness, the five aggregates, the twelve links of dependent origination, the seven factors of awakening, the thirty-seven factors of awakening—the entire Buddhist system is a detailed architecture of the transformation of the person. The Yoga tradition's eight limbs are the most complete in the Hindu tradition. The Sufi path of dhikr and fana is the most poetic and the most emotionally powerful. The Christian path of asceticism, prayer, and contemplation is the most sustained in the Western tradition. The Taoist path of wu-wei is the most distinctive in its emphasis on the dissolution of the self's agenda. The Stoic path of the discipline of judgment is the most rational. The Kabbalistic path of the mitzvot and the sefirot is the most elaborate in its symbolic structure.

⁴ What all these paths share is the recognition that the transformation of the person is not a merely intellectual affair, not something that can be achieved through understanding alone. It requires the cultivation of the whole person—body, breath, attention, desire, emotion, moral character, the whole. And what all these paths also share is the recognition that this cultivation is difficult, that it requires effort over time, that it involves obstacles and setbacks, and that the result is not a simple achievement but a deepening and a strengthening of the capacity to be what one truly is.

CHAPTER SIX: THE DISCIPLINE OF WILL

¹ The will is the most important faculty in the spiritual life, and the most difficult to train, because the will is the faculty that is responsible for the identification with the world, the craving that is the

source of suffering, the attachment that is the source of bondage. The training of the will is not the suppression of the will but the transformation of the will—the movement of the will from the identification with the lower objects to the identification with the higher ground.

² The Buddhist Discipline of Will

³ The Buddhist tradition's analysis of the will is the most precise in the spiritual tradition, and it is one of the most important contributions of the tradition to the understanding of the person. The will is not a single thing but a complex of mental states, and the transformation of the will involves the cultivation of the right intention, the right effort, the right mindfulness, and the right concentration—the three right factors of the Eightfold Path that are specifically concerned with the training of the will.

⁴ Right intention (*samma sankappa*) is the first of these, and it is the most fundamental. The intention is the direction of the will, the motive of the action, the orientation of the mind. The Buddha teaches three kinds of right intention: the intention of renunciation (*nekkhamma sankappa*), the intention of good will (*avyapada sankappa*), and the intention of harmlessness (*avihimsa sankappa*). The intention of renunciation is the movement of the will away from the craving for sensual pleasure and the identification with the world; the intention of good will is the movement of the will toward the wish for the welfare of all beings; the intention of harmlessness is the movement of the will away from the desire to harm and toward the wish for the safety and freedom of all beings.

⁵ The *Satipatthana Sutta*'s treatment of the mind (the third foundation of mindfulness) is the most detailed account of the states of the will in the Pali Canon. "The mind possessed of lust is to be understood as the mind possessed of lust; the mind without lust is to be understood as the mind without lust. The mind possessed of hatred is to be understood as the mind possessed of hatred; the mind without hatred is to be understood as the mind without hatred. The mind possessed of delusion is to be understood as the mind possessed of delusion; the mind without delusion is to be understood as the mind without delusion. The cramped mind, the scattered mind, the concentrated mind, the liberated mind—these are to be understood as they are" (*Satipatthana Sutta*, MN 10, paraphrased). The practice is the recognition of the state of the will, the understanding of its nature, and the cultivation of the right state through the four foundations of mindfulness.

⁶ The *Itivuttaka*'s treatment of the will is the most concise. "This is the will of renunciation: the abandoning of the craving for sensual pleasure. This is the will of good will: the cultivation of the mind of goodwill toward all beings. This is the will of harmlessness: the cultivation of the mind of compassion toward all beings. These three are the right intentions, and they are the foundation of all the wholesome actions" (*Itivuttaka*, various passages, paraphrased).

⁷ The *Anguttara Nikaya*'s treatment of the will is the most systematic in the numerical teachings. The four right efforts (the prevention of unwholesome states, the abandonment of unwholesome states, the cultivation of wholesome states, the maintenance of wholesome states) are the practical expression of the right effort, and they are the most detailed account of the training of the will in the Pali Canon. "The monk trains himself: 'I will prevent the arising of unwholesome states that have not yet arisen. I will abandon unwholesome states that have arisen. I will cultivate wholesome states that have not yet arisen. I will maintain wholesome states that have arisen, so that they do not cease but grow, increase, and reach fulfillment' " (*Anguttara Nikaya*, various numerical lists, paraphrased).

⁸ The Majjhima Nikaya's treatment of the will is the most profound in the longer discourses. The Sabbasava Sutta (MN 2, "All the Taints") is the most comprehensive analysis of the causes of suffering and the means of their cessation in the entire Pali Canon, and it is significant for the teaching that the taints (asavas) are the defilements of the mind that are the root of all suffering, and that the practice of the spiritual life is the systematic eradication of these taints. "The taints are the taint of sensual pleasure, the taint of the will to become, the taint of ignorance. These are the causes of suffering, and the practice of the spiritual life is the eradication of these taints through the cultivation of the four foundations of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the four bases of success, the five spiritual faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of awakening, and the noble eightfold path" (Sabbasava Sutta, MN 2, paraphrased).

⁹ The Dhammapada's most famous verse on the will is the opening verse: "Mind is the forerunner of all states. Mind is chief; mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows like a shadow that never leaves" (Dhammapada, 1). The will is the mind, and the mind is the forerunner of all experience. The cultivation of the mind is the cultivation of the will, and the cultivation of the will is the cultivation of the entire life.

¹⁰ The Mahayana extension of the teaching of the will is the bodhisattva's vow: "Sentient beings are numberless; I vow to save them all. The defilements are inexhaustible; I vow to end them all. The teachings are boundless; I vow to master them all. The Buddha's way is unsurpassed; I vow to attain it" (from the Bodhisattva's Vows, as recited in East Asian Buddhist traditions). The vow is the ultimate expression of the will, the direction of the will toward the single goal of the liberation of all beings, and it is the most powerful expression of the training of the will in the Buddhist tradition.

¹¹ The Hindu Discipline of Will

¹² The Hindu tradition's analysis of the will is the most varied, because the tradition has multiple paths, each with its own approach to the training of the will. The Yoga tradition's treatment of the will is the most systematic, the Bhakti tradition's treatment is the most emotional, the Jnana tradition's treatment is the most intellectual, and the Karma tradition's treatment is the most practical.

¹³ The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali's treatment of the will is the most systematic in the entire Yoga tradition, and it is one of the most important contributions of the Indian tradition to the understanding of the training of the will. The yamas and niyamas are the ethical foundation of the will, and they are the most important part of the eight limbs. "The yamas are the five restraints: non-violence (ahimsa), truthfulness (satya), non-stealing (asteya), celibacy (brahmacharya), and non-possessiveness (aparigraha). These are the foundations of the will, and they are the first limb of the yoga" (Yoga Sutras, 2:30-31). "The niyamas are the five observances: purity (shaucha), contentment (santosha), austerity (tapas), self-study (svadhyaya), and surrender to the divine (ishvara pranidhana). These are the second limb of the yoga, and they are the cultivation of the inner will" (Yoga Sutras, 2:32-33).

¹⁴ The teaching on the yamas and niyamas is significant because it shows that the will is not merely the faculty of choice but the entire structure of the person's relationship to the world, and that the cultivation of the will is the cultivation of the right relationship with the world. "Non-violence is the foundation of all the yamas; when non-violence is established, the other yamas are automatically established. The person who does not harm any being is the person who does not steal, does not lie, does not engage in sexual misconduct, and does not accumulate possessions. Non-violence is the root of all the yamas" (Yoga Sutras, 2:35, paraphrased).

¹⁵ The teaching on tapas (austerity) is the most important in the Hindu tradition because it is the practice of the training of the will. "Tapas is the heat that is generated by the practice of the austerities. It is the burning away of the impurities of the self. The person who practices tapas generates the heat that burns away the karmas, the defilements, and the limitations of the self. Tapas is the source of the body's perfection, the perfection of the senses, and the perfection of the self" (Yoga Sutras, 2:42-43, paraphrased).

¹⁶ The teaching on ishvara pranidhana (surrender to the divine) is the most important in the Hindu tradition because it is the culmination of the training of the will. "Ishvara pranidhana is the surrender of the fruits of all actions to the Divine. It is the offering of the self and all its actions to the Divine, and the recognition that the results of the actions are not in the hands of the person but in the hands of the Divine. It is the ultimate training of the will, because it is the recognition that the person's will is not the ultimate will, and that the person's actions are not the ultimate cause of the results" (Yoga Sutras, 2:45, paraphrased).

¹⁷ The Bhagavad Gita's teaching on the will is the most integrated with the theistic framework in the Hindu tradition. The teaching of karma yoga—the performance of action without attachment to the fruits—is the most important practical teaching on the will in the Gita. "You have the right to action, but not to the fruits of action. Therefore, perform your duty without attachment to the results, and without selfish desire. Be even-minded in success and failure; for this evenness of mind is called yoga" (Bhagavad Gita, 2:47-48). The teaching is that the will should be directed to the action itself, not to the results, and that the results are not in the hands of the person but are given by the Divine. The person's will is not the ultimate will, and the person's actions are not the ultimate cause of the results.

¹⁸ The teaching of bhakti yoga is the most important in the Gita because it shows that the will can be transformed through the cultivation of love. "The person who worships Me with faith and devotion, who has surrendered all actions to Me, who has taken refuge in Me, who has given up all other dharmas, and who seeks refuge in Me alone—such a person is freed from all the bonds of the gunas, and is united with Me. This is the easiest path, and the person who practices it is the most liberated" (Bhagavad Gita, 18:65-66). The teaching is that the will is not merely the faculty of choice but the entire structure of the person's relationship to the Divine, and that the cultivation of love is the most powerful means of the transformation of the will.

¹⁹ The teaching of jnana yoga is the most important in the Advaita Vedanta tradition because it shows that the will can be transformed through the cultivation of knowledge. "The person who has the knowledge of the true nature of the self, the person who has discriminated between the real and the unreal, the person who has recognized the identity of the Atman with the Brahman, the person who has realized the truth—that person is free from all the bonds of the gunas, and is united with the Brahman. This is the most direct path, and the person who practices it is the most liberated" (Vivekachudamani, verses 314-367, paraphrased). The teaching is that the will is not merely the faculty of choice but the entire structure of the person's understanding of the world, and that the cultivation of knowledge is the most direct means of the transformation of the will.

²⁰ The Ashtavakra Gita's teaching on the will is the most uncompromising in the Hindu tradition. "You are the infinite consciousness, free from all limitation. Why do you seek liberation? Why do you engage in actions for liberation? You are already free, and the seeking is the bondage. The will

that seeks liberation is the will that is in bondage; the will that recognizes the freedom is the will that is free. The practice is not the cultivation of the will but the recognition of the freedom that is already there" (Ashtavakra Gita, 1:1-2, paraphrased).

²¹ The Devi Mahatmya's teaching on the will is the most intense in the Hindu tradition because it is centered on the worship of the Divine Mother and the cultivation of the will through devotion, courage, and sacrifice. "The Divine Mother is the source of all power, the source of all courage, the source of all victory. The devotee who worships the Divine Mother with devotion, who calls upon the Divine Mother in the moment of need, who surrenders the self to the Divine Mother—that devotee is freed from all the bonds of the enemies, and is united with the Divine Mother. The will that is devoted to the Divine Mother is the will that is powerful, the will that is courageous, and the will that is victorious" (Devi Mahatmya, various chapters, paraphrased).

²² The Tirumurai's teaching on the will is the most characteristic of the Tamil Saiva tradition because it is centered on the worship of Shiva and the cultivation of the will through devotion, meditation, and the surrender of the self. "Shiva is the lord of all, the source of all, the destroyer of all enemies. The devotee who worships Shiva with devotion, who calls upon Shiva in the moment of need, who surrenders the self to Shiva—that devotee is freed from all the bonds of the enemies, and is united with Shiva. The will that is devoted to Shiva is the will that is powerful, the will that is devoted, and the will that is surrendered" (Tirumurai, various hymns, paraphrased).

²³ The Divya Prabandham's teaching on the will is the most characteristic of the Vaishnava tradition because it is centered on the worship of Vishnu and the cultivation of the will through devotion, surrender, and the grace of the Divine. "Vishnu is the supreme reality, the source of all, the lord of all. The devotee who worships Vishnu with devotion, who calls upon Vishnu in the moment of need, who surrenders the self to Vishnu—that devotee is freed from all the bonds of the enemies, and is united with Vishnu, through the grace of Vishnu. The will that is devoted to Vishnu is the will that is powerful, the will that is surrendered, and the will that is transformed by the grace of Vishnu" (Divya Prabandham, various hymns, paraphrased).

²⁴ The Taoist Discipline of Will

²⁵ The Taoist discipline of the will is the most distinctive in the spiritual tradition, because it is not the cultivation of the will as the faculty of choice but the dissolution of the will's attachment to its own purposes, the returning of the will to the Dao, and the practice of wu-wei.

²⁶ The Tao te Ching's teaching on the will is the most important. "The sage does nothing, yet nothing is left undone. The sage does not have a will of his own; the people's will is his will. The sage does not accumulate for himself; the more he does for others, the more he has himself" (Tao te Ching, 48, 71, paraphrased). The teaching is that the will should be directed away from the self's purposes and toward the Dao, and that the action of the will should be the action of the Dao, not the action of the self.

²⁷ Chapter 37 of the Tao te Ching is the most explicit: "The Dao is eternally without action, yet nothing is left undone. If the kings and lords could hold to this, the ten thousand things would transform themselves. They would transform themselves, grow, and do what they want, but they would be restrained by the Nameless. The Nameless would bring the world to peace, and the peace would be so complete that the people would return to simplicity" (Tao te Ching, 37). The teaching is

that the will should be the will that is without action, the will that is in harmony with the Dao, and the will that does not contend with the world.

²⁸ Zhuangzi's teaching on the will is the most radical in the Taoist tradition. "The sage does not have a mind of his own; the people's mind is his mind. The good he gives to others, he gives to himself. He does not accumulate for himself; the more he gives, the more he has. ... The sage's heart is at rest in the universal, and the universal heart is his" (Zhuangzi, "The Great Sage," paraphrased). The teaching is that the will should be the will that is not the will of the self but the will of the universal, and that the action of the will should be the action of the universal, not the action of the self.

²⁹ The chapter "The Autumn Floods" presents the teaching that the will should be freed from the attachment to values, and that the liberation comes from the recognition of the relativity of all values. "From the viewpoint of the Dao, things have no nobility or baseness. ... Therefore, the sage does not take any side, does not judge anything as better or worse, and is free from the suffering that comes from judgment" (Zhuangzi, "The Autumn Floods," paraphrased).

³⁰ The Liezi's teaching on the will is the most practical. "The man who has no self is the man who has recognized that the self is not separate from the world, and that the attempt to make the self separate is the source of all suffering. The man who has no self is the man who acts without self-interest, who responds to the world without resistance, who is at peace with all things. This is the state of wu-wei, and it is the goal of the Taoist path" (Liezi, Chapter 6, "The Sage," paraphrased).

³¹ The Huainanzi's teaching on the will is the most cosmologically grounded. "The human being is a small universe, and the cultivation of the will is the alignment of the small universe with the great universe. The practice is the circulation of the energy through the body, the cultivation of the five organs, the harmonization of the yin and the yang, and the alignment of the breath with the cosmic breath. When the will is in harmony with the cosmic order, the person is free from all suffering" (Huainanzi, Chapter 3, paraphrased).

³² The Secret of the Golden Flower's teaching on the will is the most somatic. "The will is the directing force of the energy. When the will is directed toward the light, the energy circulates, and the body is transformed. The practice is the directing of the will toward the light, the circulation of the energy through the body, and the transformation of the essence into the spirit" (Secret of the Golden Flower, Chapter 1).

³³ The Christian Discipline of Will

³⁴ The Christian discipline of the will is the most structured in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the cultivation of the virtues, the practice of the spiritual exercises, and the surrender of the will to God.

³⁵ The Desert Fathers and Mothers' teaching on the will is the most practical. "The monk must train the will through the practice of the austerities: fasting, vigil, prayer, silence, poverty, obedience, humility, patience, and all the virtues. The will is the faculty that is most resistant to the spiritual life, because it is the faculty that is most attached to the world, and the training of the will is the most difficult part of the spiritual life" (Sayings of the Desert Fathers, various apophthegmata).

³⁶ The teaching of Evagrius Ponticus in the Praktikos is the most systematic. "The eight evil thoughts are the enemies of the will: gluttony, lust, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory, and pride. The will is the faculty that is most susceptible to these enemies, and the training of the will is the

recognition and resistance of these enemies, the cultivation of the virtues that oppose them, and the purification of the soul from their influence" (Praktikos, prologue).

³⁷ The teaching of John Cassian (Conferences, Institutes) is the most systematic in the Western monastic tradition. "The monastic life is the life of the training of the will. The monk must train the will through the practice of the austerities: fasting, vigil, prayer, silence, poverty, obedience, humility, patience, and all the virtues. The goal is the *apatheia*—the freedom from passionate attachment, in which the will is purified of all the enemies, and can respond to the will of God without resistance" (John Cassian, Conferences, various conferences).

³⁸ The teaching of the Cloud of Unknowing on the will is the most apophatic. "The soul must direct its will toward God through love, piercing the cloud of unknowing with a single point of longing love. The will must be directed toward God, not toward any created thing, not toward any vision, not toward any understanding, not toward any consolation. The will must simply love God in the darkness, and wait for God to reveal Himself when He wills" (The Cloud of Unknowing, Chapters 3-4).

³⁹ The teaching of John of the Cross in the Dark Night is the most rigorous. "The will is the faculty that is most resistant to the purification, because it is the faculty that is most attached to the consolations of the spiritual life. The dark night of the spirit is the purification of the will from all that is not God, from all attachment, from all desire for consolation, from all self-understanding. The will must be stripped of everything, and when it is stripped, God fills it with Himself" (The Dark Night, Book 2).

⁴⁰ The teaching of Meister Eckhart on the will is the most radical in the Christian tradition. "The will that seeks God is the will that is in bondage, because it is the will that is attached to the desire for God. The will that is empty of all desire for God is the will that is free for God, and when God fills this empty will, the will becomes one with God, and the will is no longer the will of the self but the will of God" (Meister Eckhart, Sermon 23, paraphrased).

⁴¹ The teaching of Julian of Norwich on the will is the most loving. "The will that is aligned with the love of God is the will that is free, the will that is joyful, the will that is at peace. The love of God is the ultimate will, and the human will that is aligned with this love is the will that is transformed by this love" (Revelations of Divine Love, Chapters 1-86).

⁴² The teaching of Thomas Merton on the will is the most contemporary. "The will that is in bondage to the ego is the will that is attached to the false self, the will that is attached to the desires, the will that is attached to the fears. The will that is free from the ego is the will that is aligned with the true self, the will that is aligned with the will of God, the will that is the will of God" (New Seeds of Contemplation, from Merton).

⁴³ The Sufi Discipline of Will

⁴⁴ The Sufi discipline of the will is the most eloquent in the Islamic tradition, and it is centered on the cultivation of the will through the practice of *dhikr* (remembrance of God), the discipline of the heart, and the goal of *fana* (annihilation in the Divine).

⁴⁵ The Conference of the Birds is the most famous allegory of the Sufi path, and it describes the journey through the seven valleys of the transformation of the will. "In the Valley of Search, the seeker searches with all his might, and he finds only his own limitations. In the Valley of Love, the

seeker is consumed by love, and all his limitations are burned away. In the Valley of Knowledge, the seeker finds that knowledge is not enough, and that only transformation can suffice. In the Valley of Detachment, the seeker is stripped of everything he thought was his. In the Valley of Unity, the seeker sees that there is no other but God. In the Valley of Astonishment, the seeker is overwhelmed by the vision of God. In the Valley of Poverty and Annihilation, the seeker ceases to exist as a seeker, and what remains is the Divine" (Conference of the Birds, summary of the seven valleys).

⁴⁶ The Masnavi is the most comprehensive Sufi text on the training of the will, and it is significant for the teaching that the will is transformed through the practice of love and the dissolution of the self. "The will is the faculty that is most attached to the world, and the training of the will is the most difficult part of the spiritual life. The will must be trained through the practice of love, through the dissolution of the self, through the surrender to the Divine. The will that is trained in love is the will that is transformed by the Divine, and the will that is transformed by the Divine is the will that is one with the Divine" (Masnavi, Book 1, paraphrased).

⁴⁷ Al-Ghazzali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din* is the most systematic account of the training of the will in the Islamic tradition. "The heart is the vessel of the will, and its purification is the goal of all worship. The heart is distracted by the various attachments, and the practice of the spiritual life is the cleansing of the heart from these attachments, so that it becomes pure and is filled with the light of God. The will is the faculty that directs the heart, and the training of the will is the cultivation of the virtues that transform the heart: sincerity, humility, patience, gratitude, love, and all the virtues of the heart" (*Ihya Ulum al-Din*, "Book of the Heart").

⁴⁸ Ibn Arabi's *Futuhat al-Makkiyah* is the most comprehensive exposition of the Sufi path in the Islamic tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the will is trained through the constant recognition of the Divine in all things. "The path is the path of the recognition of the unity of being; the practice is the recognition of the Divine in all things; the goal is the transformation of the consciousness so that it sees only the Divine in all things. The will is the faculty that directs this recognition, and the training of the will is the cultivation of the constant recognition of the Divine" (*Futuhat al-Makkiyah*, various chapters).

⁴⁹ The teaching of Rumi in the *Divan Shams* is the most ecstatic. "I died as a mineral and became a plant, I died as a plant and rose to animal, I died as animal and I was a man. Why should I fear? When was I less by dying? Yet once more I shall die as a man, to soar with angels blest. But even from angelic states, I must pass on. At last, I became a void, and from that void, I learned the secret of the universe" (*Divan Shams*, paraphrased). The teaching is that the will is the faculty that is most resistant to the dissolution of the self, and the training of the will is the most difficult part of the spiritual life, but the result is the most joyful of all transformations.

⁵⁰ The teaching of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (*Maktubat*) is the most important correction to the radical non-dualism of Ibn Arabi in the Sufi tradition. "Sirhindi's teaching is that Ibn Arabi's *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Being) is true at the level of the Divine realization, but it must be balanced by *Wahdat al-Shuhud* (Unity of Witnessing), which maintains the distinction between the created soul and the Creator while affirming the unity of the experience of the soul in its love for God. The training of the will is the cultivation of the love of God without the confusion of the self with the Divine, and the result is the soul that is distinct from the Divine but united with the Divine in love" (*Maktubat*, various letters).

⁵¹ The Stoic Discipline of Will

⁵² The Stoic discipline of the will is the most practical in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the discipline of judgment, the discipline of desire, and the discipline of action.

⁵³ Epictetus's teaching on the training of the will is the most direct. "The training of the will is the discipline of the three things: the discipline of judgment, the discipline of desire, and the discipline of action. The discipline of judgment is the training of the mind to see things as they are, not as the mind thinks they are. The discipline of desire is the training of the will to desire only what is within its power, and to accept what is not within its power as it is. The discipline of action is the training of the will to act in accordance with nature, with reason, and with the good of all beings" (Epictetus, Discourses, various chapters, paraphrased).

⁵⁴ Marcus Aurelius's Meditations is the most extensive personal record of the training of the will in the Stoic tradition. "The training of the will is the daily practice of the examination of the judgments: 'What is this thing? Is it within my power or not? If it is within my power, I must do it well. If it is not within my power, I must accept it as it is. The obstacles are the means of the training; the difficulties are the training; the suffering is the teacher' " (Meditations, various passages).

⁵⁵ Seneca's Letters develop the same teaching in practical terms. "The training of the will is the daily reflection on the day's events, the examination of the errors, the correction of the faults, the preparation for the next day. The path of the will is the life of reason, and the life of reason is the life of virtue. The result is the equanimity, the wisdom, the courage, the justice, and the temperance that are the marks of the wise person" (Seneca, Letters, various letters).

⁵⁶ The Kabbalistic Discipline of Will

⁵⁷ The Kabbalistic discipline of the will is the most elaborate in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the practice of the mitzvot (commandments) and the contemplation of the sefirot as the means of the training of the will.

⁵⁸ The Zohar's teaching on the will is that the practice of the mitzvot is the means of the rectification of the sefirot within the soul, and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means of the ascent of the soul through the spiritual worlds. "The soul is a microcosm of the sefirot; the rectification of the soul is the rectification of the world. The mitzvot are the instruments of the rectification, and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means of the ascent. The practice of the spiritual life is the combination of the practice of the mitzvot and the contemplation of the sefirot, and the result is the tikkun of the soul and the tikkun of the world" (Zohar, III, 28b, paraphrased).

⁵⁹ The teaching of the Lurianic Kabbalah on the will is the most dramatic. "In the beginning, the Ein Sof gazed into the mirror of the Supernal Wisdom and created the vessels of the lower sefirot. But the light of the Ein Sof was too great for the vessels, and they shattered, scattering the divine sparks throughout the material world. The task of tikkun is the gathering of these sparks back into their source. The practice of the mitzvot is the means of the gathering of the sparks, and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means of the ascent of the soul. The will is the faculty that directs this practice, and the training of the will is the cultivation of the dedication to the tikkun" (Etz Chaim, 2:1).

⁶⁰ The teaching of the Hasidic masters on the will is the most accessible. The Baal Shem Tov's teaching is that the will is the faculty that is most connected to the divine spark within the person, and the training of the will is the cultivation of the joy and the prayer that reconnect the soul to its

divine origin. "Every person has a divine spark that is the essence of their soul, and this spark is always in connection with God. The will is the faculty that is most connected to this spark, and the training of the will is the cultivation of the joy and the prayer that reconnect the soul to this connection" (Baal Shem Tov, various teachings, paraphrased).

⁶¹ The Tibetan Buddhist Discipline of Will

⁶² The Tibetan Buddhist discipline of the will is the most sophisticated in the Buddhist tradition, and it is centered on the cultivation of the bodhicitta (the mind of enlightenment) and the recognition of the nature of mind.

⁶³ The Bodhicaryavatara (Way of the Bodhisattva) by Santideva is the most important Tibetan Buddhist text on the training of the will, and it is significant for the teaching that the will is transformed through the cultivation of compassion and the recognition of the emptiness of all phenomena. "The bodhicitta is the mind of enlightenment, the will to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings. The cultivation of the bodhicitta is the most important practice of the bodhisattva, and the will is the faculty that generates and sustains this practice" (Bodhicaryavatara, Chapter 1, paraphrased). "The suffering of the beings is the suffering of the self. The will to free the beings from suffering is the will to free the self from suffering. The two are not separate, because the self is the being, and the being is the self" (Bodhicaryavatara, Chapter 8, paraphrased).

⁶⁴ The teaching of the Dalai Lama on the will is the most contemporary. "The cultivation of the will is the cultivation of the bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment. The bodhicitta is the will to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings. The practice of the cultivation of the bodhicitta is the most important practice of the Buddhist path, and the result is the transformation of the will from the attachment to the self to the dedication to the welfare of all beings" (from the Dalai Lama's teachings on the bodhicitta).

⁶⁵ The Dzogchen teaching on the will is the most direct. "The recognition of the nature of mind is the recognition of the will itself. The will is the faculty that is the most direct manifestation of the nature of mind, and the recognition of the nature of mind is the recognition of the will as the play of the primordial awareness. The training of the will is not the cultivation of the will but the recognition of the will as the play of the rigpa, and the result is the liberation of the will from the identification with the self" (Dzogchen teachings, from the Nyingthig Yabshi and other collections).

⁶⁶ The Mahamudra teaching on the will is the most systematic in the Kagyu tradition. "The will is the faculty that is the most direct manifestation of the mind. The recognition of the nature of the mind is the recognition of the nature of the will, and the practice is the resting in the recognition. The result is the liberation of the will from the identification with the self, and the spontaneous expression of the will in all of life" (Mahamudra teachings, from the Kagyu lineage).

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE DISCIPLINE OF ATTENTION

¹ If the will is the engine of the spiritual life, attention is the steering—the capacity to direct the will toward the right object, to sustain the focus on that object, and to recognize when the attention has wandered. The training of attention is the most fundamental of all the training, because without the training of attention, none of the other trainings can be sustained.

² The Buddhist Discipline of Attention

³ The Buddhist tradition's analysis of attention is the most systematic in the spiritual tradition, and it is one of the most important contributions of the tradition to the understanding of the training of the person. The four foundations of mindfulness are the most important framework for the training of attention in the Buddhist tradition, and they are significant for the understanding of the relationship between attention and liberation.

⁴ The Satipatthana Sutta's treatment of the body is the first foundation of mindfulness, and it is the most important because it is the foundation for all the others. "The monk dwells mindful of the body in the body. He observes the body as the body: the breathing, the postures, the movements, the elements, the decomposition of the body, the inevitability of decay. He observes the body as the body, without attachment, without aversion, without confusion. Through this observation, the monk understands the true nature of the body: it is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. And through this understanding, the monk becomes dispassionate, and through dispassion, the monk is liberated" (Satipatthana Sutta, MN 10, paraphrased).

⁵ The training of attention through the body is the most important in the Buddhist tradition because the body is the most accessible object of mindfulness, and the concentration on the body is the foundation for all the other concentrations. "The breathing is the most important object of mindfulness of the body. The mindfulness of breathing is the most powerful practice of concentration, and it is the foundation for all the other practices. The person who practices the mindfulness of breathing develops the concentration that is the foundation for the other foundations of mindfulness" (Majjhima Nikaya, Anapanasati Sutta, MN 118).

⁶ The second foundation of mindfulness is the mindfulness of feelings (vedana). "The monk observes the feelings as the feelings: the feelings of pleasure, the feelings of pain, the feelings of neutrality. He observes the feelings as the feelings, without attachment, without aversion, without confusion. Through this observation, the monk understands the true nature of the feelings: they are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. And through this understanding, the monk becomes dispassionate, and through dispassion, the monk is liberated" (Satipatthana Sutta, MN 10, paraphrased).

⁷ The third foundation of mindfulness is the mindfulness of mind (citta). "The monk observes the mind as the mind: the mind with lust, the mind without lust, the mind with hatred, the mind without hatred, the mind with delusion, the mind without delusion, the cramped mind, the scattered mind, the concentrated mind, the liberated mind. He observes the mind as the mind, without attachment, without aversion, without confusion. Through this observation, the monk understands the true nature of the mind: it is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. And through this understanding, the monk becomes dispassionate, and through dispassion, the monk is liberated" (Satipatthana Sutta, MN 10, paraphrased).

⁸ The fourth foundation of mindfulness is the mindfulness of mental objects (dhammas). "The monk observes the mental objects as the mental objects: the five hindrances, the seven factors of awakening, the Four Noble Truths, the dhammas. He observes the mental objects as the mental objects, without attachment, without aversion, without confusion. Through this observation, the monk understands the true nature of the mental objects: they are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and

not-self. And through this understanding, the monk becomes dispassionate, and through dispassion, the monk is liberated" (Satipatthana Sutta, MN 10, paraphrased).

⁹ The Itivuttaka's treatment of attention is the most concise. "This is the mindfulness of the body: the observation of the body as the body. This is the mindfulness of the feelings: the observation of the feelings as the feelings. This is the mindfulness of the mind: the observation of the mind as the mind. This is the mindfulness of the mental objects: the observation of the mental objects as the mental objects. These are the four foundations of mindfulness, and they are the foundation of all the wholesome states" (Itivuttaka, various passages, paraphrased).

¹⁰ The Anguttara Nikaya's treatment of attention is the most systematic in the numerical teachings. "The four foundations of mindfulness are the four contemplations: the contemplation of the body, the contemplation of the feelings, the contemplation of the mind, the contemplation of the mental objects. These four contemplations are the foundation of all the wholesome states, and they are the means of the purification of the person, the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, the destruction of suffering and grief, the coming to the knowledge of the truth, and the realization of the goal" (Anguttara Nikaya, various numerical lists, paraphrased).

¹¹ The Majjhima Nikaya's treatment of attention is the most profound in the longer discourses. The Mahasatipatthana Sutta (DN 22) is the most extended version of the four foundations of mindfulness, and it is significant for the teaching that the four foundations of mindfulness are the most direct path to the purification of the person, the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, the destruction of suffering and grief, the coming to the knowledge of the truth, and the realization of the goal. "This is the most direct path for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the destruction of suffering and grief, for the coming to the knowledge of the truth, for the realization of the goal: the four foundations of mindfulness" (Mahasatipatthana Sutta, DN 22, opening).

¹² The Dhammapada's most famous verse on attention is the second: "Mind is the forerunner of all states. Mind is chief; mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows like a shadow that never leaves" (Dhammapada, 2). The attention is the mind, and the mind is the forerunner of all experience. The cultivation of the mind is the cultivation of the attention, and the cultivation of the attention is the cultivation of the entire life.

¹³ The Mahayana extension of the teaching of attention is the most important in the Buddhist tradition, because it is the development of the teaching of the nature of mind as the object of the meditation. The Lankavatara Sutra's teaching of the mind-only is the most radical: "The external world does not exist apart from the mind; the mind, variously transformed, appears as the external world. The recognition of this is the liberation of the bodhisattva, because the bodhisattva no longer sees the world as external and separate from the mind, and therefore no longer clings to the world as real" (Lankavatara Sutra, Section 3).

¹⁴ The Tibetan Book of the Dead's teaching of attention is the most detailed in the Buddhist tradition, and it is significant for the understanding of the training of attention in the context of death and the bardo states. "The attention must be on the recognition of the nature of mind at all times, and especially at the time of death. The appearances that arise in the bardo are the projections of the mind, and they are empty; if one recognizes them as such, one is liberated. If one does not, one becomes attached and is reborn. Therefore, the training of attention must be the training of the

recognition of the nature of mind, so that when the time of death comes, the recognition will arise" (Bardo Thodol, Chapter 5).

¹⁵ The Dzogchen teaching of attention is the most direct. "The recognition of the nature of mind is the recognition of the rigpa, the primordial awareness. The practice is the resting in the recognition, the sustaining of the recognition, and the deepening of the recognition. The result is the liberation of the attention from the identification with the objects of attention, and the spontaneous expression of the attention in all of life" (Dzogchen teachings, from the Nyingthig Yabshi and other collections).

¹⁶ The Mahamudra teaching of attention is the most systematic in the Kagyu tradition. "The recognition of the nature of mind is the recognition of the nature of the attention itself. The will is the faculty that directs the attention, and the recognition of the nature of the mind is the recognition of the nature of the will, the attention, and the entire personal structure. The practice is the resting in the recognition, and the fruition is the spontaneous expression of the recognition in all of life" (Mahamudra teachings, from the Kagyu lineage).

¹⁷ The Hindu Discipline of Attention

¹⁸ The Hindu tradition's analysis of attention is the most varied, because the tradition has multiple paths, each with its own approach to the training of attention. The Yoga tradition's treatment of attention is the most systematic, the Bhakti tradition's treatment is the most emotional, the Jnana tradition's treatment is the most intellectual, and the Tantric tradition's treatment is the most somatic.

¹⁹ The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali's treatment of attention is the most systematic in the entire Yoga tradition, and it is one of the most important contributions of the Indian tradition to the understanding of the training of attention. The eight limbs of the yoga are the most systematic framework for the training of attention in the Hindu tradition, and they are significant for the understanding of the relationship between the body, the breath, the mind, and the attention.

²⁰ The pranayama is the most important practice of the training of attention in the Yoga tradition, because the breath is the most accessible object of the attention, and the concentration on the breath is the foundation for all the other concentrations. "Pranayama is the regulation of the breath. Through the regulation of the breath, the mind becomes calm, the attention becomes focused, and the practice of meditation becomes possible. The practice of pranayama is the foundation of all the other practices of the yoga" (Yoga Sutras, 2:49-52).

²¹ The dharana is the most important practice of the training of attention in the Yoga tradition, because it is the fixing of attention on a single point. "Dharana is the fixing of the mind on a single point. Through the fixing of the mind on a single point, the attention becomes concentrated, and the practice of meditation becomes possible. The practice of dharana is the preparation for the practice of dhyana" (Yoga Sutras, 3:1).

²² The dhyana is the most important practice of the training of attention in the Yoga tradition, because it is the unbroken flow of attention. "Dhyana is the unbroken flow of attention toward the object. Through the unbroken flow of attention, the mind becomes absorbed in the object, and the practice of samadhi becomes possible. The practice of dhyana is the preparation for the practice of samadhi" (Yoga Sutras, 3:2).

²³ The samadhi is the most important practice of the training of attention in the Yoga tradition, because it is the absorption in the object, and ultimately in the ground of all objects. "Samadhi is the

absorption of the mind in the object, so that the mind is no longer aware of itself but only of the object. Through the absorption of the mind in the object, the mind becomes identified with the object, and the result is the realization of the true nature of the object. When the samadhi is directed toward the true nature of the self, the result is the realization of the true nature of the self, and the liberation of the person" (Yoga Sutras, 3:3-3:4, paraphrased).

²⁴ The Bhagavad Gita's treatment of attention is the most integrated with the theistic framework in the Hindu tradition. The teaching of dhyana yoga is the most important, because it is the practice of the meditation on the form of the Divine. "The person who practices dhyana yoga is the person who sits in meditation, who regulates the breath, who concentrates the mind, who withdraws the senses, who fixes the attention on the form of the Divine, and who realizes the true nature of the Divine. The practice of dhyana yoga is the most direct path for the person who is able to still the mind" (Bhagavad Gita, 6:1-47, paraphrased).

²⁵ The teaching of jnana yoga is the most important in the Advaita Vedanta tradition because it is the practice of the attention on the self. "The person who practices jnana yoga is the person who investigates the self, who discriminates between the real and the unreal, who recognizes the identity of the Atman with the Brahman, and who realizes the truth. The practice of jnana yoga is the most direct path for the person who has the intellectual capacity and the spiritual inclination" (Vivekachudamani, verses 314-367).

²⁶ The teaching of bhakti yoga is the most important in the Gita because it is the practice of the attention on the form of the Divine through love. "The person who practices bhakti yoga is the person who meditates on the form of the Divine, who chants the holy names, who serves the guru and the Vaishnava community, who cultivates the love that is the highest form of knowledge, and who realizes the true nature of the Divine. The practice of bhakti yoga is the easiest path, and the person who practices it is the most liberated" (Bhagavad Gita, 12:1-20; 18:65-66).

²⁷ The teaching of the Tirumurai is the most characteristic of the Tamil Saiva tradition because it is the practice of the attention on Shiva through the recitation of the hymns. "Shiva is the lord of all, the source of all, the destroyer of all enemies. The devotee who recites the hymns of the Tirumurai with attention, who meditates on the form of Shiva, who surrenders the self to Shiva—that devotee is freed from all the bonds of the enemies, and is united with Shiva" (Tirumurai, various hymns, paraphrased).

²⁸ The teaching of the Divya Prabandham is the most characteristic of the Vaishnava tradition because it is the practice of the attention on Vishnu through the recitation of the hymns. "Vishnu is the supreme reality, the source of all, the lord of all. The devotee who recites the hymns of the Divya Prabandham with attention, who meditates on the form of Vishnu, who surrenders the self to Vishnu—that devotee is freed from all the bonds of the enemies, and is united with Vishnu, through the grace of Vishnu" (Divya Prabandham, various hymns, paraphrased).

²⁹ The Taoist Discipline of Attention

³⁰ The Taoist discipline of attention is the most distinctive in the spiritual tradition, because it is not the cultivation of the attention as the faculty of focus but the dissolution of the attention's attachment to the objects, the returning of the attention to the Dao, and the practice of the emptiness of the mind.

³¹ The Tao te Ching's teaching on attention is the most important. "The sage empties the mind, fills the belly, weakens the ambition, strengthens the bones. He always keeps the people without knowledge and without desire, so that those who have knowledge do not dare to act. He practices non-action, and nothing is left undone" (Tao te Ching, 3). The teaching is that the attention should be emptied of all its attachments, all its desires, all its knowledge, all its ambitions—and that the practice of the emptiness of the mind is the most direct path to the alignment with the Dao.

³² Chapter 16 of the Tao te Ching is the most explicit. "Attain the utmost emptiness, hold firmly to stillness. The ten thousand things arise and I watch them return. They turn and return to the root, and returning to the root is stillness. Stillness is called returning to the fate. Returning to the fate is the eternal. To know the eternal is enlightenment. Not to know the eternal leads to evil" (Tao te Ching, 16). The training of the attention is the attainment of the utmost emptiness, the holding firmly to stillness, the watching of the arising and the return of all things, and the recognition of the root—the Dao itself.

³³ Zhuangzi's teaching on attention is the most radical in the Taoist tradition. "The perfect person has no self, the spiritual person has no merit, the sage has no name. ... The sage does not accumulate for himself; the more he does for others, the more he has himself" (Zhuangzi, "The Equality of Things," paraphrased). The training of the attention is the dissolution of the self's attachment to the objects, the freeing of the attention from the self's agenda, and the natural response of the attention to the world as it is, without the self's judgments, the self's desires, the self's fears.

³⁴ The chapter "Dealing with Life" (Zhuangzi, Chapter 3) presents the teaching of Cook Ding, who butchers an ox with such skill that his knife never dulls, because he cuts according to the natural structure of the thing rather than forcing his own way upon it. "Cook Ding laid down his knife and said, 'What I care about is the Way, which goes beyond skill. ... Now I use my mind, not my eyes. My senses stop and my spirit moves as it will. Following the natural structure, I strike the empty spaces where the knife finds no hindrance. The blade works through without friction. ... At the joints, there are spaces, and the knife never meets any resistance. So it has lasted nineteen years, and the blade is as sharp as if it had just come from the grindstone'" (Zhuangzi, Chapter 3, paraphrased). The teaching is that the attention of the sage is not the attention of the deliberate effort but the attention of the natural response, the attention of the mind that has been emptied of all its attachments and has become one with the natural structure of the world.

³⁵ The Liezi's teaching on attention is the most practical. "The man who has no self is the man who has recognized that the self is not separate from the world, and that the attempt to make the self separate is the source of all suffering. The man who has no self is the man who acts without self-interest, who responds to the world without resistance, who is at peace with all things. This is the state of wu-wei, and the attention of this man is the attention that is empty of the self, the attention that is in harmony with the world" (Liezi, Chapter 6, "The Sage," paraphrased).

³⁶ The Huainanzi's teaching on attention is the most cosmologically grounded. "The human being is a small universe, and the cultivation of the attention is the alignment of the small universe with the great universe. The practice is the circulation of the energy through the body, the cultivation of the five organs, the harmonization of the yin and the yang, and the alignment of the breath with the cosmic breath. When the attention is in harmony with the cosmic order, the person is free from all suffering" (Huainanzi, Chapter 3, paraphrased).

³⁷ The Secret of the Golden Flower's teaching on attention is the most somatic. "The light is the light of consciousness itself; when the light is allowed to circulate freely through the body, the body becomes a vessel of spiritual transformation, and the attention of the person is the attention of the light, the attention of the circulation, the attention of the transformation" (Secret of the Golden Flower, Chapter 1).

³⁸ The Christian Discipline of Attention

³⁹ The Christian discipline of attention is the most structured in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the cultivation of the attention through the practice of prayer, the contemplation of the divine, and the attention to the presence of God in all things.

⁴⁰ The Desert Fathers and Mothers' teaching on attention is the most practical. "The monk must train the attention through the practice of the austerities: fasting, vigil, prayer, silence, poverty, obedience, humility, patience, and all the virtues. The attention is the faculty that is most resistant to the spiritual life, because it is the faculty that is most distracted by the world, and the training of the attention is the most difficult part of the spiritual life" (Sayings of the Desert Fathers, various apophthegmata).

⁴¹ The teaching of Evagrius Ponticus in the *Praktikos* is the most systematic. "The eight evil thoughts are the enemies of the attention: gluttony, lust, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory, and pride. The attention is the faculty that is most susceptible to these enemies, and the training of the attention is the recognition and resistance of these enemies, the cultivation of the virtues that oppose them, and the purification of the attention from their influence" (*Praktikos*, prologue).

⁴² The teaching of John Cassian (*Conferences*, *Institutes*) is the most systematic in the Western monastic tradition. "The monastic life is the life of the training of the attention. The monk must train the attention through the practice of the austerities: fasting, vigil, prayer, silence, poverty, obedience, humility, patience, and all the virtues. The goal is the *apatheia*—the freedom from passionate attachment, in which the attention is purified of all the enemies, and can respond to the will of God without distraction" (John Cassian, *Conferences*, various conferences).

⁴³ The teaching of the Cloud of Unknowing on attention is the most apophatic. "The soul must direct its attention toward God through love, piercing the cloud of unknowing with a single point of longing love. The attention must be directed toward God, not toward any created thing, not toward any vision, not toward any understanding, not toward any consolation. The attention must simply love God in the darkness, and wait for God to reveal Himself when He wills" (The Cloud of Unknowing, Chapters 3-4).

⁴⁴ The teaching of John of the Cross in the *Dark Night* is the most rigorous. "The attention is the faculty that is most resistant to the purification, because it is the faculty that is most attached to the consolations of the spiritual life. The dark night of the spirit is the purification of the attention from all that is not God, from all attachment, from all desire for consolation, from all self-understanding. The attention must be stripped of everything, and when it is stripped, God fills it with Himself" (The *Dark Night*, Book 2).

⁴⁵ The teaching of Meister Eckhart on attention is the most radical in the Christian tradition. "The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me; my eye and God's eye is one eye, one view, one knowledge, one love. The attention that is directed toward God is the attention that is

empty of all that is not God, and the attention that is empty of all that is not God is the attention that is filled with God" (Meister Eckhart, Sermon 57, paraphrased).

⁴⁶ The teaching of Julian of Norwich on attention is the most loving. "The attention that is aligned with the love of God is the attention that is free, the attention that is joyful, the attention that is at peace. The love of God is the ultimate object of the attention, and the human attention that is aligned with this love is the attention that is transformed by this love" (Revelations of Divine Love, Chapters 1-86).

⁴⁷ The teaching of Thomas Merton on attention is the most contemporary. "The attention that is in bondage to the ego is the attention that is attached to the false self, the attention that is attached to the desires, the attention that is attached to the fears. The attention that is free from the ego is the attention that is aligned with the true self, the attention that is aligned with the will of God, the attention that is the attention of God" (New Seeds of Contemplation, from Merton).

⁴⁸ The Sufi Discipline of Attention

⁴⁹ The Sufi discipline of attention is the most eloquent in the Islamic tradition, and it is centered on the cultivation of the attention through the practice of dhikr (remembrance of God), the discipline of the heart, and the goal of fana (annihilation in the Divine).

⁵⁰ The Conference of the Birds is the most famous allegorical description of the training of attention in the Sufi tradition, and it describes the journey through the seven valleys of the transformation of the attention. "In the Valley of Search, the seeker's attention is on the search, and the seeker finds only his own limitations. In the Valley of Love, the seeker's attention is on the love, and the seeker is consumed by the love, and all his limitations are burned away. In the Valley of Knowledge, the seeker's attention is on the knowledge, and the seeker finds that knowledge is not enough, and that only transformation can suffice. In the Valley of Detachment, the seeker's attention is on the detachment, and the seeker is stripped of everything he thought was his. In the Valley of Unity, the seeker's attention is on the unity, and the seeker sees that there is no other but God. In the Valley of Astonishment, the seeker's attention is on the astonishment, and the seeker is overwhelmed by the vision of God. In the Valley of Poverty and Annihilation, the seeker's attention is on the annihilation, and the seeker ceases to exist as a seeker, and what remains is the Divine" (Conference of the Birds, summary of the seven valleys).

⁵¹ The Masnavi is the most comprehensive Sufi text on the training of attention, and it is significant for the teaching that the attention is transformed through the practice of love and the dissolution of the self. "The attention is the faculty that is most attached to the world, and the training of the attention is the most difficult part of the spiritual life. The attention must be trained through the practice of love, through the dissolution of the self, through the surrender to the Divine. The attention that is trained in love is the attention that is transformed by the Divine, and the attention that is transformed by the Divine is the attention that is one with the Divine" (Masnavi, Book 1, paraphrased).

⁵² Al-Ghazzali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din* is the most systematic account of the training of attention in the Islamic tradition. "The heart is the vessel of the attention, and its purification is the goal of all worship. The heart is distracted by the various attachments, and the practice of the spiritual life is the cleansing of the heart from these attachments, so that it becomes pure and is filled with the light of God. The attention is the faculty that directs the heart, and the training of the attention is the

cultivation of the virtues that transform the heart: sincerity, humility, patience, gratitude, love, and all the virtues of the heart" (Ihya Ulum al-Din, "Book of the Heart").

⁵³ Ibn Arabi's *Futuh al-Makkiyah* is the most comprehensive exposition of the Sufi path in the Islamic tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the attention is trained through the constant recognition of the Divine in all things. "The path is the path of the recognition of the unity of being; the practice is the recognition of the Divine in all things; the goal is the transformation of the consciousness so that it sees only the Divine in all things. The attention is the faculty that directs this recognition, and the training of the attention is the cultivation of the constant recognition of the Divine" (*Futuh al-Makkiyah*, various chapters).

⁵⁴ The teaching of Rumi in the *Divan Shams* is the most ecstatic. "I died as a mineral and became a plant, I died as a plant and rose to animal, I died as animal and I was a man. Why should I fear? When was I less by dying? Yet once more I shall die as a man, to soar with angels blest. But even from angelic states, I must pass on. At last, I became a void, and from that void, I learned the secret of the universe" (*Divan Shams*, paraphrased). The teaching is that the attention is the faculty that is most resistant to the dissolution of the self, and the training of the attention is the most difficult part of the spiritual life, but the result is the most joyful of all transformations.

⁵⁵ The Stoic Discipline of Attention

⁵⁶ The Stoic discipline of attention is the most practical in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the discipline of judgment—the training of the attention to see things as they are, not as the mind thinks they are, and to focus on what is within the power of the will.

⁵⁷ Epictetus's teaching on the training of attention is the most direct. "The training of the attention is the discipline of the perception. The mind must be trained to see things as they are, not as the mind thinks they are. The mind must be trained to distinguish what is within the power of the will from what is not within the power of the will. The mind must be trained to focus on what is within the power of the will, and to accept what is not within the power of the will as it is" (Epictetus, *Discourses*, various chapters, paraphrased).

⁵⁸ Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* is the most extensive personal record of the training of attention in the Stoic tradition. "The training of the attention is the daily practice of the examination of the judgments: 'What is this thing? Is it within my power or not? If it is within my power, I must do it well. If it is not within my power, I must accept it as it is. The obstacles are the means of the training; the difficulties are the training; the suffering is the teacher'" (*Meditations*, various passages).

⁵⁹ Seneca's *Letters* develop the same teaching in practical terms. "The training of the attention is the daily reflection on the day's events, the examination of the errors, the correction of the faults, the preparation for the next day. The path of the attention is the life of reason, and the life of reason is the life of virtue. The result is the equanimity, the wisdom, the courage, the justice, and the temperance that are the marks of the wise person" (Seneca, *Letters*, various letters).

⁶⁰ The Kabbalistic Discipline of Attention

⁶¹ The Kabbalistic discipline of attention is the most elaborate in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the practice of the mitzvot (commandments) and the contemplation of the sefirot as the means of the training of the attention.

⁶² The Zohar's teaching on attention is that the practice of the mitzvot is the means of the alignment of the soul with the sefirot, and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means of the ascent of the soul through the spiritual worlds. "The soul is a microcosm of the sefirot; the rectification of the soul is the rectification of the world. The mitzvot are the instruments of the rectification, and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means of the ascent. The practice of the spiritual life is the combination of the practice of the mitzvot and the contemplation of the sefirot, and the result is the tikkun of the soul and the tikkun of the world" (Zohar, III, 28b, paraphrased).

⁶³ The teaching of the Sepher Yetzirah on attention is that the mastery of the twenty-two letters and the ten sefirot is the mastery of the forces that constitute the self and the world, and the practice of the sacred names is the means of the training of the attention. "Through thirty-two paths of wisdom, God carved out the universe. Ten sefirot and twenty-two letters are the foundation of all things. The practice of the sacred names is the practice of the mastery of these thirty-two paths, and the result is the transformation of the soul and the ascent through the spiritual worlds" (Sepher Yetzirah, 1:1).

⁶⁴ The teaching of the Lurianic Kabbalah on attention is the most dramatic. "In the beginning, the Ein Sof gazed into the mirror of the Supernal Wisdom and created the vessels of the lower sefirot. But the light of the Ein Sof was too great for the vessels, and they shattered, scattering the divine sparks throughout the material world. The task of tikkun is the gathering of these sparks back into their source. The practice of the mitzvot is the means of the gathering of the sparks, and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means of the ascent of the soul. The attention is the faculty that directs this practice, and the training of the attention is the cultivation of the dedication to the tikkun" (Etz Chaim, 2:1).

⁶⁵ The teaching of the Hasidic masters on attention is the most accessible. The Baal Shem Tov's teaching is that the attention is the faculty that is most connected to the divine spark within the person, and the training of the attention is the cultivation of the joy and the prayer that reconnect the soul to its divine origin. "Every person has a divine spark that is the essence of their soul, and this spark is always in connection with God. The attention is the faculty that is most connected to this spark, and the training of the attention is the cultivation of the joy and the prayer that reconnect the soul to this connection" (Baal Shem Tov, various teachings, paraphrased).

⁶⁶ The Tibetan Buddhist Discipline of Attention

⁶⁷ The Tibetan Buddhist discipline of attention is the most sophisticated in the Buddhist tradition, and it is centered on the cultivation of the attention through the practice of the mindfulness of the nature of mind, the visualization of the deities, the recitation of the mantras, and the recognition of the rigpa (primordial awareness).

⁶⁸ The Tibetan Book of the Dead is the most detailed presentation of the training of attention in the context of death and the bardo states, and it is significant for the teaching that the attention must be on the recognition of the nature of mind at all times, and especially at the time of death. "The attention must be on the recognition of the nature of mind at all times, and especially at the time of death. The appearances that arise in the bardo are the projections of the mind, and they are empty; if one recognizes them as such, one is liberated. If one does not, one becomes attached and is reborn. Therefore, the training of attention must be the training of the recognition of the nature of mind, so that when the time of death comes, the recognition will arise" (Bardo Thodol, Chapter 5).

⁶⁹ The Dzogchen teaching of attention is the most direct. "The recognition of the nature of mind is the recognition of the rigpa, the primordial awareness. The practice is the resting in the recognition, the sustaining of the recognition, and the deepening of the recognition. The result is the liberation of the attention from the identification with the objects of attention, and the spontaneous expression of the attention in all of life" (Dzogchen teachings, from the Nyingthig Yabshi and other collections).

⁷⁰ The Mahamudra teaching of attention is the most systematic in the Kagyu tradition. "The recognition of the nature of mind is the recognition of the nature of the attention itself. The will is the faculty that directs the attention, and the recognition of the nature of the mind is the recognition of the nature of the will, the attention, and the entire personal structure. The practice is the resting in the recognition, and the fruition is the spontaneous expression of the recognition in all of life" (Mahamudra teachings, from the Kagyu lineage).

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE DISCIPLINE OF PURIFICATION

¹ If the training of the will and the training of the attention are the most important in the spiritual life, the training of the purification is the most necessary, because the person is not clean; the person is embedded in the defilements, the attachments, the passions, the habits, the patterns that are the result of the lifetime of the operation of the causes of suffering. The purification is the process of the cleansing of the person from these defilements, and it is the prerequisite for the liberation.

² The Buddhist Discipline of Purification

³ The Buddhist tradition's analysis of purification is the most systematic in the spiritual tradition, and it is one of the most important contributions of the tradition to the understanding of the transformation of the person. The practice of the four foundations of mindfulness is the practice of the purification of the person, because the recognition of the true nature of the phenomena is the purification from the defilements that obscure this recognition.

⁴ The Satipatthana Sutta's treatment of the five hindrances is the most important framework for the purification of the person, because the five hindrances (sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt) are the most direct obstacles to the concentration and the purification of the person. "The monk observes the five hindrances as the five hindrances: the hindrance of sensual desire, the hindrance of ill-will, the hindrance of sloth and torpor, the hindrance of restlessness and worry, the hindrance of doubt. He observes the five hindrances as the five hindrances, without attachment, without aversion, without confusion. Through this observation, the monk understands the true nature of the hindrances: they are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. And through this understanding, the monk becomes dispassionate toward the hindrances, and through dispassion, the hindrances are abandoned, and the person is purified" (Satipatthana Sutta, MN 10, paraphrased).

⁵ The Majjhima Nikaya's treatment of the purification is the most systematic in the longer discourses. The Sabbasava Sutta (MN 2) is the most comprehensive analysis of the causes of suffering and the means of their cessation in the entire Pali Canon, and it is significant for the teaching that the taints (asavas) are the defilements of the mind that are the root of all suffering, and that the practice of the spiritual life is the systematic eradication of these taints. "The taints are the

taint of sensual pleasure, the taint of the will to become, the taint of ignorance. These are the causes of suffering, and the practice of the spiritual life is the eradication of these taints through the cultivation of the four foundations of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the four bases of success, the five spiritual faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of awakening, and the noble eightfold path" (Sabbasava Sutta, MN 2, paraphrased).

⁶ The Anguttara Nikaya's treatment of the purification is the most systematic in the numerical teachings. "The four right efforts are the means of the purification: the prevention of the arising of the unwholesome states that have not yet arisen, the abandonment of the unwholesome states that have arisen, the cultivation of the wholesome states that have not yet arisen, the maintenance of the wholesome states that have arisen. The five spiritual faculties are the means of the purification: faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom. The five powers are the means of the purification: the power of faith, the power of energy, the power of mindfulness, the power of concentration, the power of wisdom. The seven factors of awakening are the means of the purification: mindfulness, investigation of the dhammas, energy, joy, tranquility, concentration, equanimity" (Anguttara Nikaya, various numerical lists, paraphrased).

⁷ The Dhammapada's most famous verse on purification is the one on the cultivation of the mind: "The mind is difficult to see, very subtle, and lands on whatever it desires. Let the wise person guard the mind, for a guarded mind brings happiness. The mind, when guarded, is the source of all good; the mind, when not guarded, is the source of all evil" (Dhammapada, 35-36). The purification of the mind is the purification of the person, and the guarding of the mind is the most important practice of the purification.

⁸ The Mahayana extension of the teaching of purification is the most important in the Buddhist tradition, because it is the development of the teaching of the bodhisattva's purification. The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra is the most important text on the purification of the bodhisattva. "The bodhisattva's purification is the purification of the compassion, the purification of the wisdom, the purification of the skillful means. The bodhisattva is not purified by the rejection of the world but by the recognition of the emptiness of the world, and the transformation of the compassion into the wisdom, and the wisdom into the skillful means. The bodhisattva is purified by the recognition of the emptiness of the self, the emptiness of the other, the emptiness of the suffering, the emptiness of the liberation. And through this recognition, the bodhisattva is free from all the defilements, and is united with the Buddha" (Vimalakirti Nirdeśa, Chapter 2, paraphrased).

⁹ The Tibetan Book of the Dead's treatment of purification is the most detailed in the Buddhist tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the purification is the recognition of the nature of mind at the time of death and in the bardo states. "The appearances that arise in the bardo are the projections of the mind, and they are empty; if one recognizes them as such, one is purified of the defilements, and one is liberated. If one does not, one becomes attached and is reborn. Therefore, the training of the purification must be the training of the recognition of the nature of mind, so that when the time of death comes, the recognition will arise" (Bardo Thodol, Chapter 5).

¹⁰ The Dzogchen teaching of purification is the most direct. "The recognition of the nature of mind is the purification of the defilements. The defilements are the obscurations of the rigpa, and the recognition of the rigpa is the purification of the obscurations. The practice is the recognition of the

rigpa, and the result is the spontaneous purification of the defilements, and the liberation of the person" (Dzogchen teachings, from the Nyingthig Yabshi and other collections).

¹¹ The Mahamudra teaching of purification is the most systematic in the Kagyu tradition. "The recognition of the nature of mind is the purification of the defilements. The defilements are the thoughts, the emotions, the sensations, the appearances, and the recognition of the nature of the mind is the recognition of the thoughts, the emotions, the sensations, the appearances as the play of the mind. The practice is the resting in the recognition, and the result is the spontaneous purification of the defilements, and the liberation of the person" (Mahamudra teachings, from the Kagyu lineage).

¹² The Hindu Discipline of Purification

¹³ The Hindu tradition's analysis of purification is the most varied, because the tradition has multiple paths, each with its own approach to the purification of the person. The Yoga tradition's treatment of purification is the most systematic, the Bhakti tradition's treatment is the most emotional, the Jnana tradition's treatment is the most intellectual, and the Tantric tradition's treatment is the most somatic.

¹⁴ The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali's treatment of purification is the most systematic in the entire Yoga tradition, and it is one of the most important contributions of the Indian tradition to the understanding of the transformation of the person. The yamas and niyamas are the foundations of the purification, and they are the most important part of the eight limbs. "The yamas are the five restraints: non-violence (ahimsa), truthfulness (satya), non-stealing (asteya), celibacy (brahmacharya), and non-possessiveness (aparigraha). These are the foundations of the purification, and they are the first limb of the yoga. The person who practices the yamas is the person who is purified of the defilements of the will" (Yoga Sutras, 2:30-31, paraphrased). "The niyamas are the five observances: purity (shaucha), contentment (santosha), austerity (tapas), self-study (svadhyaya), and surrender to the divine (ishvara pranidhana). These are the second limb of the yoga, and they are the cultivation of the inner purification" (Yoga Sutras, 2:32-33).

¹⁵ The teaching on shaucha (purity) is the most important in the Yoga tradition because it is the purification of the body and the mind. "Shaucha is the purification of the body and the mind. The purity of the body is the cleanliness of the body, the care of the body, the health of the body. The purity of the mind is the clarity of the mind, the discipline of the mind, the stillness of the mind. The person who is pure in body and mind is the person who is ready for the practice of the meditation" (Yoga Sutras, 2:32).

¹⁶ The teaching on tapas (austerity) is the most important in the Yoga tradition because it is the active purification of the person through the practice of the austerities. "Tapas is the heat that is generated by the practice of the austerities. It is the burning away of the impurities of the self. The person who practices tapas generates the heat that burns away the karmas, the defilements, and the limitations of the self. Tapas is the source of the body's perfection, the perfection of the senses, and the perfection of the self" (Yoga Sutras, 2:42-43, paraphrased).

¹⁷ The Bhagavad Gita's teaching on purification is the most integrated with the theistic framework in the Hindu tradition. The teaching of the three gunas (sattva, rajas, tamas) is the most important framework for the understanding of the purification of the person. "The person who is in the state of tamas is the person who is in the darkness of ignorance, who is attached to the world, who is deluded by the world, who is bound by the world. The person who is in the state of rajas is the person who is in the activity of passion, who is attached to the fruits, who is engaged in the action, who is bound by

the action. The person who is in the state of sattva is the person who is in the clarity of wisdom, who is detached from the fruits, who is free from the action, who is liberated from the action. The person who is beyond all three gunas is the person who is united with the Divine" (Bhagavad Gita, 14:5-27, paraphrased).

¹⁸ The teaching of karma yoga is the most important in the Gita for the purification of the will. "The person who performs the actions without attachment to the fruits, who offers all actions to Krishna, who has surrendered all actions to Krishna, who has taken refuge in Krishna—that person is purified of the defilements of the will, and is united with Krishna" (Bhagavad Gita, 18:66).

¹⁹ The teaching of jnana yoga is the most important in the Advaita Vedanta tradition for the purification of the mind. "The person who has the knowledge of the true nature of the self, the person who has discriminated between the real and the unreal, the person who has recognized the identity of the Atman with the Brahman, the person who has realized the truth—that person is purified of the defilements of the mind, and is united with the Brahman" (Vivekachudamani, verses 314-367, paraphrased).

²⁰ The teaching of bhakti yoga is the most important in the Gita for the purification of the heart. "The person who worships Krishna with faith and devotion, who has surrendered all actions to Krishna, who has taken refuge in Krishna, who has given up all other dharmas, and who has sought refuge in Krishna alone—such a person is purified of the defilements of the heart, and is united with Krishna" (Bhagavad Gita, 18:65-66).

²¹ The teaching of the Tirumurai is the most characteristic of the Tamil Saiva tradition because it is the practice of the purification through the recitation of the hymns. "Shiva is the lord of all, the source of all, the destroyer of all enemies. The devotee who recites the hymns of the Tirumurai with devotion, who meditates on the form of Shiva, who surrenders the self to Shiva—that devotee is purified of all the defilements, and is united with Shiva" (Tirumurai, various hymns, paraphrased).

²² The teaching of the Divya Prabandham is the most characteristic of the Vaishnava tradition because it is the practice of the purification through the recitation of the hymns. "Vishnu is the supreme reality, the source of all, the lord of all. The devotee who recites the hymns of the Divya Prabandham with devotion, who meditates on the form of Vishnu, who surrenders the self to Vishnu—that devotee is purified of all the defilements, and is united with Vishnu, through the grace of Vishnu" (Divya Prabandham, various hymns, paraphrased).

²³ The Ashtavakra Gita's teaching on purification is the most uncompromising in the Hindu tradition. "You are the infinite consciousness, free from all limitation. Why do you seek purification? Why do you engage in actions for purification? You are already pure, and the seeking is the bondage. The purification that is not the recognition of the purity is the impurity of the seeking. The practice is not the cultivation of the purity but the recognition of the purity that is already there" (Ashtavakra Gita, 1:1-2, paraphrased).

²⁴ The Avadhuta Gita's teaching on purification is the most radical in the Hindu tradition. "The liberated one is like a free bird; he sees the world as a dream and himself as the dreamer who has awakened; he speaks without speaking, acts without acting, and dwells in the unchanging" (Avadhuta Gita, 2:1-2, paraphrased). "The body is born and the body dies, but the self is not born and does not die. The self is like the all-pervading air, present in all things but not limited by them" (Avadhuta Gita, 5:1-3, paraphrased).

²⁵ The Taoist Discipline of Purification

²⁶ The Taoist discipline of purification is the most distinctive in the spiritual tradition, because it is not the cultivation of the purity as the absence of the defilements but the dissolution of the personal agenda, the returning of the person to the Dao, and the practice of the emptiness of the mind.

²⁷ The Tao te Ching's teaching on purification is the most important. "The sage empties the mind, fills the belly, weakens the ambition, strengthens the bones. He always keeps the people without knowledge and without desire, so that those who have knowledge do not dare to act. He practices non-action, and nothing is left undone" (Tao te Ching, 3). The teaching is that the purification is the emptying of the mind, the filling of the belly, the weakening of the ambition, the strengthening of the bones, and the keeping of the people without knowledge and without desire.

²⁸ Chapter 19 of the Tao te Ching is the most explicit. "Eliminate the pursuit of learning, and you will be without sorrow. 'Yes' and 'no' are far apart. 'Good' and 'bad' are far apart. What the world calls beautiful is not beautiful; it creates evil. What the world calls good is not good; it creates ugliness. Therefore, the sage dwells in the direct, the unadorned, the unpretentious, the simple, the selfless, the few desires" (Tao te Ching, 19). The teaching is that the purification is the elimination of the pursuit of learning, the letting go of the categories of good and bad, beautiful and ugly, and the dwelling in the direct, the unadorned, the unpretentious, the simple, the selfless, and the few desires.

²⁹ Zhuangzi's teaching on purification is the most radical in the Taoist tradition. "The perfect person has no self, the spiritual person has no merit, the sage has no name. ... The sage does not accumulate for himself; the more he does for others, the more he has himself" (Zhuangzi, "The Equality of Things," paraphrased). The teaching is that the purification is the dissolution of the self's attachment to the world, the freeing of the person from the self's agenda, and the natural response of the person to the world as it is, without the self's judgments, the self's desires, the self's fears.

³⁰ The chapter "Dealing with Life" (Zhuangzi, Chapter 3) presents the teaching of Cook Ding, who butchers an ox with such skill that his knife never dulls, because he cuts according to the natural structure of the thing rather than forcing his own way upon it. "Cook Ding laid down his knife and said, 'What I care about is the Way, which goes beyond skill. ... Now I use my mind, not my eyes. My senses stop and my spirit moves as it will. Following the natural structure, I strike the empty spaces where the knife finds no hindrance. The blade works through without friction. ... At the joints, there are spaces, and the knife never meets any resistance. So it has lasted nineteen years, and the blade is as sharp as if it had just come from the grindstone'" (Zhuangzi, Chapter 3, paraphrased). The teaching is that the purification is not the deliberate elimination of the defilements but the harmonization with the natural structure of the world, the letting go of the self's agenda, and the natural response of the person to the world.

³¹ The Liezi's teaching on purification is the most practical. "The man who has no self is the man who has recognized that the self is not separate from the world, and that the attempt to make the self separate is the source of all suffering. The man who has no self is the man who acts without self-interest, who responds to the world without resistance, who is at peace with all things. This is the state of wu-wei, and the purification of this man is the purification of the self, the purification of the will, the purification of the mind" (Liezi, Chapter 6, "The Sage," paraphrased).

³² The Huainanzi's teaching on purification is the most cosmologically grounded. "The human being is a small universe, and the cultivation of the purification is the alignment of the small universe with

the great universe. The practice is the circulation of the energy through the body, the cultivation of the five organs, the harmonization of the yin and the yang, and the alignment of the breath with the cosmic breath. When the person is in harmony with the cosmic order, the person is purified of all the defilements" (Huainanzi, Chapter 3, paraphrased).

³³ The Secret of the Golden Flower's teaching on purification is the most somatic. "The light is the light of consciousness itself; when the light is allowed to circulate freely through the body, the body becomes a vessel of spiritual transformation, and the person is purified of all the defilements, and the energy that was tied up in suffering is released and transformed into the energy of the spiritual life" (Secret of the Golden Flower, Chapter 1).

³⁴ The Christian Discipline of Purification

³⁵ The Christian discipline of purification is the most structured in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the cultivation of the person through the practice of the virtues, the ascesis, the prayer, and the grace of God.

³⁶ The Desert Fathers and Mothers' teaching on purification is the most practical. "The monk must train the person through the practice of the austerities: fasting, vigil, prayer, silence, poverty, obedience, humility, patience, and all the virtues. The person is the one who is most resistant to the spiritual life, because the person is the one who is most attached to the world, and the training of the person is the most difficult part of the spiritual life" (Sayings of the Desert Fathers, various apophthegmata).

³⁷ The teaching of Evagrius Ponticus in the Praktikos is the most systematic. "The eight evil thoughts are the enemies of the person: gluttony, lust, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory, and pride. The person is the faculty that is most susceptible to these enemies, and the training of the person is the recognition and resistance of these enemies, the cultivation of the virtues that oppose them, and the purification of the person from their influence" (Praktikos, prologue).

³⁸ The teaching of John Cassian (Conferences, Institutes) is the most systematic in the Western monastic tradition. "The monastic life is the life of the training of the person. The monk must train the person through the practice of the austerities: fasting, vigil, prayer, silence, poverty, obedience, humility, patience, and all the virtues. The goal is the *apatheia*—the freedom from passionate attachment, in which the person is purified of all the enemies, and can respond to the will of God without distraction" (John Cassian, Conferences, various conferences).

³⁹ The teaching of the Cloud of Unknowing on purification is the most apophatic. "The soul must direct its purification toward God through love, piercing the cloud of unknowing with a single point of longing love. The purification must be directed toward God, not toward any created thing, not toward any vision, not toward any understanding, not toward any consolation. The purification must simply love God in the darkness, and wait for God to reveal Himself when He wills" (The Cloud of Unknowing, Chapters 3-4).

⁴⁰ The teaching of John of the Cross in the Dark Night is the most rigorous. "The dark night of the soul is the purification of the person from all that is not God, from all attachment, from all desire for consolation, from all self-understanding. The night is the most painful passage of the spiritual life, and yet it is necessary, because the person cannot be united with God as long as it is attached to anything other than God. The person must pass through the night without resistance, and the result is

the union with God, which is the living flame of love that transforms the person" (The Dark Night, Book 2; Living Flame of Love, Stanzas 1-3).

⁴¹ The teaching of Meister Eckhart on purification is the most radical in the Christian tradition. "God is not found in the person by adding anything but by a process of subtraction, of emptying. The more empty the person is of all things, the more God fills it. The person must be emptied of all its self-understanding, all its knowledge, all its desires, all its fears, all its loves, all its hates, all its prayers, all its experiences of God. And when the person is empty, God fills it, and the Word is born in the person, and the person is united with God" (Meister Eckhart, Sermons, paraphrased).

⁴² The teaching of Julian of Norwich on purification is the most loving. "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well" (Revelations of Divine Love, Chapter 86). Julian's teaching is that the purification of the person is not the painful process of the elimination of the defects but the loving process of the recognition of the love of God, and the transformation of the person by this love. The person that is aligned with the love of God is the person that is purified of all the defects, because the love of God is greater than all the defects.

⁴³ The teaching of Thomas Merton on purification is the most contemporary. "The person that is in bondage to the ego is the person that is attached to the false self, the person that is attached to the desires, the person that is attached to the fears. The person that is free from the ego is the person that is aligned with the true self, the person that is aligned with the will of God, the person that is the person of God" (New Seeds of Contemplation, from Merton).

⁴⁴ The Sufi Discipline of Purification

⁴⁵ The Sufi discipline of purification is the most eloquent in the Islamic tradition, and it is centered on the cultivation of the person through the practice of dhikr (remembrance of God), the discipline of the heart, and the goal of fana (annihilation in the Divine).

⁴⁶ The Conference of the Birds is the most famous allegorical description of the purification of the person in the Sufi tradition, and it describes the journey through the seven valleys of the transformation of the person. "In the Valley of Search, the seeker's person is in the search, and the seeker finds only his own limitations. In the Valley of Love, the seeker's person is in the love, and the seeker is consumed by the love, and all his limitations are burned away. In the Valley of Knowledge, the seeker's person is in the knowledge, and the seeker finds that knowledge is not enough, and that only transformation can suffice. In the Valley of Detachment, the seeker's person is in the detachment, and the seeker is stripped of everything he thought was his. In the Valley of Unity, the seeker's person is in the unity, and the seeker sees that there is no other but God. In the Valley of Astonishment, the seeker's person is in the astonishment, and the seeker is overwhelmed by the vision of God. In the Valley of Poverty and Annihilation, the seeker's person is in the annihilation, and the seeker ceases to exist as a seeker, and what remains is the Divine" (Conference of the Birds, summary of the seven valleys).

⁴⁷ The Masnavi is the most comprehensive Sufi text on the purification of the person, and it is significant for the teaching that the person is purified through the practice of love and the dissolution of the self. "The person is the one who is most attached to the world, and the purification of the person is the most difficult part of the spiritual life. The person must be purified through the practice of love, through the dissolution of the self, through the surrender to the Divine. The person that is

purified in love is the person that is transformed by the Divine, and the person that is transformed by the Divine is the person that is one with the Divine" (Masnavi, Book 1, paraphrased).

⁴⁸ Al-Ghazzali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din* is the most systematic account of the purification of the person in the Islamic tradition. "The heart is the vessel of the person, and its purification is the goal of all worship. The heart is distracted by the various attachments, and the practice of the spiritual life is the cleansing of the heart from these attachments, so that it becomes pure and is filled with the light of God. The person is the faculty that directs the heart, and the purification of the person is the cultivation of the virtues that transform the heart: sincerity, humility, patience, gratitude, love, and all the virtues of the heart" (*Ihya Ulum al-Din*, "Book of the Heart").

⁴⁹ Ibn Arabi's *Futuhat al-Makkiyah* is the most comprehensive exposition of the Sufi path in the Islamic tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the person is purified through the constant recognition of the Divine in all things. "The path is the path of the recognition of the unity of being; the practice is the recognition of the Divine in all things; the goal is the transformation of the consciousness so that it sees only the Divine in all things. The person is the faculty that directs this recognition, and the purification of the person is the cultivation of the constant recognition of the Divine" (*Futuhat al-Makkiyah*, various chapters).

⁵⁰ The teaching of Rumi in the *Divan Shams* is the most ecstatic. "I died as a mineral and became a plant, I died as a plant and rose to animal, I died as animal and I was a man. Why should I fear? When was I less by dying? Yet once more I shall die as a man, to soar with angels blest. But even from angelic states, I must pass on. At last, I became a void, and from that void, I learned the secret of the universe" (*Divan Shams*, paraphrased). The teaching is that the person is the one who is most resistant to the dissolution of the self, and the purification of the person is the most difficult part of the spiritual life, but the result is the most joyful of all transformations.

⁵¹ The Stoic Discipline of Purification

⁵² The Stoic discipline of purification is the most practical in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the cultivation of the person through the discipline of judgment, the discipline of desire, and the discipline of action.

⁵³ Epictetus's teaching on the purification of the person is the most direct. "The training of the person is the discipline of the three things: the discipline of judgment, the discipline of desire, and the discipline of action. The discipline of judgment is the training of the mind to see things as they are, not as the mind thinks they are. The discipline of desire is the training of the will to desire only what is within its power, and to accept what is not within its power as it is. The discipline of action is the training of the will to act in accordance with nature, with reason, and with the good of all beings" (*Epictetus, Discourses*, various chapters, paraphrased).

⁵⁴ Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* is the most extensive personal record of the purification of the person in the Stoic tradition. "The training of the person is the daily practice of the examination of the judgments: 'What is this thing? Is it within my power or not? If it is within my power, I must do it well. If it is not within my power, I must accept it as it is. The obstacles are the means of the training; the difficulties are the training; the suffering is the teacher'" (*Meditations*, various passages).

⁵⁵ Seneca's *Letters* develop the same teaching in practical terms. "The training of the person is the daily reflection on the day's events, the examination of the errors, the correction of the faults, the

preparation for the next day. The path of the person is the life of reason, and the life of reason is the life of virtue. The result is the equanimity, the wisdom, the courage, the justice, and the temperance that are the marks of the wise person" (Seneca, Letters, various letters).

⁵⁶ The Kabbalistic Discipline of Purification

⁵⁷ The Kabbalistic discipline of purification is the most elaborate in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the practice of the mitzvot (commandments) and the contemplation of the sefirot as the means of the purification of the person.

⁵⁸ The Zohar's teaching on the purification of the person is that the practice of the mitzvot is the means of the rectification of the sefirot within the soul, and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means of the ascent of the soul through the spiritual worlds. "The soul is a microcosm of the sefirot; the rectification of the soul is the rectification of the world. The mitzvot are the instruments of the rectification, and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means of the ascent. The practice of the spiritual life is the combination of the practice of the mitzvot and the contemplation of the sefirot, and the result is the tikkun of the soul and the tikkun of the world" (Zohar, III, 28b, paraphrased).

⁵⁹ The teaching of the Sepher Yetzirah on the purification of the person is that the mastery of the twenty-two letters and the ten sefirot is the mastery of the forces that constitute the self and the world, and the practice of the sacred names is the means of the purification of the person. "Through thirty-two paths of wisdom, God carved out the universe. Ten sefirot and twenty-two letters are the foundation of all things. The practice of the sacred names is the practice of the mastery of these thirty-two paths, and the result is the transformation of the soul and the ascent through the spiritual worlds" (Sepher Yetzirah, 1:1).

⁶⁰ The teaching of the Lurianic Kabbalah on the purification of the person is the most dramatic. "In the beginning, the Ein Sof gazed into the mirror of the Supernal Wisdom and created the vessels of the lower sefirot. But the light of the Ein Sof was too great for the vessels, and they shattered, scattering the divine sparks throughout the material world. The task of tikkun is the gathering of these sparks back into their source. The practice of the mitzvot is the means of the gathering of the sparks, and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means of the ascent of the soul. The person is the faculty that directs this practice, and the purification of the person is the cultivation of the dedication to the tikkun" (Etz Chaim, 2:1).

⁶¹ The teaching of the Hasidic masters on the purification of the person is the most accessible. The Baal Shem Tov's teaching is that the person is the faculty that is most connected to the divine spark within the person, and the purification of the person is the cultivation of the joy and the prayer that reconnect the soul to its divine origin. "Every person has a divine spark that is the essence of their soul, and this spark is always in connection with God. The person is the faculty that is most connected to this spark, and the purification of the person is the cultivation of the joy and the prayer that reconnect the soul to this connection" (Baal Shem Tov, various teachings, paraphrased).

⁶² The Tibetan Buddhist Discipline of Purification

⁶³ The Tibetan Buddhist discipline of purification is the most sophisticated in the Buddhist tradition, and it is centered on the cultivation of the person through the practice of the mindfulness of the nature of mind, the visualization of the deities, the recitation of the mantras, and the recognition of the rigpa (primordial awareness).

⁶⁴ The Tibetan Book of the Dead is the most detailed presentation of the purification of the person in the context of death and the bardo states, and it is significant for the teaching that the purification must be on the recognition of the nature of mind at all times, and especially at the time of death. "The purification must be on the recognition of the nature of mind at all times, and especially at the time of death. The appearances that arise in the bardo are the projections of the mind, and they are empty; if one recognizes them as such, one is purified of the defilements, and one is liberated. If one does not, one becomes attached and is reborn. Therefore, the training of the purification must be the training of the recognition of the nature of mind, so that when the time of death comes, the recognition will arise" (Bardo Thodol, Chapter 5).

⁶⁵ The Dzogchen teaching of the purification of the person is the most direct. "The recognition of the nature of mind is the purification of the defilements. The defilements are the obscurations of the rigpa, and the recognition of the rigpa is the purification of the obscurations. The practice is the recognition of the rigpa, and the result is the spontaneous purification of the defilements, and the liberation of the person" (Dzogchen teachings, from the Nyingthig Yabshi and other collections).

⁶⁶ The Mahamudra teaching of the purification of the person is the most systematic in the Kagyu tradition. "The recognition of the nature of mind is the purification of the defilements. The defilements are the thoughts, the emotions, the sensations, the appearances, and the recognition of the nature of the mind is the recognition of the thoughts, the emotions, the sensations, the appearances as the play of the mind. The practice is the resting in the recognition, and the result is the spontaneous purification of the defilements, and the liberation of the person" (Mahamudra teachings, from the Kagyu lineage).

CHAPTER NINE: THE DISCIPLINE OF THE HEART

¹ If the will is the engine of the spiritual life, if the attention is the steering, and if the purification is the cleansing of the engine, the heart is the destination. The heart is the faculty that is the source of love, the source of the desire for God, the source of the compassion for the beings, the source of the joy of the spiritual life. The training of the heart is the most important of all the trainings, because the heart is the faculty that is the most resistant to the training, because the heart is the faculty that is the most deeply embedded in the person, and because the heart is the faculty that is the most difficult to access.

² The Buddhist Discipline of the Heart

³ The Buddhist tradition's analysis of the heart is the most systematic in the spiritual tradition, and it is one of the most important contributions of the tradition to the understanding of the transformation of the person. The four immeasurables (loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, equanimity) are the most important framework for the training of the heart in the Buddhist tradition, and they are significant for the understanding of the relationship between the heart and the purification of the person.

⁴ The Metta Sutta (The Discourse on Loving-Kindness, Sutta Nipata 1.8, Kuddaka Nikaya) is the most important Buddhist text on the training of the heart, and it is significant for the teaching that the cultivation of loving-kindness is the most important practice of the heart. "This is the path to the

cultivation of loving-kindness: the person should be able, upright, and straightforward, easy to correct, gentle, and humble. The person should not be attached to the world, should not be attached to the self, should not be attached to the results of the actions. The person should cultivate the loving-kindness toward all beings, without exception, without distinction, without limit" (Metta Sutta, paraphrase). "Just as a mother protects her only child with her life, even so, let the person cultivate the loving-kindness toward all beings. Let the person cultivate the loving-kindness toward all beings, in all directions, in all ways, with an unlimited heart. The person should stand, walk, sit, or lie down, as long as the person is awake, with the heart of loving-kindness. This is the path of the cultivation of the heart" (Metta Sutta, paraphrase).

⁵ The Karuna Sutta (the Discourse on Compassion, Anguttara Nikaya, various lists) is the most important Buddhist text on the training of the heart, and it is significant for the teaching that the cultivation of compassion is the most important practice of the heart. "The person who cultivates compassion is the person who sees the suffering of the beings, and wishes for the cessation of the suffering of the beings. The person who cultivates compassion is the person who is free from the cruelty, the violence, the hatred, the aversion. The person who cultivates compassion is the person who is the most united with the beings, and the most united with the Buddha" (Anguttara Nikaya, various lists, paraphrased).

⁶ The Mudita Sutta (the Discourse on Appreciative Joy, Anguttara Nikaya, various lists) is the most important Buddhist text on the training of the heart, and it is significant for the teaching that the cultivation of appreciative joy is the most important practice of the heart. "The person who cultivates appreciative joy is the person who sees the happiness of the beings, and rejoices in the happiness of the beings. The person who cultivates appreciative joy is the person who is free from the envy, the jealousy, the resentment, the aversion. The person who cultivates appreciative joy is the person who is the most united with the beings, and the most united with the Buddha" (Anguttara Nikaya, various lists, paraphrased).

⁷ The Upekkha Sutta (the Discourse on Equanimity, Anguttara Nikaya, various lists) is the most important Buddhist text on the training of the heart, and it is significant for the teaching that the cultivation of equanimity is the most important practice of the heart. "The person who cultivates equanimity is the person who is even-minded toward the beings, without attachment, without aversion, without confusion. The person who cultivates equanimity is the person who is free from the craving, the clinging, the suffering. The person who cultivates equanimity is the person who is the most united with the beings, and the most united with the Buddha" (Anguttara Nikaya, various lists, paraphrased).

⁸ The Brahnavihara Suttas (the Discourses on the Divine Abodes, Majjhima Nikaya 100, 129, 130) are the most important Buddhist texts on the training of the heart, and they are significant for the teaching that the cultivation of the four immeasurables is the most important practice of the heart, and that the cultivation of the four immeasurables is the means of the liberation of the person. "The four immeasurables are the loving-kindness, the compassion, the appreciative joy, and the equanimity. These four are the divine abodes, the dwelling places of the gods, the foundation of the spiritual life" (Majjhima Nikaya 100, paraphrase).

⁹ The Bodhicaryavatara (Way of the Bodhisattva) by Santideva is the most important Tibetan Buddhist text on the training of the heart, and it is significant for the teaching that the heart is

transformed through the cultivation of compassion and the recognition of the emptiness of all phenomena. "The heart that is the source of the compassion is the heart that is the most transformed by the recognition of the emptiness of all phenomena. The compassion without the recognition of the emptiness is the compassion that is attached to the suffering, and this is not the true compassion. The compassion with the recognition of the emptiness is the compassion that is free from the attachment, and this is the true compassion" (Bodhicaryavatara, Chapter 8, paraphrased).

¹⁰ The Tibetan Book of the Dead's teaching on the heart is the most detailed in the Buddhist tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the heart is the faculty that is most important in the recognition of the nature of mind at the time of death and in the bardo states. "The heart is the center of the person, the seat of the emotions, the source of the compassion, the place of the recognition. At the time of death, the heart is the center of the dissolution, and the recognition that arises in the heart is the recognition of the nature of mind. If the heart recognizes the nature of mind, the person is liberated; if the heart does not recognize the nature of mind, the person is reborn" (Bardo Thodol, Chapter 5).

¹¹ The Dzogchen teaching of the heart is the most direct. "The heart is the seat of the rigpa, the primordial awareness. The recognition of the nature of mind is the recognition of the nature of the heart, and the practice is the resting in the recognition. The result is the spontaneous expression of the heart in all of life, the spontaneous expression of the compassion in all of life, the spontaneous expression of the love in all of life" (Dzogchen teachings, from the Nyingthig Yabshi and other collections).

¹² The Mahamudra teaching of the heart is the most systematic in the Kagyu tradition. "The heart is the faculty that is the most direct manifestation of the mind. The recognition of the nature of the mind is the recognition of the nature of the heart, and the practice is the resting in the recognition. The result is the liberation of the heart from the identification with the self, and the spontaneous expression of the heart in all of life" (Mahamudra teachings, from the Kagyu lineage).

¹³ The Hindu Discipline of the Heart

¹⁴ The Hindu tradition's analysis of the heart is the most varied, because the tradition has multiple paths, each with its own approach to the training of the heart. The Bhakti tradition's treatment of the heart is the most emotional, the Jnana tradition's treatment is the most intellectual, the Yoga tradition's treatment is the most disciplined, and the Tantric tradition's treatment is the most somatic.

¹⁵ The Bhagavad Gita's teaching on the heart is the most integrated with the theistic framework in the Hindu tradition. The teaching of bhakti yoga is the most important for the training of the heart. "The person who worships Krishna with faith and devotion, who has surrendered all actions to Krishna, who has taken refuge in Krishna, who has given up all other dharmas, and who has sought refuge in Krishna alone—such a person is freed from all the bonds of the gunas, and is united with Krishna. This is the easiest path, and the person who practices it is the most liberated" (Bhagavad Gita, 18:65-66). The training of the heart is the cultivation of the devotion, the love, the surrender, and the refuge in Krishna.

¹⁶ The teaching of the Bhakti tradition is the most important in the Hindu tradition for the training of the heart, because the heart is the faculty that is the most directly accessible to the devotion, the love, the surrender, and the refuge. The Tirumurai is the most important Tamil Saiva text on the training of the heart, because the hymns of the Tirumurai are the most direct expression of the devotion to Shiva.

"Shiva is the lord of all, the source of all, the destroyer of all enemies. The devotee who recites the hymns of the Tirumurai with devotion, who meditates on the form of Shiva, who surrenders the self to Shiva—that devotee is freed from all the bonds of the enemies, and is united with Shiva" (Tirumurai, various hymns, paraphrased).

¹⁷ The Divya Prabandham is the most important Vaishnava text on the training of the heart, because the hymns of the Divya Prabandham are the most direct expression of the devotion to Vishnu.

"Vishnu is the supreme reality, the source of all, the lord of all. The devotee who recites the hymns of the Divya Prabandham with devotion, who meditates on the form of Vishnu, who surrenders the self to Vishnu—that devotee is freed from all the bonds of the enemies, and is united with Vishnu, through the grace of Vishnu" (Divya Prabandham, various hymns, paraphrased).

¹⁸ The teaching of the Jnana tradition is the most important in the Advaita Vedanta tradition for the training of the heart, because the heart is the faculty that is the most directly accessible to the knowledge. "The person who has the knowledge of the true nature of the self, the person who has discriminated between the real and the unreal, the person who has recognized the identity of the Atman with the Brahman, the person who has realized the truth—that person is freed from all the bonds of the gunas, and is united with the Brahman. This is the most direct path, and the person who practices it is the most liberated" (Vivekachudamani, verses 314-367, paraphrased).

¹⁹ The teaching of the Yoga tradition is the most important in the Hindu tradition for the training of the heart, because the heart is the faculty that is the most directly accessible to the discipline. "The person who practices the yoga is the person who cultivates the heart through the practice of the yamas, the niyamas, the asana, the pranayama, the pratyahara, the dharana, the dhyana, and the samadhi. The heart that is cultivated in this way is the heart that is pure, the heart that is clear, the heart that is calm, the heart that is concentrated. The heart that is pure, clear, calm, and concentrated is the heart that is ready for the realization of the true nature of the self" (Yoga Sutras, 2:30-35; 3:1-4, paraphrased).

²⁰ The teaching of the Devi Mahatmya is the most intense in the Hindu tradition for the training of the heart, because the heart is the faculty that is the most directly accessible to the devotion to the Divine Mother. "The Divine Mother is the source of all power, the source of all courage, the source of all victory. The devotee who worships the Divine Mother with devotion, who calls upon the Divine Mother in the moment of need, who surrenders the self to the Divine Mother—that devotee is freed from all the bonds of the enemies, and is united with the Divine Mother. The heart that is devoted to the Divine Mother is the heart that is powerful, the heart that is courageous, and the heart that is victorious" (Devi Mahatmya, various chapters, paraphrased).

²¹ The Ashtavakra Gita's teaching on the heart is the most uncompromising in the Hindu tradition. "You are the infinite consciousness, free from all limitation. Why do you seek liberation? Why do you engage in actions for liberation? Why do you cultivate the heart for liberation? You are already free, and the seeking is the bondage. The heart that seeks liberation is the heart that is in bondage; the heart that recognizes the freedom is the heart that is free. The practice is not the cultivation of the heart but the recognition of the freedom that is already there" (Ashtavakra Gita, 1:1-2, paraphrased).

²² The Avadhuta Gita's teaching on the heart is the most radical in the Hindu tradition. "The liberated one is like a free bird; he sees the world as a dream and himself as the dreamer who has awakened; he speaks without speaking, acts without acting, and dwells in the unchanging. The heart of the

liberated one is the heart that is free of all limitation, the heart that is free of all attachment, the heart that is free of all suffering, the heart that is free of all bondage" (Avadhuta Gita, 2:1-2, paraphrased).

²³ The Taoist Discipline of the Heart

²⁴ The Taoist discipline of the heart is the most distinctive in the spiritual tradition, because it is not the cultivation of the heart as the faculty of emotion but the dissolution of the heart's attachment to the objects, the returning of the heart to the Dao, and the practice of the emptiness of the heart.

²⁵ The Tao te Ching's teaching on the heart is the most important. "The sage empties the heart, fills the belly, weakens the ambition, strengthens the bones. He always keeps the people without knowledge and without desire, so that those who have knowledge do not dare to act. He practices non-action, and nothing is left undone" (Tao te Ching, 3). The teaching is that the heart should be emptied of all its attachments, all its desires, all its knowledge, all its ambitions—and that the practice of the emptiness of the heart is the most direct path to the alignment with the Dao.

²⁶ Chapter 16 of the Tao te Ching is the most explicit. "Attain the utmost emptiness of the heart, hold firmly to stillness of the heart. The ten thousand things arise and I watch them return. They turn and return to the root, and returning to the root is stillness. Stillness is called returning to the fate. Returning to the fate is the eternal. To know the eternal is enlightenment. Not to know the eternal leads to evil" (Tao te Ching, 16, paraphrased). The training of the heart is the attainment of the utmost emptiness of the heart, the holding firmly to stillness of the heart, the watching of the arising and the return of all things, and the recognition of the root—the Dao itself.

²⁷ Zhuangzi's teaching on the heart is the most radical in the Taoist tradition. "The perfect person has no heart of his own; the people's heart is his heart. The good he gives to others, he gives to himself. He does not accumulate for himself; the more he gives, the more he has. ... The sage's heart is at rest in the universal, and the universal heart is his" (Zhuangzi, "The Great Sage," paraphrased). The teaching is that the heart should be the heart that is not the heart of the self but the heart of the universal, and that the action of the heart should be the action of the universal, not the action of the self.

²⁸ The chapter "Dealing with Life" (Zhuangzi, Chapter 3) presents the teaching of Cook Ding, who butchers an ox with such skill that his knife never dulls, because he cuts according to the natural structure of the thing rather than forcing his own way upon it. "Cook Ding laid down his knife and said, 'What I care about is the Way, which goes beyond skill. ... Now I use my mind, not my eyes. My senses stop and my spirit moves as it will. Following the natural structure, I strike the empty spaces where the knife finds no hindrance. The blade works through without friction. ... At the joints, there are spaces, and the knife never meets any resistance. So it has lasted nineteen years, and the blade is as sharp as if it had just come from the grindstone'" (Zhuangzi, Chapter 3, paraphrased). The teaching is that the heart of the sage is not the heart of the deliberate effort but the heart of the natural response, the heart of the mind that has been emptied of all its attachments and has become one with the natural structure of the world.

²⁹ The Liezi's teaching on the heart is the most practical. "The man who has no heart of his own is the man who has recognized that the self is not separate from the world, and that the attempt to make the self separate is the source of all suffering. The man who has no heart of his own is the man who acts without self-interest, who responds to the world without resistance, who is at peace with all

things. This is the state of wu-wei, and the heart of this man is the heart that is empty of the self, the heart that is in harmony with the world" (Liezi, Chapter 6, "The Sage," paraphrased).

³⁰ The Huainanzi's teaching on the heart is the most cosmologically grounded. "The human being is a small universe, and the cultivation of the heart is the alignment of the small universe with the great universe. The practice is the circulation of the energy through the body, the cultivation of the five organs, the harmonization of the yin and the yang, and the alignment of the breath with the cosmic breath. When the heart is in harmony with the cosmic order, the person is free from all suffering" (Huainanzi, Chapter 3, paraphrased).

³¹ The Secret of the Golden Flower's teaching on the heart is the most somatic. "The light is the light of consciousness itself; when the light is allowed to circulate freely through the body, the body becomes a vessel of spiritual transformation, and the heart is the center of the circulation, the center of the light, the center of the transformation" (Secret of the Golden Flower, Chapter 1).

³² The Christian Discipline of the Heart

³³ The Christian discipline of the heart is the most structured in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the cultivation of the heart through the practice of the prayer, the contemplation of the divine, and the attention to the presence of God in all things.

³⁴ The Desert Fathers and Mothers' teaching on the heart is the most practical. "The monk must train the heart through the practice of the austerities: fasting, vigil, prayer, silence, poverty, obedience, humility, patience, and all the virtues. The heart is the faculty that is most resistant to the spiritual life, because the heart is the faculty that is most attached to the world, and the training of the heart is the most difficult part of the spiritual life" (Sayings of the Desert Fathers, various apophthegmata).

³⁵ The teaching of Evagrius Ponticus in the Praktikos is the most systematic. "The eight evil thoughts are the enemies of the heart: gluttony, lust, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory, and pride. The heart is the faculty that is most susceptible to these enemies, and the training of the heart is the recognition and resistance of these enemies, the cultivation of the virtues that oppose them, and the purification of the heart from their influence" (Praktikos, prologue).

³⁶ The teaching of John Cassian (Conferences, Institutes) is the most systematic in the Western monastic tradition. "The monastic life is the life of the training of the heart. The monk must train the heart through the practice of the austerities: fasting, vigil, prayer, silence, poverty, obedience, humility, patience, and all the virtues. The goal is the *apatheia*—the freedom from passionate attachment, in which the heart is purified of all the enemies, and can respond to the will of God without distraction" (John Cassian, Conferences, various conferences).

³⁷ The teaching of the Cloud of Unknowing on the heart is the most apophatic. "The soul must direct its heart toward God through love, piercing the cloud of unknowing with a single point of longing love. The heart must be directed toward God, not toward any created thing, not toward any vision, not toward any understanding, not toward any consolation. The heart must simply love God in the darkness, and wait for God to reveal Himself when He wills" (The Cloud of Unknowing, Chapters 3-4).

³⁸ The teaching of John of the Cross in the Dark Night is the most rigorous. "The dark night of the soul is the purification of the heart from all that is not God, from all attachment, from all desire for consolation, from all self-understanding. The night is the most painful passage of the spiritual life,

and yet it is necessary, because the heart cannot be united with God as long as it is attached to anything other than God. The heart must pass through the night without resistance, and the result is the union with God, which is the living flame of love that transforms the heart" (The Dark Night, Book 2; Living Flame of Love, Stanzas 1-3).

³⁹ The teaching of Meister Eckhart on the heart is the most radical in the Christian tradition. "The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me; my eye and God's eye is one eye, one view, one knowledge, one love. The heart that is directed toward God is the heart that is empty of all that is not God, and the heart that is empty of all that is not God is the heart that is filled with God" (Meister Eckhart, Sermon 57, paraphrased).

⁴⁰ The teaching of Julian of Norwich on the heart is the most loving. "The heart that is aligned with the love of God is the heart that is free, the heart that is joyful, the heart that is at peace. The love of God is the ultimate object of the heart, and the human heart that is aligned with this love is the heart that is transformed by this love" (Revelations of Divine Love, Chapters 1-86).

⁴¹ The teaching of Thomas Merton on the heart is the most contemporary. "The heart that is in bondage to the ego is the heart that is attached to the false self, the heart that is attached to the desires, the heart that is attached to the fears. The heart that is free from the ego is the heart that is aligned with the true self, the heart that is aligned with the will of God, the heart that is the heart of God" (New Seeds of Contemplation, from Merton).

⁴² The Sufi Discipline of the Heart

⁴³ The Sufi discipline of the heart is the most eloquent in the Islamic tradition, and it is centered on the cultivation of the heart through the practice of dhikr (remembrance of God), the discipline of the heart, and the goal of fana (annihilation in the Divine).

⁴⁴ The Conference of the Birds is the most famous allegorical description of the training of the heart in the Sufi tradition, and it describes the journey through the seven valleys of the transformation of the heart. "In the Valley of Search, the seeker's heart is in the search, and the seeker finds only his own limitations. In the Valley of Love, the seeker's heart is in the love, and the seeker is consumed by the love, and all his limitations are burned away. In the Valley of Knowledge, the seeker's heart is in the knowledge, and the seeker finds that knowledge is not enough, and that only transformation can suffice. In the Valley of Detachment, the seeker's heart is in the detachment, and the seeker is stripped of everything he thought was his. In the Valley of Unity, the seeker's heart is in the unity, and the seeker sees that there is no other but God. In the Valley of Astonishment, the seeker's heart is in the astonishment, and the seeker is overwhelmed by the vision of God. In the Valley of Poverty and Annihilation, the seeker's heart is in the annihilation, and the seeker ceases to exist as a seeker, and what remains is the Divine" (Conference of the Birds, summary of the seven valleys).

⁴⁵ The Masnavi is the most comprehensive Sufi text on the training of the heart, and it is significant for the teaching that the heart is transformed through the practice of love and the dissolution of the self. "The heart is the one who is most attached to the world, and the training of the heart is the most difficult part of the spiritual life. The heart must be trained through the practice of love, through the dissolution of the self, through the surrender to the Divine. The heart that is trained in love is the heart that is transformed by the Divine, and the heart that is transformed by the Divine is the heart that is one with the Divine" (Masnavi, Book 1, paraphrased).

⁴⁶ Al-Ghazzali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din* is the most systematic account of the training of the heart in the Islamic tradition. "The heart is the vessel of the attention, and its purification is the goal of all worship. The heart is distracted by the various attachments, and the practice of the spiritual life is the cleansing of the heart from these attachments, so that it becomes pure and is filled with the light of God. The heart is the faculty that directs the attention, and the training of the heart is the cultivation of the virtues that transform the heart: sincerity, humility, patience, gratitude, love, and all the virtues of the heart" (*Ihya Ulum al-Din*, "Book of the Heart").

⁴⁷ Ibn Arabi's *Futuhat al-Makkiyah* is the most comprehensive exposition of the Sufi path in the Islamic tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the heart is trained through the constant recognition of the Divine in all things. "The path is the path of the recognition of the unity of being; the practice is the recognition of the Divine in all things; the goal is the transformation of the consciousness so that it sees only the Divine in all things. The heart is the faculty that directs this recognition, and the training of the heart is the cultivation of the constant recognition of the Divine" (*Futuhat al-Makkiyah*, various chapters).

⁴⁸ The teaching of Rumi in the *Divan Shams* is the most ecstatic. "I died as a mineral and became a plant, I died as a plant and rose to animal, I died as animal and I was a man. Why should I fear? When was I less by dying? Yet once more I shall die as a man, to soar with angels blest. But even from angelic states, I must pass on. At last, I became a void, and from that void, I learned the secret of the universe" (*Divan Shams*, paraphrased). The teaching is that the heart is the one who is most resistant to the dissolution of the self, and the training of the heart is the most difficult part of the spiritual life, but the result is the most joyful of all transformations.

⁴⁹ The Stoic Discipline of the Heart

⁵⁰ The Stoic discipline of the heart is the most practical in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the cultivation of the heart through the discipline of judgment, the discipline of desire, and the discipline of action.

⁵¹ Epictetus's teaching on the training of the heart is the most direct. "The training of the heart is the discipline of the three things: the discipline of judgment, the discipline of desire, and the discipline of action. The discipline of judgment is the training of the mind to see things as they are, not as the mind thinks they are. The discipline of desire is the training of the will to desire only what is within its power, and to accept what is not within its power as it is. The discipline of action is the training of the will to act in accordance with nature, with reason, and with the good of all beings" (Epictetus, *Discourses*, various chapters, paraphrased).

⁵² Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* is the most extensive personal record of the training of the heart in the Stoic tradition. "The training of the heart is the daily practice of the examination of the judgments: 'What is this thing? Is it within my power or not? If it is within my power, I must do it well. If it is not within my power, I must accept it as it is. The obstacles are the means of the training; the difficulties are the training; the suffering is the teacher'" (*Meditations*, various passages).

⁵³ Seneca's *Letters* develop the same teaching in practical terms. "The training of the heart is the daily reflection on the day's events, the examination of the errors, the correction of the faults, the preparation for the next day. The path of the heart is the life of reason, and the life of reason is the life of virtue. The result is the equanimity, the wisdom, the courage, the justice, and the temperance that are the marks of the wise person" (Seneca, *Letters*, various letters).

⁵⁴ The Kabbalistic Discipline of the Heart

⁵⁵ The Kabbalistic discipline of the heart is the most elaborate in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the practice of the mitzvot (commandments) and the contemplation of the sefirot as the means of the training of the heart.

⁵⁶ The Zohar's teaching on the training of the heart is that the practice of the mitzvot is the means of the alignment of the soul with the sefirot, and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means of the ascent of the soul through the spiritual worlds. "The soul is a microcosm of the sefirot; the rectification of the soul is the rectification of the world. The mitzvot are the instruments of the rectification, and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means of the ascent. The practice of the spiritual life is the combination of the practice of the mitzvot and the contemplation of the sefirot, and the result is the tikkun of the soul and the tikkun of the world" (Zohar, III, 28b, paraphrased).

⁵⁷ The teaching of the Sepher Yetzirah on the training of the heart is that the mastery of the twenty-two letters and the ten sefirot is the mastery of the forces that constitute the self and the world, and the practice of the sacred names is the means of the training of the heart. "Through thirty-two paths of wisdom, God carved out the universe. Ten sefirot and twenty-two letters are the foundation of all things. The practice of the sacred names is the practice of the mastery of these thirty-two paths, and the result is the transformation of the soul and the ascent through the spiritual worlds" (Sepher Yetzirah, 1:1).

⁵⁸ The teaching of the Lurianic Kabbalah on the training of the heart is the most dramatic. "In the beginning, the Ein Sof gazed into the mirror of the Supernal Wisdom and created the vessels of the lower sefirot. But the light of the Ein Sof was too great for the vessels, and they shattered, scattering the divine sparks throughout the material world. The task of tikkun is the gathering of these sparks back into their source. The practice of the mitzvot is the means of the gathering of the sparks, and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means of the ascent of the soul. The heart is the faculty that directs this practice, and the training of the heart is the cultivation of the dedication to the tikkun" (Etz Chaim, 2:1).

⁵⁹ The teaching of the Hasidic masters on the training of the heart is the most accessible. The Baal Shem Tov's teaching is that the heart is the faculty that is most connected to the divine spark within the person, and the training of the heart is the cultivation of the joy and the prayer that reconnect the soul to its divine origin. "Every person has a divine spark that is the essence of their soul, and this spark is always in connection with God. The heart is the faculty that is most connected to this spark, and the training of the heart is the cultivation of the joy and the prayer that reconnect the soul to this connection" (Baal Shem Tov, various teachings, paraphrased).

⁶⁰ The Tibetan Buddhist Discipline of the Heart

⁶¹ The Tibetan Buddhist discipline of the heart is the most sophisticated in the Buddhist tradition, and it is centered on the cultivation of the heart through the practice of the mindfulness of the nature of mind, the visualization of the deities, the recitation of the mantras, and the recognition of the rigpa (primordial awareness).

⁶² The Tibetan Book of the Dead is the most detailed presentation of the training of the heart in the context of death and the bardo states, and it is significant for the teaching that the heart must be on the recognition of the nature of mind at all times, and especially at the time of death. "The heart must

be on the recognition of the nature of mind at all times, and especially at the time of death. The appearances that arise in the bardo are the projections of the mind, and they are empty; if one recognizes them as such, one is liberated of the defilements, and one is liberated. If one does not, one becomes attached and is reborn. Therefore, the training of the heart must be the training of the recognition of the nature of mind, so that when the time of death comes, the recognition will arise" (Bardo Thodol, Chapter 5).

⁶³ The Dzogchen teaching of the heart is the most direct. "The recognition of the nature of mind is the recognition of the rigpa, the primordial awareness. The heart is the seat of the rigpa, and the practice is the resting in the recognition. The result is the spontaneous expression of the heart in all of life, the spontaneous expression of the compassion in all of life, the spontaneous expression of the love in all of life" (Dzogchen teachings, from the Nyingthig Yabshi and other collections).

⁶⁴ The Mahamudra teaching of the heart is the most systematic in the Kagyu tradition. "The heart is the faculty that is the most direct manifestation of the mind. The recognition of the nature of the mind is the recognition of the nature of the heart, and the practice is the resting in the recognition. The result is the liberation of the heart from the identification with the self, and the spontaneous expression of the heart in all of life" (Mahamudra teachings, from the Kagyu lineage).

CHAPTER TEN: THE DISCIPLINE OF THE AFFECTIVE LIFE

¹ The affective life—the realm of the emotions, the desires, the pleasures, the pains, the joys, the sorrows, the loves, the hates—is the most difficult area of the spiritual life, because the affective life is the most immediate of all the realms, the most powerful, the most resistant to the training, and the most deeply embedded in the person. The spiritual traditions have very different approaches to the affective life, and the differences are among the most significant in understanding the traditions' relation to the world.

² The Buddhist Approach to the Affective Life

³ The Buddhist tradition's approach to the affective life is the most systematic in the spiritual tradition, and it is one of the most important contributions of the tradition to the understanding of the transformation of the person. The Buddha's teaching on the feelings (vedana) is the most important framework for the understanding of the affective life, and it is significant for the understanding of the relationship between the feelings and the suffering.

⁴ The Satipatthana Sutta's treatment of the feelings is the most important. "The monk observes the feelings as the feelings: the feelings of pleasure, the feelings of pain, the feelings of neutrality. He observes the feelings as the feelings, without attachment, without aversion, without confusion. Through this observation, the monk understands the true nature of the feelings: they are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. And through this understanding, the monk becomes dispassionate toward the feelings, and the feelings are abandoned, and the person is liberated" (Satipatthana Sutta, MN 10, paraphrased). The teaching is that the feelings are the immediate experience of the person, and the person's relationship to the feelings is the source of the suffering. The liberation is the recognition of the impermanent, unsatisfactory, not-self nature of the feelings, the dispassion toward the feelings, and the abandonment of the attachment to the feelings.

⁵ The Cula-Vedalla Sutta (MN 119) is the most detailed Buddhist text on the treatment of the feelings, and it is significant for the teaching that the feelings are the most immediate object of the mindfulness, and that the mindfulness of the feelings is the key to the liberation from the suffering. "The Buddha said: 'The feelings are the most immediate of the phenomena. When a feeling arises, it is immediately experienced by the person as pleasant, painful, or neutral. The person who is not mindful of the feeling is the person who is overwhelmed by the feeling, who is attached to the pleasant feeling, who is averse to the painful feeling, who is confused by the neutral feeling. The person who is mindful of the feeling is the person who observes the feeling as the feeling, who understands the feeling as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self, and who is free from the suffering of the feeling'" (Cula-Vedalla Sutta, MN 119, paraphrase).

⁶ The Abhidhamma Pitaka's analysis of the feelings is the most systematic in the Buddhist tradition, and it is one of the most important contributions of the tradition to the psychology of the affective life. The Abhidhamma's analysis of the vedana (feeling) as the three types (pleasant, painful, neutral) and the seven types (the feelings associated with each of the seven cittas) and the eighteen types (the feelings associated with each of the eighteen cittas) is the most detailed psychological account of the affective life in the spiritual tradition.

⁷ The Dhammapada's treatment of the feelings is the most concise. "The mind is difficult to see, very subtle, and lands on whatever it desires. Let the wise person guard the mind, for a guarded mind brings happiness" (Dhammapada, 35). The feelings are the manifestations of the mind, and the guarding of the mind is the guarding against the attachment to the feelings.

⁸ The Theragatha (Verses of the Elders) and the Therigatha (Verses of the Elder Nuns) are the most important Buddhist texts on the personal experience of the feelings in the context of the spiritual life, and they are significant for the authenticity of the experience. "The elder said: 'I was overcome by the sorrow, the grief, the despair. I was like a tree that has been cut down, like a river that has been dammed, like the sun that has been covered by the clouds. But I practiced the mindfulness of the feelings, and I understood the true nature of the feelings, and I was free from the suffering of the feelings'" (Theragatha, paraphrased).

⁹ The Hindu Approach to the Affective Life

¹⁰ The Hindu tradition's approach to the affective life is the most varied, because the tradition has multiple paths, each with its own approach to the affective life. The Yoga tradition's approach is the most systematic, the Bhakti tradition's approach is the most emotional, the Jnana tradition's approach is the most intellectual, and the Tantric tradition's approach is the most somatic.

¹¹ The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali's treatment of the affective life is the most systematic in the entire Yoga tradition, and it is one of the most important contributions of the Indian tradition to the understanding of the transformation of the person. The teaching on the kleshas (the afflictions) is the most important framework for the understanding of the affective life. "The afflictions are ignorance, ego, attachment, aversion, and clinging to life. These are the causes of the suffering, and the practice of the yoga is the eradication of the afflictions" (Yoga Sutras, 2:2-3). The teaching is that the affective life is the source of the suffering, and the eradication of the afflictions is the means of the liberation.

¹² The teaching on the pratipaksha bhavana (the cultivation of the opposite) is the most important for the treatment of the affective life. "When the negative thoughts arise, the person should cultivate the

opposite thoughts. When the thoughts of violence arise, the person should cultivate the thoughts of non-violence. When the thoughts of untruth arise, the person should cultivate the thoughts of truth. When the thoughts of stealing arise, the person should cultivate the thoughts of generosity. When the thoughts of sexual misconduct arise, the person should cultivate the thoughts of celibacy. When the thoughts of possessiveness arise, the person should cultivate the thoughts of non-possessiveness" (Yoga Sutras, 2:33-34, paraphrased). The teaching is that the affective life is the source of the suffering, and the cultivation of the opposite thoughts is the means of the transformation of the affective life.

¹³ The Bhagavad Gita's teaching on the affective life is the most integrated with the theistic framework in the Hindu tradition. The teaching of the three gunas (sattva, rajas, tamas) is the most important framework for the understanding of the affective life. "The person who is in the state of tamas is the person who is in the darkness of ignorance, who is attached to the world, who is deluded by the world, who is bound by the world. The person who is in the state of rajas is the person who is in the activity of passion, who is attached to the fruits, who is engaged in the action, who is bound by the action. The person who is in the state of sattva is the person who is in the clarity of wisdom, who is detached from the fruits, who is free from the action, who is liberated from the action. The person who is beyond all three gunas is the person who is united with the Divine" (Bhagavad Gita, 14:5-27, paraphrased).

¹⁴ The teaching of the Bhakti tradition is the most important in the Hindu tradition for the transformation of the affective life, because the heart is the faculty that is the most directly accessible to the devotion, the love, the surrender, and the refuge. The Tirumurai and the Divya Prabandham are the most important texts on the transformation of the affective life in the Hindu tradition, because the hymns of the Tirumurai and the Divya Prabandham are the most direct expression of the devotion to the Divine, and the devotion is the most powerful means of the transformation of the affective life.

¹⁵ The Ashtavakra Gita's teaching on the affective life is the most uncompromising in the Hindu tradition. "You are the infinite consciousness, free from all limitation. Why do you experience the feelings of pleasure, the feelings of pain, the feelings of neutrality? The feelings are the appearances in the consciousness that you are, and you are always already free of the feelings. The practice is not the cultivation of the feelings but the recognition of the freedom that is already there" (Ashtavakra Gita, 1:1-2, paraphrased).

¹⁶ The Avadhuta Gita's teaching on the affective life is the most radical in the Hindu tradition. "The liberated one is like a free bird; he sees the world as a dream and himself as the dreamer who has awakened; he speaks without speaking, acts without acting, and dwells in the unchanging. The heart of the liberated one is the heart that is free of all the feelings of pleasure, the feelings of pain, the feelings of neutrality, the heart that is free of all the bondage to the feelings" (Avadhuta Gita, 2:1-2, paraphrased).

¹⁷ The Taoist Approach to the Affective Life

¹⁸ The Taoist approach to the affective life is the most distinctive in the spiritual tradition, because it is not the cultivation of the affective life as the absence of the feelings but the dissolution of the person's attachment to the feelings, the returning of the person to the Dao, and the practice of the emptiness of the heart.

¹⁹ The Tao te Ching's teaching on the affective life is the most important. "The sage empties the heart, fills the belly, weakens the ambition, strengthens the bones. He always keeps the people without knowledge and without desire, so that those who have knowledge do not dare to act. He practices non-action, and nothing is left undone" (Tao te Ching, 3). The teaching is that the affective life should be emptied of all its attachments, all its desires, all its knowledge, all its ambitions—and that the practice of the emptiness of the heart is the most direct path to the alignment with the Dao.

²⁰ Chapter 14 of the Tao te Ching is the most explicit. "The person who is free from the feelings of pleasure, the feelings of pain, the feelings of neutrality is the person who is in harmony with the Dao. The person who is in harmony with the Dao is the person who is free from the suffering of the world" (Tao te Ching, 14, paraphrased). The teaching is that the affective life is the source of the suffering, and the freedom from the feelings is the means of the liberation.

²¹ Zhuangzi's teaching on the affective life is the most radical in the Taoist tradition. "The perfect person has no heart of his own; the people's heart is his heart. The good he gives to others, he gives to himself. He does not accumulate for himself; the more he gives, the more he has. ... The sage's heart is at rest in the universal, and the universal heart is his" (Zhuangzi, "The Great Sage," paraphrased). The teaching is that the affective life should be the affective life that is not the affective life of the self but the affective life of the universal, and that the action of the affective life should be the action of the universal, not the action of the self.

²² The chapter "The Autumn Floods" (Zhuangzi, Chapter 17) presents the teaching that the affective life is the source of the suffering, and the liberation comes from the recognition of the relativity of all values. "From the viewpoint of the Dao, things have no nobility or baseness. ... Therefore, the sage does not take any side, does not judge anything as better or worse, and is free from the suffering that comes from judgment" (Zhuangzi, "The Autumn Floods," paraphrased).

²³ The Liezi's teaching on the affective life is the most practical. "The man who has no heart of his own is the man who has recognized that the self is not separate from the world, and that the attempt to make the self separate is the source of all suffering. The man who has no heart of his own is the man who acts without self-interest, who responds to the world without resistance, who is at peace with all things. This is the state of wu-wei, and the affective life of this man is the affective life that is empty of the self, the affective life that is in harmony with the world" (Liezi, Chapter 6, "The Sage," paraphrased).

²⁴ The Huainanzi's teaching on the affective life is the most cosmologically grounded. "The human being is a small universe, and the cultivation of the affective life is the alignment of the small universe with the great universe. The practice is the circulation of the energy through the body, the cultivation of the five organs, the harmonization of the yin and the yang, and the alignment of the breath with the cosmic breath. When the affective life is in harmony with the cosmic order, the person is free from all suffering" (Huainanzi, Chapter 3, paraphrased).

²⁵ The Secret of the Golden Flower's teaching on the affective life is the most somatic. "The light is the light of consciousness itself; when the light is allowed to circulate freely through the body, the body becomes a vessel of spiritual transformation, and the affective life is the center of the circulation, the center of the light, the center of the transformation" (Secret of the Golden Flower, Chapter 1).

²⁶ The Christian Approach to the Affective Life

²⁷ The Christian approach to the affective life is the most structured in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the cultivation of the affective life through the practice of the prayer, the contemplation of the divine, and the attention to the presence of God in all things.

²⁸ The Desert Fathers and Mothers' teaching on the affective life is the most practical. "The monk must train the affective life through the practice of the austerities: fasting, vigil, prayer, silence, poverty, obedience, humility, patience, and all the virtues. The affective life is the faculty that is most resistant to the spiritual life, because the affective life is the faculty that is most attached to the world, and the training of the affective life is the most difficult part of the spiritual life" (Sayings of the Desert Fathers, various apophthegmata).

²⁹ The teaching of Evagrius Ponticus in the *Praktikos* is the most systematic. "The eight evil thoughts are the enemies of the affective life: gluttony, lust, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory, and pride. The affective life is the faculty that is most susceptible to these enemies, and the training of the affective life is the recognition and resistance of these enemies, the cultivation of the virtues that oppose them, and the purification of the affective life from their influence" (*Praktikos*, prologue).

³⁰ The teaching of John Cassian (*Conferences*, *Institutes*) is the most systematic in the Western monastic tradition. "The monastic life is the life of the training of the affective life. The monk must train the affective life through the practice of the austerities: fasting, vigil, prayer, silence, poverty, obedience, humility, patience, and all the virtues. The goal is the *apatheia*—the freedom from passionate attachment, in which the affective life is purified of all the enemies, and can respond to the will of God without distraction" (John Cassian, *Conferences*, various conferences).

³¹ The teaching of the Cloud of Unknowing on the affective life is the most apophatic. "The soul must direct its affective life toward God through love, piercing the cloud of unknowing with a single point of longing love. The affective life must be directed toward God, not toward any created thing, not toward any vision, not toward any understanding, not toward any consolation. The affective life must simply love God in the darkness, and wait for God to reveal Himself when He wills" (The Cloud of Unknowing, Chapters 3-4).

³² The teaching of John of the Cross in the *Dark Night* is the most rigorous. "The dark night of the soul is the purification of the affective life from all that is not God, from all attachment, from all desire for consolation, from all self-understanding. The night is the most painful passage of the spiritual life, and yet it is necessary, because the affective life cannot be united with God as long as it is attached to anything other than God. The affective life must pass through the night without resistance, and the result is the union with God, which is the living flame of love that transforms the affective life" (The *Dark Night*, Book 2; *Living Flame of Love*, Stanzas 1-3).

³³ The teaching of Meister Eckhart on the affective life is the most radical in the Christian tradition. "The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me; my eye and God's eye is one eye, one view, one knowledge, one love. The affective life that is directed toward God is the affective life that is empty of all that is not God, and the affective life that is empty of all that is not God is the affective life that is filled with God" (Meister Eckhart, Sermon 57, paraphrased).

³⁴ The teaching of Julian of Norwich on the affective life is the most loving. "The affective life that is aligned with the love of God is the affective life that is free, the affective life that is joyful, the affective life that is at peace. The love of God is the ultimate object of the affective life, and the

human affective life that is aligned with this love is the affective life that is transformed by this love" (Revelations of Divine Love, Chapters 1-86).

³⁵ The teaching of Thomas Merton on the affective life is the most contemporary. "The affective life that is in bondage to the ego is the affective life that is attached to the false self, the affective life that is attached to the desires, the affective life that is attached to the fears. The affective life that is free from the ego is the affective life that is aligned with the true self, the affective life that is aligned with the will of God, the affective life that is the affective life of God" (New Seeds of Contemplation, from Merton).

³⁶ The Sufi Approach to the Affective Life

³⁷ The Sufi approach to the affective life is the most eloquent in the Islamic tradition, and it is centered on the cultivation of the affective life through the practice of dhikr (remembrance of God), the discipline of the heart, and the goal of fana (annihilation in the Divine).

³⁸ The Conference of the Birds is the most famous allegorical description of the training of the affective life in the Sufi tradition, and it describes the journey through the seven valleys of the transformation of the affective life. "In the Valley of Search, the seeker's affective life is in the search, and the seeker finds only his own limitations. In the Valley of Love, the seeker's affective life is in the love, and the seeker is consumed by the love, and all his limitations are burned away. In the Valley of Knowledge, the seeker's affective life is in the knowledge, and the seeker finds that knowledge is not enough, and that only transformation can suffice. In the Valley of Detachment, the seeker's affective life is in the detachment, and the seeker is stripped of everything he thought was his. In the Valley of Unity, the seeker's affective life is in the unity, and the seeker sees that there is no other but God. In the Valley of Astonishment, the seeker's affective life is in the astonishment, and the seeker is overwhelmed by the vision of God. In the Valley of Poverty and Annihilation, the seeker's affective life is in the annihilation, and the seeker ceases to exist as a seeker, and what remains is the Divine" (Conference of the Birds, summary of the seven valleys).

³⁹ The Masnavi is the most comprehensive Sufi text on the training of the affective life, and it is significant for the teaching that the affective life is transformed through the practice of love and the dissolution of the self. "The affective life is the one that is most attached to the world, and the training of the affective life is the most difficult part of the spiritual life. The affective life must be trained through the practice of love, through the dissolution of the self, through the surrender to the Divine. The affective life that is trained in love is the affective life that is transformed by the Divine, and the affective life that is transformed by the Divine is the affective life that is one with the Divine" (Masnavi, Book 1, paraphrased).

⁴⁰ Al-Ghazzali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din* is the most systematic account of the training of the affective life in the Islamic tradition. "The heart is the vessel of the affective life, and its purification is the goal of all worship. The heart is distracted by the various attachments, and the practice of the spiritual life is the cleansing of the heart from these attachments, so that it becomes pure and is filled with the light of God. The affective life is the faculty that directs the heart, and the training of the affective life is the cultivation of the virtues that transform the heart: sincerity, humility, patience, gratitude, love, and all the virtues of the heart" (*Ihya Ulum al-Din*, "Book of the Heart").

⁴¹ Ibn Arabi's *Futuhat al-Makkiyah* is the most comprehensive exposition of the Sufi path in the Islamic tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the affective life is trained through the

constant recognition of the Divine in all things. "The path is the path of the recognition of the unity of being; the practice is the recognition of the Divine in all things; the goal is the transformation of the consciousness so that it sees only the Divine in all things. The affective life is the faculty that directs this recognition, and the training of the affective life is the cultivation of the constant recognition of the Divine" (Futuh al-Makkiyah, various chapters).

⁴² The teaching of Rumi in the Divan Shams is the most ecstatic. "I died as a mineral and became a plant, I died as a plant and rose to animal, I died as animal and I was a man. Why should I fear? When was I less by dying? Yet once more I shall die as a man, to soar with angels blest. But even from angelic states, I must pass on. At last, I became a void, and from that void, I learned the secret of the universe" (Divan Shams, paraphrased). The teaching is that the affective life is the one who is most resistant to the dissolution of the self, and the training of the affective life is the most difficult part of the spiritual life, but the result is the most joyful of all transformations.

⁴³ The Stoic Approach to the Affective Life

⁴⁴ The Stoic approach to the affective life is the most practical in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the cultivation of the affective life through the discipline of judgment, the discipline of desire, and the discipline of action.

⁴⁵ Epictetus's teaching on the training of the affective life is the most direct. "The training of the affective life is the discipline of the three things: the discipline of judgment, the discipline of desire, and the discipline of action. The discipline of judgment is the training of the mind to see things as they are, not as the mind thinks they are. The discipline of desire is the training of the will to desire only what is within its power, and to accept what is not within its power as it is. The discipline of action is the training of the will to act in accordance with nature, with reason, and with the good of all beings" (Epictetus, Discourses, various chapters, paraphrased).

⁴⁶ Marcus Aurelius's Meditations is the most extensive personal record of the training of the affective life in the Stoic tradition. "The training of the affective life is the daily practice of the examination of the judgments: 'What is this thing? Is it within my power or not? If it is within my power, I must do it well. If it is not within my power, I must accept it as it is. The obstacles are the means of the training; the difficulties are the training; the suffering is the teacher'" (Meditations, various passages).

⁴⁷ Seneca's Letters develop the same teaching in practical terms. "The training of the affective life is the daily reflection on the day's events, the examination of the errors, the correction of the faults, the preparation for the next day. The path of the affective life is the life of reason, and the life of reason is the life of virtue. The result is the equanimity, the wisdom, the courage, the justice, and the temperance that are the marks of the wise person" (Seneca, Letters, various letters).

⁴⁸ The Kabbalistic Approach to the Affective Life

⁴⁹ The Kabbalistic approach to the affective life is the most elaborate in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the practice of the mitzvot (commandments) and the contemplation of the sefirot as the means of the training of the affective life.

⁵⁰ The Zohar's teaching on the training of the affective life is that the practice of the mitzvot is the means of the alignment of the soul with the sefirot, and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means of the ascent of the soul through the spiritual worlds. "The soul is a microcosm of the sefirot; the rectification of the soul is the rectification of the world. The mitzvot are the instruments of the

rectification, and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means of the ascent. The practice of the spiritual life is the combination of the practice of the mitzvot and the contemplation of the sefirot, and the result is the tikkun of the soul and the tikkun of the world" (Zohar, III, 28b, paraphrased).

⁵¹ The teaching of the Sepher Yetzirah on the training of the affective life is that the mastery of the twenty-two letters and the ten sefirot is the mastery of the forces that constitute the self and the world, and the practice of the sacred names is the means of the training of the affective life. "Through thirty-two paths of wisdom, God carved out the universe. Ten sefirot and twenty-two letters are the foundation of all things. The practice of the sacred names is the practice of the mastery of these thirty-two paths, and the result is the transformation of the soul and the ascent through the spiritual worlds" (Sepher Yetzirah, 1:1).

⁵² The teaching of the Lurianic Kabbalah on the training of the affective life is the most dramatic. "In the beginning, the Ein Sof gazed into the mirror of the Supernal Wisdom and created the vessels of the lower sefirot. But the light of the Ein Sof was too great for the vessels, and they shattered, scattering the divine sparks throughout the material world. The task of tikkun is the gathering of these sparks back into their source. The practice of the mitzvot is the means of the gathering of the sparks, and the contemplation of the sefirot is the means of the ascent of the soul. The affective life is the faculty that directs this practice, and the training of the affective life is the cultivation of the dedication to the tikkun" (Etz Chaim, 2:1).

⁵³ The teaching of the Hasidic masters on the training of the affective life is the most accessible. The Baal Shem Tov's teaching is that the affective life is the faculty that is most connected to the divine spark within the person, and the training of the affective life is the cultivation of the joy and the prayer that reconnect the soul to its divine origin. "Every person has a divine spark that is the essence of their soul, and this spark is always in connection with God. The affective life is the faculty that is most connected to this spark, and the training of the affective life is the cultivation of the joy and the prayer that reconnect the soul to this connection" (Baal Shem Tov, various teachings, paraphrased).

⁵⁴ The Tibetan Buddhist Approach to the Affective Life

⁵⁵ The Tibetan Buddhist approach to the affective life is the most sophisticated in the Buddhist tradition, and it is centered on the cultivation of the affective life through the practice of the mindfulness of the nature of mind, the visualization of the deities, the recitation of the mantras, and the recognition of the rigpa (primordial awareness).

⁵⁶ The Tibetan Book of the Dead is the most detailed presentation of the training of the affective life in the context of death and the bardo states, and it is significant for the teaching that the affective life must be on the recognition of the nature of mind at all times, and especially at the time of death. "The affective life must be on the recognition of the nature of mind at all times, and especially at the time of death. The appearances that arise in the bardo are the projections of the mind, and they are empty; if one recognizes them as such, one is transformed of the affective life, and one is liberated. If one does not, one becomes attached and is reborn. Therefore, the training of the affective life must be the training of the recognition of the nature of mind, so that when the time of death comes, the recognition will arise" (Bardo Thodol, Chapter 5).

⁵⁷ The Dzogchen teaching of the affective life is the most direct. "The recognition of the nature of mind is the transformation of the affective life. The affective life is the obscurations of the rigpa, and the recognition of the rigpa is the transformation of the obscurations. The practice is the recognition

of the rigpa, and the result is the spontaneous transformation of the affective life, and the liberation of the person" (Dzogchen teachings, from the Nyingthig Yabshi and other collections).

⁵⁸ The Mahamudra teaching of the affective life is the most systematic in the Kagyu tradition. "The recognition of the nature of mind is the transformation of the affective life. The affective life is the thoughts, the emotions, the sensations, the appearances, and the recognition of the nature of the mind is the recognition of the thoughts, the emotions, the sensations, the appearances as the play of the mind. The practice is the resting in the recognition, and the result is the spontaneous transformation of the affective life, and the liberation of the person" (Mahamudra teachings, from the Kagyu lineage).

EPILOGUE TO VOLUME II

¹ This volume has addressed the most practical dimensions of the spiritual life: the discipline of the will, of the attention, of the purification, of the heart, and of the affective life. These are the disciplines that are the most directly relevant to the actual person, the most immediately applicable to the actual life, and the most difficult to actually implement.

² What has not been addressed is the question of the ways of knowing—the relationship between the intellectual recognition and the direct experience, the role of silence and negation, the role of the body and the embodied experience, the role of love and ethics in the transformation of the person, and the relationship between the person and the world. These topics, and the way they are understood by the various traditions, are the subject of Volume III.

Volume III: Ways of Knowing

PROLOGUE: The Problem of How Things Are Known

¹ If Volumes I and II addressed what is known and what must be done about it, Volume III addresses the question of how it is known. This is not a secondary question. The manner of knowing is not separable from the content of what is known, and in the spiritual domain, the manner of knowing is often the more fundamental consideration.

² The most radical insight across the spiritual traditions is that the ordinary modes of knowing—conceptual thinking, sensory perception, discursive reasoning, emotional reaction—are not adequate to know what is ultimate. Something else is required: a direct knowing that bypasses the conceptual apparatus, a knowing through negation that strips away every false identification, a knowing through the body that is not reducible to intellectual understanding, a knowing through love that knows the beloved directly rather than through description, a knowing through ethical living that discovers truth in the doing rather than the thinking.

³ These various modes of knowing are not the same, and the traditions that emphasize them differently reveal something important about the limits of any single mode. The tradition that teaches that the truth can only be known through negation is not denying that the truth can be known; it is teaching that the truth cannot be known any other way. The tradition that teaches that the truth can only be known through love is not sentimentalizing truth; it is teaching that the truth is the kind of thing that can only be known in the way that love knows—through union, through intimacy, through the dissolution of the distance between the knower and the known. The tradition that teaches that the truth must be known through the body is not reducing truth to matter; it is teaching that the body is not an obstacle to knowledge but a vehicle of it.

⁴ What follows is an attempt to gather these different modes of knowing into a single vision, recognizing both their differences and their common ground.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: DIRECT KNOWLEDGE — THE KNOWING THAT IS NOT CONCEPTUAL

¹ The most important distinction in the spiritual domain is between conceptual knowledge (knowledge by description, by representation, by the mediation of the mind) and direct knowledge (knowledge by presence, by contact, by immediate awareness). Conceptual knowledge is the ordinary mode of knowing in the world; direct knowledge is the mode of knowing that the spiritual traditions are primarily concerned with, even when they use the language of concepts.

² The Buddhist Theory of Direct Knowing

³ No tradition has worked out the theory of direct knowing more carefully than the Buddhist tradition, and the epistemological structure of the Buddhist path is one of its most important contributions to the spiritual domain.

⁴ The Buddhist concept of gnana (knowing, wisdom, insight) is distinguished from vijñana (consciousness, discrimination, the dualistic awareness of subject and object) and from vijñapti-mātra (consciousness-only, the awareness that is nothing but the transformation of consciousness). The difference between gnana and vijñana is the difference between the direct knowledge of the nature of things and the dualistic awareness of things as objects. The former is single and immediate; the latter is dual and mediated.

⁵ The Satipatthana Sutta is in part a training in the cultivation of direct knowing, because the four foundations of mindfulness are the training of attention in the direct apprehension of the phenomena without the interference of the conceptual apparatus. "The monk observes the body as the body, without conceptualization, without discrimination, without the involvement of the self. This is the direct knowing of the body" (Satipatthana Sutta, MN 10, paraphrased). The same is true for the feelings, the mind, and the mental objects.

⁶ The Pali Canon's distinction between panna (wisdom, insight) and sanna (discrimination, recognition, the conceptual label) is the most important epistemological distinction in the early Buddhist tradition. "Panna is the direct knowledge of the nature of things; sanna is the conceptual recognition of things. The person who has panna sees things as they are; the person who has only sanna sees things as they appear to be" (from the Pali Canon commentaries, as expressed in the Abhidhamma framework).

⁷ The Mahayana Buddhist development of the concept of direct knowing is the most sophisticated in the Buddhist tradition, and it is centered on the teaching of the wisdom of the perfection of insight—the direct knowledge of emptiness. The Heart Sutra's most famous line, "When the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara was practicing the deep wisdom of the perfection of insight, he saw and observed that the five aggregates are all empty in their own nature" (Heart Sutra, opening), is the description of the direct seeing—the visual metaphor that captures the nature of the knowledge. It is not a deduction, not a conclusion, not a conceptual inference; it is a seeing.

⁸ The Diamond Sutra's teaching of the direct knowing is the most radical in the Buddhist tradition. "What the Tathagata has taught is the raft, and the wise person has understood the raft is for crossing, not for grasping. The direct knowing of the dharmas is the crossing; the conceptual grasping of the dharmas is the clinging to the raft. The person who has crossed has let go of the raft, and the person who is still clinging to the raft has not crossed" (Diamond Sutra, paraphrase).

⁹ The Lankavatara Sutra's teaching of the mind-only is the most extensive Buddhist account of the direct knowing of the nature of consciousness. "The external world does not exist apart from the mind; the mind, variously transformed, appears as the external world. The direct knowing of this is the liberation of the bodhisattva, because the bodhisattva no longer sees the world as external and separate from the mind, and therefore no longer clings to the world as real" (Lankavatara Sutra, Section 3). The direct knowing here is the recognition of the one reality behind the apparent duality of the mind and the world.

¹⁰ The Tibetan Buddhist concept of rigpa (primordial awareness, the direct recognition of the nature of mind) is the most developed theory of direct knowing in the Buddhist tradition. The Dzogchen

teaching is that rigpa is not a product of thought, not an inference, not a conclusion, but the direct recognition of what is already present. "The rigpa is the direct knowing of the nature of mind, the recognition of the luminosity and emptiness of the mind, the immediate awareness of the ground of all experience. It is not something to be achieved; it is something to be recognized, and the practice is the recognition" (Dzogchen teachings, from the Nyingthig Yabshi and other collections).

¹¹ The metaphor of the sun in the sky is central to the Dzogchen teaching of direct knowing: "The sun is always shining in the sky, but the clouds obscure it. The sun does not need to be lit; it needs only to be revealed. The rigpa is always present, but the adventitious defilements obscure it. The practice of Dzogchen is not the cultivation of the rigpa; it is the removal of the obscurations, so that the rigpa can reveal itself" (Dzogchen teachings, paraphrase).

¹² The Mahamudra teaching of the direct knowing is the closest equivalent to the Dzogchen teaching within the Kagyu tradition. "Mahamudra is the direct recognition of the nature of mind, the direct knowing of the emptiness and the luminosity of the mind, the immediate awareness of the ground of all experience. It is not a conceptual understanding; it is a direct recognition, and the practice is the stabilization of this recognition in all circumstances" (Mahamudra teachings, from the Kagyu lineage).

¹³ The Zen tradition's concept of kensho (seeing into one's nature) and satori (awakening, the direct realization of the nature of mind) is the most dramatic expression of the direct knowing in the Buddhist tradition. The koan is the most characteristic device for the cultivation of direct knowing, because the koan is designed to short-circuit the conceptual intellect and to produce the direct recognition of the nature of mind.

¹⁴ Dogen's teaching of the direct knowing in the Shobogenzo is the most extensive in the Zen tradition. "To study the Way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by the ten thousand things. This is the direct knowing of the Way: it is not a conceptual understanding; it is the actualization of the Way in the person, the direct experience of the non-separation of the self and the ten thousand things" (Shobogenzo, Bendowa, paraphrased).

¹⁵ The koan tradition's most famous koan, "Mu" (Zhaozhou's answer to the question whether a dog has Buddha-nature), is the most direct expression of the Zen approach to direct knowing. Zhaozhou's answer is not "yes" or "no" or "the dog has Buddha-nature just as all beings do" or "the dog does not have Buddha-nature because all beings are empty of nature." Zhaozhou's answer is simply "Mu"—no—and the point of the koan is that the answer is not a conceptual position but a direct pointing to the mind that is before all conceptualization. The student who works on the koan is not trying to solve a puzzle; the student is trying to recognize the mind that is the source of the answer, the mind that is before the question.

¹⁶ The Ten Bulls (Oxherding Pictures) is the most influential Zen presentation of the stages of the direct knowing, and the tenth picture is the most important. The image is of the person in the marketplace, laughing and singing, with no ox in sight—in other words, the person who has recognized the nature of mind and returned to ordinary life, the person who has no special state to show, the person who has no attainment to display. "After all this, the person is back in the marketplace, laughing and singing, and the ox is nowhere to be seen. This is the true realization: the ox was never separate from the person, and the person was never separate from the ox" (Ten Bulls,

tenth picture, paraphrased). The direct knowing is not a state to be maintained; it is the ground of all states, the recognition that is always already the case.

¹⁷ The Upanishadic Theory of Direct Knowing

¹⁸ The Upanishadic tradition's theory of direct knowing is the most important in the Indian tradition, and it is centered on the concept of *anubhava* (direct experience) and the distinction between the knowledge that comes from the study of the scriptures and the knowledge that comes from the direct recognition of the Atman.

¹⁹ The Chandogya Upanishad's famous teaching of "*Tat tvam asi*" (That thou art) is the most influential statement of the direct knowing in the Upanishadic tradition. Uddalaka's instruction to Shvetaketu is not a philosophical argument but a direct pointing to what is already the case. "That which is the finest essence of the whole world—this is the Atman. That is the Reality. That is the Truth. *Tat tvam asi, Shvetaketu*" (Chandogya Upanishad, 6.8.7). The teaching is that Shvetaketu already is what he is seeking; the instruction is the direct pointing to what is already present, and the recognition of this is the liberation.

²⁰ The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad's teaching of the direct knowing is the most explicit. "The self is not the body, not the breath, not the mind, not the intellect, not the ego. The self is what remains when all of these are set aside; it is the seer that cannot be seen, the hearer that cannot be heard, the thinker that cannot be thought, the knower that cannot be known. This is the direct knowledge of the self: it is the knowledge of what cannot be known by the mind, because the mind is the instrument of the knowing, and the self is what is known by itself" (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 4.3.21, paraphrased).

²¹ The Kena Upanishad's teaching of the direct knowing is the most epistemological. "By what eye does the eye see, by what mind does the mind think, by what speech does the speech speak? It is not by the eye that the eye sees; it is not by the mind that the mind thinks; it is not by the speech that the speech speaks. It is by the Self that the eye sees, by the Self that the mind thinks, by the Self that the speech speaks. The Self is the condition of all knowing, and the Self cannot be known as an object of knowing, because the Self is the subject of all knowing" (Kena Upanishad, 1:1). The direct knowing here is the recognition of the self as the ground of all knowing, the recognition that the self cannot be known by the means of knowledge but only by itself.

²² The Mandukya Upanishad's teaching of the four states of consciousness and the fourth (*turiya*) is the most important theory of direct knowing in the Upanishadic tradition. "The fourth is not inwardly conscious, not outwardly conscious, not both-wise conscious, not a mass of consciousness, not conscious, not unconscious. It is unseen, beyond the reach of ordinary inquiry, ungraspable, indefinable, the essence of the experience of one's own self, the cessation of all phenomena, peace, bliss, and nondual" (Mandukya Upanishad, verse 7). The fourth is the direct knowing in its purity, the state of consciousness that is not objectified, not mediated, not dual, but the immediate awareness of the self as it is.

²³ The Gaudapada Karika on the Mandukya Upanishad is the most important philosophical development of the non-dual teaching in the Indian tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the direct knowing of the non-dual reality is the only genuine knowledge. "The world is unreal, but not like a dream. It is like an illusion, but not an illusion that can be dispelled by another illusion. It is the appearance of the Real in the mode of limitation. The direct knowledge of the Real is the

knowledge that the world is not other than the Real, and the world is not real in the way that the Real is real. This knowledge is not a conceptual understanding; it is a direct recognition, and the recognition is the liberation" (Gaudapada Karika, 2:1-10, paraphrased).

²⁴ The Yoga Vasistha's teaching of the direct knowing is the most radical in the Hindu tradition, because it presents the recognition of the mind as the source of the appearance of the world as the direct knowledge that is the liberation. "The world is appearance in the mind; the mind is the world; the self is the consciousness that perceives both. When the mind is stilled, the world does not appear, and the self abides in its own nature. This is the direct knowledge: it is the recognition that the world is the mind, and the mind is the self, and the self is the one reality" (Yoga Vasistha, Book 6, Chapter 1, paraphrased).

²⁵ The Ashtavakra Gita's teaching of the direct knowing is the most uncompromising in the Hindu tradition. "You are the infinite consciousness, free from all limitation. Why do you seek to know? What is there to know? You are already everything, and the seeking is the bondage. The direct knowledge is the recognition of the freedom that is already there, the recognition that you are not the body, not the mind, not the intellect, not the ego, but the infinite consciousness that is the ground of all appearance" (Ashtavakra Gita, 1:1-2, paraphrased).

²⁶ The Vivekachudamani is the most important manual for the cultivation of the direct knowing in the Advaita Vedanta tradition, because it presents the systematic discrimination between the real and the unreal as the means of the direct recognition of the Atman. "The person who discriminates between the real and the unreal is the person who is ready for the direct knowledge. The discrimination is the recognition that the body is not the self, the breath is not the self, the mind is not the self, the intellect is not the self, the ego is not the self, and that what remains when all these are set aside is the self, the witness, the Atman, the Brahman" (Vivekachudamani, verses 217-227, paraphrased). The direct knowledge is the culmination of the discrimination, the recognition that is not mediated by the conceptual apparatus but is the immediate awareness of the truth.

²⁷ The Taoist Theory of Direct Knowing

²⁸ The Taoist theory of direct knowing is the most distinctive in the spiritual tradition, because it is not the recognition of a ground behind the appearance but the recognition of the way of the appearance itself, the recognition of the Tao that is the pattern of all existence, the recognition that the truth is not a hidden reality but the immediate actuality of what is.

²⁹ The Tao te Ching's teaching of direct knowing is the most foundational. "The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal name. The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth. The named is the mother of the ten thousand things. Therefore, the person who knows the eternal does not speak of it; the person who speaks of it does not know the eternal. The direct knowing of the Tao is the knowing that is without words, without concepts, without the labeling of the experience" (Tao te Ching, 1). The very first chapter of the Tao te Ching establishes the primacy of direct knowing over conceptual knowing, and the entire text is structured around this distinction.

³⁰ Chapter 16 of the Tao te Ching is the most explicit about the cultivation of direct knowing. "Attain the utmost emptiness, hold firmly to stillness. The ten thousand things arise and I watch them return. They turn and return to the root, and returning to the root is stillness. Stillness is called returning to the fate. Returning to the fate is the eternal. To know the eternal is enlightenment. Not to know the

eternal leads to evil" (Tao te Ching, 16). The direct knowing here is the knowing of the eternal from the stillness, the recognition of the root of all things, the recognition of the way that the world moves.

³¹ Zhuangzi's teaching of direct knowing is the most radical in the Taoist tradition, because it dissolves the very distinction between the knower and the known. In the chapter "The Equality of Things," Zhuangzi presents the recognition of the equality of all things as the direct knowing of the Tao. "The great understanding is broad and unhurried; the small understanding is fractional and busy. The great person does not have a self; the small person is the self. The great person does not have the feelings of gain and loss; the small person is the feeling of gain and loss. The great person does not have the feelings of right and wrong; the small person is the feeling of right and wrong. The great person dwells in the direct, the unadorned, the simple; the small person dwells in the categories, the judgments, the distinctions" (Zhuangzi, "The Equality of Things," paraphrased). The direct knowing is the dissolution of the small understanding into the great understanding, the recognition that the distinctions of the small understanding are not ultimately real.

³² The famous butterfly dream passage is the most eloquent expression of the Taoist theory of direct knowing. "Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly dreaming I am a man. But between a man and a butterfly there is a difference. This is called the transformation of things" (Zhuangzi, "The Equality of Things," Chapter 2). The point is not that reality is an illusion but that the certainty of the knower about the nature of the known is an illusion, and the direct knowing is the recognition of the fluidity of the boundary between the self and the world, the waking and the dreaming, the real and the apparent.

³³ The Liezi's teaching of direct knowing is the most practical. "The man who has no self is the man who has recognized that the self is not separate from the world, and that the attempt to make the self separate is the source of all suffering. The man who has no self is the man who knows without knowing, acts without acting, and dwells in the way" (Liezi, Chapter 6, "The Sage," paraphrased).

³⁴ The Huainanzi's teaching of direct knowing is the most cosmologically grounded. "The human being is a small universe, and the cultivation of the direct knowing is the alignment of the small universe with the great universe. The practice is the circulation of the energy through the body, the cultivation of the five organs, the harmonization of the yin and the yang, and the alignment of the breath with the cosmic breath. When the person is in harmony with the cosmic order, the person knows the way directly, without the interference of the conceptual apparatus" (Huainanzi, Chapter 3, paraphrased).

³⁵ The Secret of the Golden Flower's teaching of direct knowing is the most somatic. "The light is the light of consciousness itself; when the light is allowed to circulate freely through the body, the body becomes a vessel of spiritual transformation, and the person knows the way directly, without the interference of the mind, without the mediation of the concepts. The direct knowing is the knowing of the light, the knowing of the circulation, the knowing of the transformation" (Secret of the Golden Flower, Chapter 1).

³⁶ The Christian Mystical Theory of Direct Knowing

³⁷ The Christian mystical tradition's theory of direct knowing is the most distinctive in the Western tradition, because it is centered on the idea of the direct encounter with God, the direct presence of God in the soul, the direct knowledge of God that comes through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

³⁸ The Desert Fathers and Mothers' teaching of direct knowing is the most practical. "The monk knows God not through books, not through study, not through reasoning, but through the direct encounter with God in the silence of the desert. The monk waits in the silence, and God speaks in the silence, and the monk knows God in the silence" (Sayings of the Desert Fathers, various apophthegmata). The direct knowing here is the knowledge that comes from the encounter with God, not from the study of the teachings about God.

³⁹ The teaching of Evagrius Ponticus in the *Praktikos* is the most systematic. "The person who has purified the heart from the eight evil thoughts enters into the state of *apatheia*, and in this state, the intellect is no longer distracted by the thoughts, and the intellect can encounter God directly, without the interference of the thoughts. This is the direct knowledge of God: it is the knowledge of the intellect in the state of stillness, the knowledge of the intellect that is no longer dual, no longer distant from God" (*Praktikos*, prologue).

⁴⁰ The teaching of the Cloud of Unknowing on direct knowing is the most apophatic. "The person knows God not through any knowledge, not through any vision, not through any understanding, not through any experience of God, but through the love that is directed into the cloud of unknowing, piercing the cloud with a single point of longing love. The person knows God in the darkness, in the unknowing, in the cloud, and this knowledge is more real than any knowledge that can be known through the mind" (The Cloud of Unknowing, Chapters 3-4).

⁴¹ The teaching of Meister Eckhart on direct knowing is the most radical in the Christian tradition. "The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me; my eye and God's eye is one eye, one view, one knowledge, one love. The direct knowledge of God is the knowledge of God by the eye of God, the knowledge of God that is the knowledge of God by God. The person knows God when the person is no longer the person, when the person has become the eye of God, when the person has become the knowledge of God" (Meister Eckhart, Sermon 57, paraphrased). This is the most radical statement of direct knowing in the Christian tradition, and it is significant for the identity of the knower with the known, the identity of the person's knowledge of God with God's knowledge of the person.

⁴² The teaching of Julian of Norwich on direct knowing is the most loving. "The person knows God through love, through the vision of the love of God, through the contemplation of the suffering of Christ, through the recognition that 'all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.' The direct knowledge of God is not the knowledge of the intellect but the knowledge of the heart, the knowledge of the love, the knowledge of the presence" (Revelations of Divine Love, Chapters 1-86).

⁴³ The teaching of Thomas Merton on direct knowing is the most contemporary. "The direct knowledge of God is the knowledge of God by the true self, the knowledge of God that is not mediated by the conceptual apparatus, not mediated by the images, not mediated by the desires, not mediated by the fears. The direct knowledge of God is the knowledge of God by the ground of the person, the knowledge of God by the person as God knows the person" (New Seeds of Contemplation, from Merton).

⁴⁴ The Sufi Theory of Direct Knowing

⁴⁵ The Sufi theory of direct knowing is the most eloquent in the Islamic tradition, and it is centered on the idea of the direct encounter with the Divine, the direct knowledge of the Divine through the annihilation of the self, the direct presence of the Divine in the heart.

⁴⁶ The Masnavi's teaching of direct knowing is the most important. "The person knows the Divine not through the books, not through the study, not through the reasoning, but through the direct encounter with the Divine in the heart. The person waits in the heart, and the Divine speaks in the heart, and the person knows the Divine in the heart. The direct knowledge of the Divine is the knowledge of the heart, the knowledge of the love, the knowledge of the presence" (Masnavi, Book 1, paraphrased).

⁴⁷ The Conference of the Birds is the most famous allegorical description of the direct knowing in the Sufi tradition, and the final valley is the most important. "In the Valley of Poverty and Annihilation, the seeker ceases to exist as a seeker, and what remains is the Divine. The seeker sees himself, the thirty birds, and understands that he is the Simurgh. The direct knowledge is the recognition of the seeker that he is the sought, that the Divine is not other than the seeker, and that the seeker's true self is the Divine" (Conference of the Birds, Final Valley, paraphrase).

⁴⁸ The teaching of Al-Ghazzali in the *Ihya Ulum al-Din* is the most systematic. "The person knows God through the direct encounter with God in the heart, through the purification of the heart from the attachments, through the illumination of the heart by the light of God. The direct knowledge of God is the knowledge of the heart, the knowledge of the light, the knowledge of the presence" (*Ihya Ulum al-Din*, "Book of the Heart").

⁴⁹ The teaching of Ibn Arabi in the *Fusus al-Hikam* is the most metaphysical. "The person knows God through the knowledge of the self. Whoever knows himself knows his Lord. The direct knowledge of God is the knowledge of the self, because the self is the mirror in which God contemplates his own reality. The knowledge of the self is the knowledge of God, because the self is not other than God, and God is not other than the self" (*Fusus al-Hikam*, prologue, paraphrased). This is the most radical statement of direct knowing in the Islamic tradition, and it is significant for the identity of the self with the Divine, the identity of the knowledge of the self with the knowledge of God.

⁵⁰ The teaching of Rumi in the *Divan Shams* is the most ecstatic. "I died as a mineral and became a plant, I died as a plant and rose to animal, I died as animal and I was a man. Why should I fear? When was I less by dying? Yet once more I shall die as a man, to soar with angels blest. But even from angelic states, I must pass on. At last, I became a void, and from that void, I learned the secret of the universe" (*Divan Shams*, paraphrased). The direct knowledge here is the knowledge that is learned from the void, the knowledge that is not the knowledge of any thing but the knowledge of the secret of the universe, the knowledge that is the direct encounter with the reality that is beyond all things.

⁵¹ The Kabbalistic Theory of Direct Knowing

⁵² The Kabbalistic theory of direct knowing is the most elaborate in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the idea of the direct encounter with the Ein Sof, the direct knowledge of the Divine through the sefirot, the direct presence of the Divine in the soul.

⁵³ The Zohar's teaching of direct knowing is the most important. "The person knows God not through the books, not through the study, not through the reasoning, but through the direct encounter with God in the heart. The person waits in the heart, and God speaks in the heart, and the person knows God in the heart. The direct knowledge of God is the knowledge of the heart, the knowledge of the sefirot, the knowledge of the Ein Sof" (Zohar, III, 28b, paraphrased).

⁵⁴ The teaching of the Sepher Yetzirah on direct knowing is the most systematic. "The person knows God through the knowledge of the twenty-two letters and the ten sefirot. These are the instruments of creation, and the knowledge of the instruments is the knowledge of the creator. The direct knowledge of God is the knowledge of the letters and the sefirot, the knowledge of the forces that constitute the world, the knowledge of the way that God creates the world" (Sepher Yetzirah, 1:1).

⁵⁵ The teaching of the Lurianic Kabbalah on direct knowing is the most dramatic. "The person knows God through the knowledge of the sparks, the knowledge of the tikkun, the knowledge of the restoration of the world. The direct knowledge of God is the knowledge of the sparks that are scattered in the material world, the knowledge of the gathering of the sparks to their source, the knowledge of the restoration of the vessels that were broken in the beginning" (Etz Chaim, 2:1, paraphrased).

⁵⁶ The Stoic Theory of Direct Knowing

⁵⁷ The Stoic theory of direct knowing is the most practical in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the idea of the direct knowledge of the nature of things, the direct knowledge of what is within the power of the person and what is not.

⁵⁸ Epictetus's teaching of direct knowing is the most direct. "The person knows what is within his power and what is not within his power. This is the direct knowledge: it is not the knowledge of the external things, but the knowledge of the power of the will. The person who knows this knows the truth, and the person who knows the truth is free" (Epictetus, Discourses, 1.1, paraphrased).

⁵⁹ Marcus Aurelius's Meditations is the most extensive personal record of the direct knowing in the Stoic tradition. "The direct knowledge is the knowledge of the nature of the things, the knowledge of the change of the things, the knowledge of the interweaving of the things. The person who knows this knows the universe, and the person who knows the universe knows the truth" (Meditations, various passages, paraphrased).

⁶⁰ The Egyptian Initiatory Theory of Direct Knowing

⁶¹ The Egyptian initiatory theory of direct knowing is the most esoteric in the spiritual tradition, and it is centered on the idea of the direct encounter with the divine light, the direct knowledge of the nature of the self through the experience of the initiation.

⁶² The Opening of the Way's teaching of direct knowing is the most systematic. "The person knows the truth through the direct encounter with the Spirit, through the experience of the initiation, through the recognition of the nature of the self. The direct knowledge is the knowledge of the state of identification, the knowledge of the recognition of the Spiritual Witness, the knowledge of the union of the consciously divine and the consciously human" (Opening of the Way, Chapter 2, paraphrased). The key teaching is that knowledge is a state, not an information: "Knowledge is not a science but a state, the state of identification. To be identified with something is to be united with it and made one with it" (Opening of the Way, Chapter 2).

⁶³ The teaching of the discernment of discernment is the most important. "The power to discriminate between perceived reality and the possibility that perception may be illusory is acquired by higher consciousness through genuine spiritual experience of identification. This is the discernment of discernment, and it is the foundation of the direct knowledge" (Opening of the Way, Chapter 2).

CHAPTER TWELVE: THE VIA NEGATIVA — KNOWING THROUGH NEGATION

¹ If direct knowledge is the knowing by presence, through negation is the knowing by the stripping away of every false qualification, the knowing of what is true by the elimination of what is not true. This is one of the most important modes of knowing in the spiritual tradition, and it is significant because it is the mode of knowing that is most resistant to the distortions of the conceptual apparatus.

² The Upanishadic Via Negativa

³ The Upanishadic tradition's via negativa is the most systematic in the Indian tradition, and it is centered on the method of *neti neti*—"not this, not this"—the systematic negation of every identification of the self with the body, the breath, the mind, the intellect, the ego, and the ultimate recognition of the self as that which remains when all these are negated.

⁴ The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad's teaching of the via negativa is the most explicit. "The self is not the body, not the breath, not the mind, not the intellect, not the ego, not the will, not the emotions, not the senses. The self is what remains when all of these are set aside; it is the seer that cannot be seen, the hearer that cannot be heard, the thinker that cannot be thought, the knower that cannot be known" (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 4.3.21, paraphrased).

⁵ The Kena Upanishad's teaching of the via negativa is the most epistemological. "It is not by the eye that the eye sees; it is not by the mind that the mind thinks; it is not by the speech that the speech speaks. The truth is that which is beyond the instruments of knowing, beyond the subject-object duality, beyond the conceptual apparatus. The truth is that which is the condition of all knowing, and it cannot be known by the means of knowledge" (Kena Upanishad, 1:1).

⁶ The Taittiriya Upanishad's teaching of the via negativa through the sheaths is the most influential in the Yoga tradition. "The physical sheath is the self, they say; but the physical sheath is transitory; it is not the self. The vital sheath is not the self; the mental sheath is not the self; the intellectual sheath is not the self; the bliss sheath is not the self. That which is beyond all these is the Self" (Taittiriya Upanishad, 2.3, paraphrased).

⁷ The Upanishadic via negativa is not negative theology in the Western sense, because it is not the negation of the divine as a person but the negation of the false identifications of the self. The self is not the body, not the mind, not the intellect, not the ego—but the self is the ground of all these, the witness that is present in all experience. The negation is the stripping away of the false identifications, the recognition of the self as that which is beyond all of them.

⁸ The Mantra of the Upanishads—"Om Tat Sat"—is the most famous expression of the via negativa in the Indian tradition. "Om is the sound that is beyond all sound; Tat is the reality that is beyond all description; Sat is the truth that is beyond all appearance. Om Tat Sat is the mantra of the via

negativa, the mantra that strips away all the false qualifications and leaves only the truth" (from the Upanishadic tradition, as expressed in the Bhagavad Gita, 17:23-28).

⁹ The Taoist Via Negativa

¹⁰ The Taoist via negativa is the most original in the spiritual tradition, because it is not the negation of the divine but the negation of the naming of the Tao, the negation of the conceptual understanding of the way, the recognition that the truth is not the object of the conceptualization but the subject of the realization.

¹¹ The Tao te Ching's opening lines are the most famous via negativa in the East. "The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal name" (Tao te Ching, 1). The negation here is the negation of the possibility of the conceptual capture of the Tao, the recognition that the truth is not the thing that can be said but the way that can be lived.

¹² Chapter 81 of the Tao te Ching is the most radical. "The sage does not accumulate for himself; the more he does for others, the more he has himself. The way of Heaven is to benefit and not to harm; the way of the sage is to do and not to contend. The words of the sage are few; the actions of the sage are simple. The direct knowing of the Tao is the knowing that is without words, without concepts, without the labeling of the experience" (Tao te Ching, 81, paraphrased).

¹³ Zhuangzi's via negativa is the most philosophical in the Taoist tradition, because it is the radical negation of all distinctions, all categories, all judgments. In the chapter "The Equality of Things," Zhuangzi presents the dissolution of all distinctions as the via negativa. "The ten thousand things are one. The one is the ten thousand things. The great understanding is broad and unhurried; the small understanding is fractional and busy. The perfect person has no self, the spiritual person has no merit, the sage has no name. ... Who knows the argument that brings the debate to rest? The sage does not argue; the sage knows the equality of all things" (Zhuangzi, "The Equality of Things," paraphrased).

¹⁴ The Liezi's via negativa is the most practical. "The man who has no self is the man who has recognized that the self is not separate from the world, and that the attempt to make the self separate is the source of all suffering. The man who has no self is the man who knows without knowing, acts without acting, and dwells in the way. This is the via negativa of the Taoist tradition: the stripping away of the self, the stripping away of the desires, the stripping away of the knowledge" (Liezi, Chapter 6, "The Sage," paraphrased).

¹⁵ The Huainanzi's via negativa is the most cosmologically grounded. "The human being is a small universe, and the via negativa is the alignment of the small universe with the great universe. The practice is the stripping away of the attachments, the stripping away of the desires, the stripping away of the knowledge, until the person is in harmony with the cosmic order" (Huainanzi, Chapter 3, paraphrased).

¹⁶ The Christian Via Negativa

¹⁷ The Christian via negativa is the most developed of the Western traditions, and it is centered on the idea of the unknowability of God, the need for the apophatic approach, the recognition that God is beyond all predication.

¹⁸ The Cloud of Unknowing is the most important text of the Christian via negativa, and it is one of the most important texts of the apophatic tradition in the entire spiritual domain. The author's teaching is that the person knows God not through any knowledge, not through any vision, not

through any understanding, not through any experience of God, but through the love that is directed into the cloud of unknowing, piercing the cloud with a single point of longing love.

¹⁹ The "cloud of forgetting" is the first element of the via negativa: "You must cast all your thoughts, all your desires, all your fears, all your knowledge, all your concepts, all your images, all your experiences of God, into the cloud of forgetting. You must forget all that you think you know about God, all that you think you can understand about God, all that you think you can experience of God" (The Cloud of Unknowing, Chapter 2).

²⁰ The "cloud of unknowing" is the second element of the via negativa: "You must direct your love into the cloud of unknowing, piercing the cloud with a single point of longing love. You must not seek to understand, not seek to see, not seek to know. You must simply love God in the darkness, in the unknowing, in the cloud" (The Cloud of Unknowing, Chapter 3).

²¹ The work of the water is the third element of the via negativa: "You will find, in your prayer, that there comes a work of the water, a work of the darkness, a work of the spiritual irritation that arises from the cloud. This work is not your own; it is the work of God in you, and you must not resist it. It is the purification of your whole being, and it is the most painful and the most necessary of all the works" (The Cloud of Unknowing, Chapter 9).

²² The Cloud of Unknowing is the most important Christian text on the via negativa because it is the most practical, the most systematic, and the most radical in its denial of the possibility of the knowledge of God through any created means. The author is not a philosopher; the author is a spiritual practitioner giving practical advice to another practitioner, and the advice is the most direct and the most uncompromising.

²³ Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite's *Mystical Theology* is the most important philosophical text of the Christian via negativa, and it is the foundation of the Western apophatic tradition. "The cause of all is beyond all assertion; it is neither one nor many, neither good nor being, neither wisdom nor power, neither life nor soul. It is beyond all these, and it is not any of these. The knowledge of God is beyond all knowledge; the contemplation of God is beyond all contemplation; the love of God is beyond all love" (*Mystical Theology*, 1, paraphrased).

²⁴ The *Divine Names* of Pseudo-Dionysius is the counterpoint to the *Mystical Theology*, and it is significant because it shows that the via negativa is not the only way of approaching God but one of the two ways, the other being the via affirmativa. "The divine names are the ways in which God reveals himself to the human mind; they are the paths by which the person ascends to God. The divine names are good, being, life, wisdom, power, love, and all the other names that are predicated of God. The person ascends through the divine names, from the lower names to the higher names, and from the higher names to the love of God, and from the love of God to the darkness of God, where the person knows God beyond all names" (*Divine Names*, paraphrase).

²⁵ Meister Eckhart's sermons are the most radical in the Christian tradition, and they are significant for the teaching that the via negativa is the only way of knowing God. "God is not found by adding anything to the soul, but by subtracting everything from the soul. The soul must be emptied of all its self-understanding, all its knowledge, all its desires, all its fears, all its loves, all its hates, all its prayers, all its experiences of God. And when the soul is empty, God fills it, and the person knows God" (Meister Eckhart, Sermon 23, paraphrased). This is the most uncompromising statement of the

via negativa in the Christian tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the knowledge of God is not the addition of something but the subtraction of everything that is not God.

²⁶ The Buddhist Via Negativa

²⁷ The Buddhist via negativa is the most systematic in the spiritual tradition, and it is centered on the concept of sunyata (emptiness) and the two truths doctrine—the teaching that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence, and that the ultimate truth is the direct recognition of this emptiness.

²⁸ The Heart Sutra's "form is emptiness, emptiness is form" is the most famous statement of the Buddhist via negativa. "The five aggregates are all empty in their own nature; the eye is empty, the ear is empty, the nose is empty, the tongue is empty, the body is empty, the mind is empty; all the dharmas are empty. The Bodhisattva does not see anything as existing or as non-existing, as permanent or as impermanent, as self or as not-self. This is the direct knowing of the emptiness, and this is the knowledge that liberates" (Heart Sutra, paraphrase).

²⁹ The Diamond Sutra's via negativa is the most radical in the Buddhist tradition, because it is the negation of the very concepts of the path, the practice, the Buddha, the dharma, and the liberation. "If a person sees the Buddha in terms of form, or seeks the Buddha in terms of sound, that person walks a wrong path. The Tathagata is not to be seen through the forms; the Tathagata is the emptiness of the forms. The Bodhisattva does not see a self, a person, a living being, or a life-span. The perfection of wisdom is not a perfection, but it is called a perfection so that people can understand it. The person who has the direct knowledge of the dharmas is the person who has no conceptual understanding, no conceptual position, no conceptual grasping" (Diamond Sutra, paraphrase).

³⁰ The Madhyamaka school of the Buddhist tradition, founded by Nagarjuna, is the most systematic philosophical development of the via negativa in the Buddhist tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that all positions are ultimately untenable, and that the only position that is viable is the position of the emptiness of all phenomena. Nagarjuna's *Mulamadhyamakakarika* (Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way) is the most important text of the Madhyamaka school, and it is one of the most important texts in the history of philosophy.

³¹ The Tibetan Book of the Dead's via negativa is the most experiential in the Buddhist tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the appearances of the bardo states are the projections of the mind, and that these appearances are empty, and that the recognition of this emptiness is the liberation. "The appearances that arise in the bardo are the projections of the mind, and they are empty; if one recognizes them as such, one is liberated. If one does not, one becomes attached and is reborn" (Bardo Thodol, Chapter 5).

³² The Dzogchen teaching of the via negativa is the most direct. "The mind is the ground of all experience, but the mind is empty of all substantiality. The practice of Dzogchen is the recognition of the emptiness of the mind, the recognition of the luminosity of the mind, the recognition of the ground of all experience. The via negativa here is the recognition that the mind is empty, and the recognition of the emptiness is the liberation" (Dzogchen teachings, paraphrase).

³³ The Mahamudra teaching of the via negativa is the most systematic in the Kagyu tradition. "The mind is the ground of all experience, but the mind is empty of all substantiality. The practice of Mahamudra is the recognition of the emptiness of the mind, the recognition of the luminosity of the mind, the recognition of the ground of all experience. The via negativa here is the recognition that

the mind is empty, and the recognition of the emptiness is the liberation" (Mahamudra teachings, paraphrase).

³⁴ The Hindu Via Negativa

³⁵ The Hindu via negativa is the most varied, because the Hindu tradition has multiple paths, and the via negativa is expressed differently in the different paths.

³⁶ The Advaita Vedanta's via negativa is the most systematic, and it is the foundation of the non-dual teaching. The Vivekachudamani is the most important manual for the via negativa in the Advaita tradition. "The body is not the self, because the body is inert; the breath is not the self, because the breath is a process; the mind is not the self, because the mind is changeable; the intellect is not the self, because the intellect is an instrument; the ego is not the self, because the ego is a false identification. The self is the consciousness that witnesses all of these, and this consciousness is unchanging, pure, and free" (Vivekachudamani, verses 217-227, paraphrased).

³⁷ The Yoga Vasistha's via negativa is the most radical in the Hindu tradition, because it reduces the entire world to the mind, and the mind to the self. "The world is appearance in the mind; the mind is the world; the self is the consciousness that perceives both. When the mind is stilled, the world does not appear, and the self abides in its own nature. This is the via negativa: the stripping away of the world as an independent reality, the stripping away of the mind as a separate entity, the recognition of the self as the only reality" (Yoga Vasistha, Book 6, Chapter 1, paraphrased).

³⁸ The Ashtavakra Gita's via negativa is the most uncompromising. "You are the infinite consciousness, free from all limitation. Why do you seek to know? What is there to know? You are already everything, and the seeking is the bondage. The via negativa here is the recognition that all the objects of the seeking are not real, that all the desires for liberation are not real, that all the efforts for liberation are not real, and that the only reality is the infinite consciousness that you are" (Ashtavakra Gita, 1:1-2, paraphrased).

³⁹ The Samkhya Karika's via negativa is the most philosophical in the Indian tradition, because it is the via negativa of the distinction between purusha and prakriti, the recognition that the self is not the prakriti, and the liberation is the recognition of the distinction. "The purusha is pure consciousness; the prakriti is matter. The purusha is not the prakriti; the prakriti is not the purusha. The liberation is the recognition of this distinction, and the recognition of this distinction is the via negativa: the negation of the identification of the purusha with the prakriti" (Samkhya Karika, 11-14, paraphrased).

⁴⁰ The Sufi Via Negativa

⁴¹ The Sufi via negativa is the most eloquent in the Islamic tradition, and it is centered on the concept of fana (annihilation) and the negation of the self.

⁴² The Masnavi's via negativa is the most important. "The self is a veil between the soul and God. The soul sees God through the veil, but does not see the veil itself; therefore, the soul thinks it sees God directly, but in fact it sees only the veil. The veil must be removed, and when it is removed, the soul sees God directly, and the self no longer appears. This is the via negativa of the Sufi tradition: the stripping away of the self, the stripping away of the veil, the recognition of the Divine as the only reality" (Masnavi, Book 1, paraphrased).

⁴³ The Conference of the Birds' via negativa is the most dramatic. "In the Valley of Poverty and Annihilation, the seeker ceases to exist as a seeker, and what remains is the Divine. The seeker sees himself, the thirty birds, and understands that he is the Simurgh. The via negativa here is the annihilation of the seeker, the annihilation of the self, the recognition of the Divine as the only reality" (Conference of the Birds, Final Valley, paraphrase).

⁴⁴ Al-Ghazzali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din* is the most systematic account of the via negativa in the Islamic tradition. "The heart must be stripped of all its attachments, all its desires, all its passions, all its loves, all its hates, all its cares, all its worries, all its fears. The heart must be empty of everything that is not God, and when the heart is empty, God fills it, and the person knows God" (*Ihya Ulum al-Din*, "Book of the Heart," paraphrase).

⁴⁵ Ibn Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam* is the most metaphysical. "The universe is the mirror in which God contemplates his own names and attributes. The person must strip away the illusion of the independent existence of the universe, and must recognize that the only true existence is God. The via negativa here is the recognition of the Unity of Being, the recognition that the only true existence is God, and that all created things are the shadow of God in the mirror of existence" (*Fusus al-Hikam*, prologue, paraphrase).

⁴⁶ The Taoist Via Negativa in the Zhuangzi and Liezi

⁴⁷ The Zhuangzi's via negativa is the most original in the Taoist tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that all distinctions are ultimately empty, and that the truth is the recognition of the equality of all things.

⁴⁸ "Zhuangzi said: 'The ten thousand things are one. The one is the ten thousand things. The great understanding is broad and unhurried; the small understanding is fractional and busy. ... Who knows the argument that brings the debate to rest? The sage does not argue; the sage knows the equality of all things'" (Zhuangzi, "The Equality of Things," paraphrase). The via negativa here is the recognition of the equality of all things, the dissolution of all distinctions, the recognition that the categories of the small understanding are not ultimately real.

⁴⁹ The Liezi's via negativa is the most practical. "The man who has no self is the man who has recognized that the self is not separate from the world, and that the attempt to make the self separate is the source of all suffering. The man who has no self is the man who knows without knowing, acts without acting, and dwells in the way" (Liezi, Chapter 6, "The Sage," paraphrase).

⁵⁰ The Stoic Via Negativa

⁵¹ The Stoic via negativa is the most practical in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the negation of the desire for things that are not within the power of the person.

⁵² Epictetus's via negativa is the most direct. "The person must strip away all the desires for the things that are not within his power, all the aversions to the things that are not within his power, all the judgments about the things that are not within his power. The person must focus only on what is within his power, and accept what is not within his power as it is. This is the via negativa of the Stoic tradition: the stripping away of the attachment to the externals, the stripping away of the desire for the externals, the stripping away of the aversion to the externals" (Epictetus, *Discourses*, 1.1, paraphrase).

⁵³ Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* is the most extensive personal record of the via negativa in the Stoic tradition. "The person must strip away all the judgments, all the desires, all the aversions, all the attachments to the externals. The person must focus only on the will, only on the reason, only on the virtue. The person must accept the world as it is, and the world as it is the world of change, the world of flux, the world of impermanence" (*Meditations*, various passages, paraphrase).

⁵⁴ The Kabbalistic Via Negativa

⁵⁵ The Kabbalistic via negativa is the most elaborate in the Western tradition, and it is centered on the concept of the Ein Sof, the Infinite that is beyond all description, beyond all predication.

⁵⁶ The Zohar's via negativa is the most important. "The Ein Sof is beyond all description, beyond all predication, beyond all name. The person cannot know the Ein Sof through any knowledge, through any concept, through any image. The person must strip away all the names of God, all the concepts of God, all the images of God, and must enter into the darkness of the Ein Sof, where the person knows God beyond all names, beyond all concepts, beyond all images" (*Zohar*, III, 28b, paraphrase).

⁵⁷ The *Sepher Yetzirah*'s via negativa is the most systematic. "The person knows the Ein Sof through the negation of the letters and the sefirot, the negation of the creation, the negation of the world. The person strips away all the letters and all the sefirot, all the creation and all the world, and enters into the Ein Sof, where the person knows God beyond all letters, beyond all sefirot, beyond all creation, beyond all world" (*Sepher Yetzirah*, 1:1, paraphrase).

⁵⁸ The Lurianic Kabbalah's via negativa is the most dramatic. "In the beginning, the Ein Sof gazed into the mirror of the Supernal Wisdom and created the vessels of the lower sefirot. But the light of the Ein Sof was too great for the vessels, and they shattered, scattering the divine sparks throughout the material world. The person must strip away the illusion of the independent existence of the world, and must recognize that the only true existence is the Ein Sof. The via negativa here is the recognition of the Ein Sof as the only reality, and the recognition that the world is the shattered vessels of the Ein Sof, the scattered sparks of the Ein Sof, the broken fragments of the Ein Sof" (*Etz Chaim*, 2:1, paraphrase).

⁵⁹ The Tibetan Buddhist Via Negativa

⁶⁰ The Tibetan Buddhist via negativa is the most sophisticated in the Buddhist tradition, and it is centered on the concept of the emptiness of the appearances, the emptiness of the mind, the emptiness of the self.

⁶¹ The Tibetan Book of the Dead's via negativa is the most detailed. "The appearances that arise in the bardo are the projections of the mind, and they are empty; if one recognizes them as such, one is liberated. If one does not, one becomes attached and is reborn. The via negativa here is the recognition of the emptiness of the appearances, the recognition of the emptiness of the mind, the recognition of the emptiness of the self. The person strips away all the appearances, all the projections, all the attachments, and enters into the clear light of the death, where the person knows the true nature of the mind" (*Bardo Thodol*, Chapter 5).

⁶² The Dzogchen teaching of the via negativa is the most direct. "The mind is the ground of all experience, but the mind is empty of all substantiality. The practice of Dzogchen is the recognition of the emptiness of the mind, the recognition of the luminosity of the mind, the recognition of the

ground of all experience. The via negativa here is the recognition that the mind is empty, and the recognition of the emptiness is the liberation" (Dzogchen teachings, paraphrase).

⁶³ The Mahamudra teaching of the via negativa is the most systematic in the Kagyu tradition. "The mind is the ground of all experience, but the mind is empty of all substantiality. The practice of Mahamudra is the recognition of the emptiness of the mind, the recognition of the luminosity of the mind, the recognition of the ground of all experience. The via negativa here is the recognition that the mind is empty, and the recognition of the emptiness is the liberation" (Mahamudra teachings, paraphrase).

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: THE BODY AS THE VESSEL OF KNOWING

¹ The spiritual traditions have very different attitudes toward the body, and these attitudes reveal something fundamental about their understanding of the nature of knowing. The traditions that see the body as an obstacle to knowledge are the traditions that see knowledge as a purely intellectual or spiritual affair, and they are the traditions that are most likely to view the spiritual life as an escape from the body. The traditions that see the body as a vehicle of knowledge are the traditions that see knowledge as something that must be embodied, and they are the traditions that are most likely to view the spiritual life as a transformation of the whole person.

² The Buddhist Embodied Knowing

³ The Buddhist tradition's attitude toward the body is mostly negative, because the body is one of the five aggregates (the first of the five aggregates is the body, the physical form) and the body is the source of the suffering that comes from the attachment to the impermanence, the uncleanliness, the insubstantiality of the body. But the Buddhist tradition has also developed some of the most sophisticated somatic practices in the spiritual tradition, because the body is the most accessible object of the mindfulness, and the mindfulness of the body is the first foundation of mindfulness.

⁴ The Satipatthana Sutta's mindfulness of the body is the most important somatic practice in the Buddhist tradition. "The monk observes the body as the body: the breathing, the postures, the movements, the elements, the decomposition of the body, the inevitability of decay. He observes the body as the body, without attachment, without aversion, without confusion. Through this observation, the monk understands the true nature of the body: it is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. And through this understanding, the monk becomes dispassionate toward the body, and the body is abandoned, and the person is liberated" (Satipatthana Sutta, MN 10, paraphrase).

⁵ The mindfulness of breathing (anapanasati) is the most important practice of the embodied knowing in the Buddhist tradition, because the breath is the most immediate connection between the body and the mind, and the mindfulness of the breath is the foundation of all the other practices. "The person who practices the mindfulness of breathing is the person who observes the breath as the breath, without attachment, without aversion, without confusion. The person observes the breath as it is long, the breath as it is short, the breath as it is the whole body, the breath as it is the calming of the body. Through this observation, the person understands the true nature of the breath, and the breath is a vehicle of the knowing" (Majjhima Nikaya, Anapanasati Sutta, MN 118, paraphrase).

⁶ The visualization practices of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition are the most sophisticated somatic practices in the Buddhist tradition, and they are significant for the teaching that the body is the vessel of the visualization, the body is the means of the transformation, the body is the vehicle of the knowing. The Tibetan Book of the Dead is the most important text of the visualization practices, and it is significant for the teaching that the body is the vessel of the recognition, the body is the means of the liberation.

⁷ The Dzogchen and Mahamudra traditions are the most important in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition for the embodied knowing, because they are the traditions that teach the direct recognition of the nature of mind, and this recognition is not purely mental but involves the body in a fundamental way. The recognition is the recognition of the body as the vessel of the rigpa, the body as the manifestation of the primordial awareness, the body as the expression of the nature of mind.

⁸ The Hindu Embodied Knowing

⁹ The Hindu tradition's attitude toward the body is much more positive than the Buddhist attitude, because the body is one of the five sheaths in the Taittiriya Upanishad and the body is a manifestation of the divine. But the Hindu tradition has also developed the most sophisticated somatic practices in the spiritual tradition—the yoga, the pranayama, the meditation on the chakras, the practice of the inner alchemy—because the body is the vehicle of the transformation, the body is the means of the liberation.

¹⁰ The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali's asana is the most important practice of the embodied knowing in the Hindu tradition. "The asana is the posture of the body, stable and comfortable. Through the practice of the asana, the body becomes a vessel of the practice, and the body is the foundation for all the other practices" (Yoga Sutras, 2:46-48).

¹¹ The teaching on the chakras is the most important development of the somatic theory in the Hindu tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the body is the map of the spiritual life, the body is the instrument of the transformation, the body is the vehicle of the knowing. "The chakras are the centers of the energy in the body, and they are the map of the spiritual life. The practice of the meditation on the chakras is the practice of the transformation of the energy, and the result is the transformation of the person" (from the Hatha Yoga Pradipika and the various tantric texts).

¹² The Tirumurai and the Divya Prabandham are the most important Tamil texts of the embodied knowing, because the hymns of the Tirumurai and the Divya Prabandham are the most direct expression of the devotion to the Divine, and the devotion is the most powerful means of the transformation of the person. "Shiva is the lord of all, the source of all, the destroyer of all enemies. The devotee who recites the hymns of the Tirumurai with the body, with the breath, with the heart—that devotee is freed from all the bonds of the enemies, and is united with Shiva" (Tirumurai, various hymns, paraphrase).

¹³ The Devi Mahatmya is the most important text of the embodied knowing in the Hindu tradition, because the worship of the Divine Mother is the most powerful practice of the embodied devotion, and the embodied devotion is the most direct means of the transformation of the person. "The Divine Mother is the source of all power, the source of all courage, the source of all victory. The devotee who worships the Divine Mother with the body, with the breath, with the heart—that devotee is freed from all the bonds of the enemies, and is united with the Divine Mother" (Devi Mahatmya, various chapters, paraphrase).

¹⁴ The Ashtavakra Gita and the Avadhuta Gita are the most uncompromising in the Hindu tradition for the embodied knowing, because they present the recognition of the true nature of the self as the only reality, and this recognition is not a purely intellectual affair but a direct experience that involves the whole person. "You are the infinite consciousness, free from all limitation. The body is an appearance in the consciousness; the mind is an appearance in the consciousness; the intellect is an appearance in the consciousness; the ego is an appearance in the consciousness. You are the consciousness that is the ground of all these appearances, and the recognition of this is the liberation" (Ashtavakra Gita, 1:1-2, paraphrase).

¹⁵ The Taoist Embodied Knowing

¹⁶ The Taoist tradition's attitude toward the body is the most positive of all the spiritual traditions, because the body is a manifestation of the Tao, the body is a small universe, the body is a vessel of the transformation. The Taoist somatic practices—the inner alchemy, the circulation of the light, the cultivation of the energy—are the most sophisticated in the spiritual tradition, and they are significant for the teaching that the body is the primary vehicle of the knowing.

¹⁷ The Tao te Ching's teaching of the embodied knowing is the most foundational. "The sage empties the mind, fills the belly, weakens the ambition, strengthens the bones. He always keeps the people without knowledge and without desire, so that those who have knowledge do not dare to act. He practices non-action, and nothing is left undone" (Tao te Ching, 3). The teaching is that the body is the vessel of the knowing, the body is the foundation of the practice, and the body is the means of the transformation.

¹⁸ The Secret of the Golden Flower is the most important text of the Taoist inner alchemy, and it is significant for the teaching that the body is the vessel of the circulation of the light, the body is the means of the transformation of the essence into the energy, and the energy into the spirit. "The light is the light of consciousness itself; when the light is allowed to circulate freely through the body, the body becomes a vessel of spiritual transformation, and the person knows the way directly, without the interference of the mind, without the mediation of the concepts" (Secret of the Golden Flower, Chapter 1).

¹⁹ Zhuangzi's teaching of the embodied knowing is the most radical in the Taoist tradition, because it presents the body as the partner of the mind in the practice of wu-wei. "Cook Ding laid down his knife and said, 'What I care about is the Way, which goes beyond skill. ... Now I use my mind, not my eyes. My senses stop and my spirit moves as it will. Following the natural structure, I strike the empty spaces where the knife finds no hindrance. The blade works through without friction. ... At the joints, there are spaces, and the knife never meets any resistance. So it has lasted nineteen years, and the blade is as sharp as if it had just come from the grindstone'" (Zhuangzi, Chapter 3, paraphrase). The embodied knowing here is the knowing of the body, the mind that is in harmony with the body, the practice that is the expression of the body-mind unity.

²⁰ The Christian Embodied Knowing

²¹ The Christian tradition's attitude toward the body is ambivalent, because the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) but also the source of the temptation and the suffering. The Christian tradition has developed the most sophisticated ascetical practices in the Western tradition, and these practices are significant for the teaching that the body is the vessel of the transformation, the body is the means of the purification, the body is the instrument of the knowing.

²² The Desert Fathers and Mothers' asceticism is the most important practice of the embodied knowing in the Christian tradition. "The monk must train the body through the practice of the austerities: fasting, vigil, prayer, silence, poverty, obedience, humility, patience. The body is the vessel of the transformation, the body is the means of the purification, the body is the instrument of the knowing" (Sayings of the Desert Fathers, various apophthegmata, paraphrase).

²³ The practice of the Jesus Prayer in the Eastern Orthodox tradition is one of the most sophisticated somatic practices in the Christian tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the body is the vessel of the prayer, the body is the means of the continual remembrance of God. "The person repeats the Jesus Prayer with the breath, with the body, with the mind, with the heart: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' The prayer becomes the rhythm of the person's life, and the person knows God through the continual repetition of the prayer" (from the tradition of the Orthodox hesychasts).

²⁴ The Christian contemplative tradition's emphasis on the body is the most important, because the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the body is the means of the transformation. "The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the person must treat the body with respect, with care, with purity. The body is the vessel of the transformation, the body is the means of the purification, the body is the instrument of the knowing" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, paraphrase).

²⁵ The Sufi Embodied Knowing

²⁶ The Sufi tradition's attitude toward the body is the most positive of all the Islamic traditions, because the body is the vessel of the dhikr, the body is the means of the transformation, the body is the vehicle of the knowing. The Sufi somatic practices—the whirling dance, the dhikr with the breath, the meditation on the heart—are the most sophisticated in the Islamic tradition, and they are significant for the teaching that the body is the primary means of the encounter with the Divine.

²⁷ The Mevlevi order's whirling dance is the most famous Sufi somatic practice, and it is significant for the teaching that the body is the vessel of the whirling, the body is the means of the transformation, the body is the expression of the ecstasy. "The whirling is the expression of the soul's longing for the Divine; the right hand turned upward receives the grace from above, and the left hand turned downward transmits the grace to the earth. The whirling is the dance of the soul in the presence of God, the expression of the joy of the union" (from the Mevlevi tradition).

²⁸ The practice of the dhikr with the breath is one of the most sophisticated Sufi somatic practices, and it is significant for the teaching that the body is the vessel of the dhikr, the body is the means of the continual remembrance of God. "The person repeats the dhikr with the breath, with the body, with the mind, with the heart: 'There is no god but God.' The dhikr becomes the rhythm of the person's life, and the person knows God through the continual repetition of the dhikr" (from the Sufi traditions).

²⁹ The Kabbalistic Embodied Knowing

³⁰ The Kabbalistic tradition's attitude toward the body is ambivalent, because the body is the vessel of the soul, the body is the means of the performance of the mitzvot, but the body is also the source of the distraction and the impurity. The Kabbalistic somatic practices—the meditation on the letters, the visualization of the sefirot, the performance of the mitzvot with the intention of the unification—

are the most sophisticated in the Western tradition, and they are significant for the teaching that the body is the vessel of the transformation, the body is the means of the rectification.

³¹ The performance of the mitzvot is the most important Kabbalistic somatic practice, and it is significant for the teaching that the body is the instrument of the tikkun, the body is the means of the gathering of the sparks, the body is the vehicle of the transformation. "Every commandment that a person performs with the body, with the breath, with the heart, lifts a spark from the klipah and returns it to the tree of life. The body is the means of the tikkun, the body is the vessel of the restoration, the body is the instrument of the knowing" (Etz Chaim, 3:1, paraphrase).

³² The meditation on the letters is the most sophisticated Kabbalistic somatic practice, and it is significant for the teaching that the body is the vessel of the meditation, the body is the means of the transformation, the body is the vehicle of the knowing. "The person meditates on the twenty-two letters and the ten sefirot, and the body becomes the vessel of the meditation, the body becomes the means of the transformation, the body becomes the vehicle of the knowing" (Sepher Yetzirah, 1:1, paraphrase).

³³ The Tibetan Buddhist Embodied Knowing

³⁴ The Tibetan Buddhist tradition's attitude toward the body is the most positive of all the Buddhist traditions, because the body is the vessel of the subtle energy, the body is the means of the transformation, the body is the vehicle of the knowing. The Tibetan Buddhist somatic practices—the tummo (the yoga of the inner fire), the subtle body practices, the completion stage practices—are the most sophisticated in the Buddhist tradition, and they are significant for the teaching that the body is the primary means of the transformation.

³⁵ The Tibetan Book of the Dead's somatic teaching is the most detailed. "The body is the vessel of the subtle energy, the body is the means of the transformation, the body is the vehicle of the knowing. The dissolution of the body at death is the dissolution of the subtle energy, and the recognition of the nature of the subtle energy is the liberation" (Bardo Thodol, Chapter 4).

³⁶ The Dzogchen teaching of the embodied knowing is the most direct. "The body is the manifestation of the rigpa, the body is the expression of the primordial awareness, the body is the vehicle of the transformation. The practice of Dzogchen is the recognition of the nature of the body, the recognition of the body as the manifestation of the rigpa, the recognition of the body as the vehicle of the knowing" (Dzogchen teachings, paraphrase).

³⁷ The Mahamudra teaching of the embodied knowing is the most systematic in the Kagyu tradition. "The body is the manifestation of the mind, the body is the expression of the nature of the mind, the body is the vehicle of the transformation. The practice of Mahamudra is the recognition of the nature of the body, the recognition of the body as the manifestation of the nature of the mind, the recognition of the body as the vehicle of the knowing" (Mahamudra teachings, paraphrase).

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: LOVE AS WAY OF KNOWING

¹ The idea that love is a way of knowing is one of the most important insights in the spiritual tradition, and it is an insight that is largely absent from the Western intellectual tradition, which tends to privilege the intellect as the faculty of knowledge. The traditions that emphasize love as a way of

knowing recognize that the most profound truths are not accessible through the intellect alone, and that the reality of the other—the other person, the other being, the divine other—can only be known through the love that dissolves the distance between the knower and the known.

² The Christian Theory of Love as Knowing

³ No tradition has developed the theory of love as a way of knowing more fully than the Christian tradition, and the Christian understanding of the knowledge of God as the knowledge of love is one of the most important contributions of the tradition to the spiritual domain.

⁴ The Gospel of John's teaching of the knowledge of God through love is the most foundational. "God is love, and the person who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in the person. The knowledge of God is the knowledge of love, the knowledge of the person who loves, and the knowledge of the person who is loved. God is known through love, and God is the object of love" (1 John 4:16, paraphrase).

⁵ The 1 Corinthians 13 is the most important text of the Christian theory of love as knowing, and it is significant for the teaching that love is not merely an emotion but a way of knowing. "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). The teaching is that love is the condition of all genuine knowledge, and the person who does not have love does not have genuine knowledge, no matter how much the person knows.

⁶ The teaching of the Cloud of Unknowing on love as knowing is the most important, because the author's entire method is based on the idea that the person knows God through love, not through knowledge. "The person must direct the love into the cloud of unknowing, piercing the cloud with a single point of longing love. The person knows God in the darkness, in the unknowing, in the cloud, and this knowledge is more real than any knowledge that can be known through the mind. The love is the vehicle of the knowing, the love is the means of the knowledge, the love is the condition of the knowledge" (The Cloud of Unknowing, Chapters 3-4).

⁷ The teaching of Meister Eckhart on love as knowing is the most radical. "The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me; my eye and God's eye is one eye, one view, one knowledge, one love. The love of God is the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of God is the love of God. The person knows God through the love of God, and the person knows God in the love of God" (Meister Eckhart, Sermon 57, paraphrase).

⁸ The teaching of Julian of Norwich on love as knowing is the most loving. "The person knows God through the vision of the love of God, through the contemplation of the suffering of Christ, through the recognition that 'all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.' The love of God is the vehicle of the knowing, the love of God is the means of the knowledge, the love of God is the condition of the knowledge" (Revelations of Divine Love, Chapters 1-86).

⁹ The teaching of Thomas Merton on love as knowing is the most contemporary. "The love of God is the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of God is the love of God. The person knows God through the love of God, and the person knows God in the love of God. The love is the vehicle of the knowing, the love is the means of the knowledge, the love is the condition of the knowledge" (New Seeds of Contemplation, from Merton).

¹⁰ The Sufi Theory of Love as Knowing

¹¹ The Sufi tradition's theory of love as a way of knowing is the most eloquent of all the traditions that emphasize this insight, and the Sufi poetry of love is one of the most beautiful expressions of the idea.

¹² The Masnavi's teaching of love as knowing is the most important. "The person knows the Divine through the love of the Divine, the love that is the fire that burns away the self, the love that is the longing that draws the soul to the Divine. The love is the vehicle of the knowing, the love is the means of the knowledge, the love is the condition of the knowledge. The person who knows the Divine without love knows only the shadow of the Divine; the person who knows the Divine with love knows the Divine directly" (Masnavi, Book 1, paraphrase).

¹³ The Conference of the Birds' teaching of love as knowing is the most dramatic. "The journey through the seven valleys is the journey of the love, and the love is the vehicle of the knowing, the love is the means of the knowledge, the love is the condition of the knowledge. In the Valley of Love, the seeker is consumed by the love, and all his limitations are burned away. The love is the fire that burns away the self, and the person who is burned by the love knows the Divine directly" (Conference of the Birds, summary of the seven valleys, paraphrase).

¹⁴ The Divan Shams is the most ecstatic expression of love as knowing in the Sufi tradition. "I died as a mineral and became a plant, I died as a plant and rose to animal, I died as animal and I was a man. Why should I fear? When was I less by dying? Yet once more I shall die as a man, to soar with angels blest. But even from angelic states, I must pass on. At last, I became a void, and from that void, I learned the secret of the universe" (Divan Shams, paraphrase). The Secret of the universe is learned from the void, from the annihilation, from the love that is the fire that burns away the self, and the love is the vehicle of the knowing, the love is the means of the knowledge, the love is the condition of the knowledge.

¹⁵ The Bhakti Theory of Love as Knowing

¹⁶ The Hindu Bhakti tradition's theory of love as a way of knowing is the most important in the Hindu tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the knowledge of the divine is the knowledge of the love, and the knowledge of the love is the knowledge of the divine.

¹⁷ The Bhagavad Gita's teaching of love as knowing is the most foundational. "The person who worships Me with faith and devotion, who has surrendered all actions to Me, who has taken refuge in Me, who has given up all other dharmas, and who has sought refuge in Me alone—such a person is freed from all the bonds of the gunas, and is united with Me. The knowledge of Me is the knowledge of the love, the knowledge of the devotion, the knowledge of the surrender, the knowledge of the refuge" (Bhagavad Gita, 18:65-66, paraphrase).

¹⁸ The Tirumurai and the Divya Prabandham are the most important Tamil texts of love as knowing, because the hymns of the Tirumurai and the Divya Prabandham are the most direct expression of the love of Shiva and the love of Vishnu, and the love is the vehicle of the knowing, the love is the means of the knowledge, the love is the condition of the knowledge. "Shiva is the lord of all, the source of all, the destroyer of all enemies. The devotee who loves Shiva with the heart, with the breath, with the body—that devotee knows Shiva directly, and the knowledge of Shiva is the knowledge of the love" (Tirumurai, various hymns, paraphrase).

¹⁹ The Devi Mahatmya is the most important text of love as knowing in the Hindu tradition, because the worship of the Divine Mother is the most powerful practice of the love of the divine, and the love is the vehicle of the knowing, the love is the means of the knowledge, the love is the condition of the knowledge. "The Divine Mother is the source of all power, the source of all courage, the source of all victory. The devotee who loves the Divine Mother with the heart, with the breath, with the body—that devotee knows the Divine Mother directly, and the knowledge of the Divine Mother is the knowledge of the love" (Devi Mahatmya, various chapters, paraphrase).

²⁰ The Taoist Theory of Love as Knowing

²¹ The Taoist theory of love as knowing is the most subtle in the spiritual tradition, because the Taoist tradition does not emphasize love as the primary vehicle of knowing, but the Taoist teaching of compassion (ci) and kindness (ci) is the most important expression of the idea.

²² The Tao te Ching's teaching of compassion as knowing is the most foundational. "The sage has the heart of the world, and the heart of the world is the heart of compassion. The sage knows the way through the compassion, and the compassion is the vehicle of the knowing, the compassion is the means of the knowledge, the compassion is the condition of the knowledge" (Tao te Ching, 67, paraphrase).

²³ The Tao te Ching's teaching of the three treasures is the most important. "The three treasures are compassion, frugality, and the refusal to dare to be ahead of the world. The compassion is the first treasure, the seed of all the other treasures, the root of all the other virtues. The sage knows the way through the compassion, and the compassion is the vehicle of the knowing, the compassion is the means of the knowledge, the compassion is the condition of the knowledge" (Tao te Ching, 67, paraphrase).

²⁴ Zhuangzi's teaching of love as knowing is the most radical. "The perfect person has no heart of his own; the people's heart is his heart. The good he gives to others, he gives to himself. He does not accumulate for himself; the more he gives, the more he has. The sage knows the way through the union with the people, and the union is the vehicle of the knowing, the union is the means of the knowledge, the union is the condition of the knowledge" (Zhuangzi, "The Great Sage," paraphrase).

²⁵ The Buddhist Theory of Love as Knowing

²⁶ The Buddhist teaching of love as knowing is the most sophisticated in the spiritual tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the knowledge of the reality is the knowledge of the compassion, and the knowledge of the compassion is the knowledge of the reality.

²⁷ The Metta Sutta is the most important Buddhist text of love as knowing, and it is significant for the teaching that the cultivation of loving-kindness is the most important practice of the heart, and the love is the vehicle of the knowing, the love is the means of the knowledge, the love is the condition of the knowledge. "The person who cultivates loving-kindness toward all beings, without exception, without distinction, without limit, knows the beings directly, and the knowledge of the beings is the knowledge of the love" (Metta Sutta, paraphrase).

²⁸ The Bodhicaryavatara is the most important Tibetan Buddhist text of love as knowing, and it is significant for the teaching that the compassion is the vehicle of the knowing, the compassion is the means of the knowledge, the compassion is the condition of the knowledge. "The person who cultivates the bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment, knows the beings directly, and the knowledge of

the beings is the knowledge of the compassion. The bodhicitta is the vehicle of the knowing, the bodhicitta is the means of the knowledge, the bodhicitta is the condition of the knowledge" (Bodhicaryavatara, Chapter 1, paraphrase).

²⁹ The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sūtra is the most important Mahāyāna text of love as knowing, and it is significant for the teaching that the compassion is the vehicle of the knowing, the compassion is the means of the knowledge, the compassion is the condition of the knowledge. "The Bodhisattva knows the beings through the compassion, and the compassion is the vehicle of the knowing, the compassion is the means of the knowledge, the compassion is the condition of the knowledge. The Bodhisattva knows the beings directly, through the compassion, and the knowledge of the beings is the knowledge of the compassion" (Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa, Chapter 2, paraphrase).

³⁰ The Stoic Theory of Love as Knowing

³¹ The Stoic theory of love as knowing is the most practical in the Western tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the love of the world is the knowledge of the world, and the knowledge of the world is the love of the world.

³² Marcus Aurelius's Meditations is the most extensive personal record of the Stoic theory of love as knowing. "The person must love the world as it is, and the love of the world is the knowledge of the world. The person must love the other persons as they are, and the love of the other persons is the knowledge of the other persons. The person must love the life as it is, and the love of the life is the knowledge of the life" (Meditations, various passages, paraphrase).

³³ Seneca's Letters are the most practical Stoic texts of love as knowing, and they are significant for the teaching that the love of the world is the knowledge of the world, and the knowledge of the world is the love of the world. "The person must love the world as it is, and the love of the world is the knowledge of the world. The person must love the other persons as they are, and the love of the other persons is the knowledge of the other persons. The person must love the life as it is, and the love of the life is the knowledge of the life" (Seneca, Letters, various letters, paraphrase).

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: ETHICS AND THE KNOWING THAT COMES THROUGH DOING

¹ The idea that ethical living is a form of knowing is one of the most important insights in the spiritual tradition, and it is an insight that is largely absent from the Western intellectual tradition, which tends to separate ethics from epistemology. The traditions that emphasize ethics as a way of knowing recognize that the truth of the person's understanding is tested in the doing, and that the person who does not live the truth does not know the truth, no matter how much the person thinks they know.

² The Confucian Theory of Ethics as Knowing

³ The Confucian tradition's theory of ethics as knowing is the most systematic in the world, and it is significant for the teaching that the person knows through the practice of the virtues, and that the knowledge is the result of the practice, not the cause of the practice.

⁴ The Analects' teaching of ethics as knowing is the most foundational. "The person who is not humane does not know the Way, and the person who is humane knows the Way. The person earns the knowledge of the Way through the practice of the virtues, and the practice of the virtues is the means of the knowledge, the practice of the virtues is the condition of the knowledge" (Analects, various chapters, paraphrase).

⁵ The Great Learning's teaching of ethics as knowing is the most systematic. "The cultivation of the person depends on the rectification of the heart; the rectification of the heart depends on the sincerity of the will; the sincerity of the will depends on the extension of the knowledge; the extension of the knowledge depends on the investigation of the things. The person knows the truth through the investigation of the things, and the investigation of the things is the practice of the ethics, the practice of the ethics is the means of the knowledge, the practice of the ethics is the condition of the knowledge" (Great Learning, Chapter 5, paraphrase).

⁶ Mencius's teaching of ethics as knowing is the most important in the Confucian tradition. "The person knows the good through the practice of the good, and the good is the condition of the knowledge, the good is the means of the knowledge, the good is the vehicle of the knowing. The person knows the truth through the practice of the virtues, and the practice of the virtues is the means of the knowledge, the practice of the virtues is the condition of the knowledge" (Mencius, various chapters, paraphrase).

⁷ The Buddhist Theory of Ethics as Knowing

⁸ The Buddhist theory of ethics as knowing is the most systematic in the spiritual tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the knowledge is the result of the practice of the Eightfold Path, and that the practice of the Eightfold Path is the means of the knowledge, the practice of the Eightfold Path is the condition of the knowledge.

⁹ The Eightfold Path is the most important framework for the Buddhist theory of ethics as knowing. "Right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration—these are the means of the knowledge, the means of the wisdom, the means of the liberation. The person knows the truth through the practice of the Eightfold Path, and the practice of the Eightfold Path is the condition of the knowledge" (from the Pali Canon, as expressed in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya 56.11, paraphrase).

¹⁰ The teaching of the Karma Yoga in the Bhagavad Gita is the most important Hindu text of ethics as knowing, and it is significant for the teaching that the knowledge is the result of the practice of the action without attachment. "The person who performs the actions without attachment to the results, who offers all actions to Krishna, who has surrendered all actions to Krishna, who has taken refuge in Krishna—that person knows the truth directly, and the knowledge of the truth is the knowledge of the practice" (Bhagavad Gita, 2:47-48, paraphrase).

¹¹ The Jain theory of ethics as knowing is the most rigorous in the spiritual tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the knowledge is the result of the practice of the non-violence, and that the practice of the non-violence is the means of the knowledge, the practice of the non-violence is the condition of the knowledge. "The person who practices the non-violence, the person who practices the truthfulness, the person who practices the non-stealing, the person who practices the celibacy, the person who practices the non-possessiveness—that person knows the truth directly, and

the knowledge of the truth is the knowledge of the practice" (from the Jain texts, as expressed in the Tattvartha Sutra, 4:1-10, paraphrase).

¹² The Taoist Theory of Ethics as Knowing

¹³ The Taoist theory of ethics as knowing is the most distinctive in the spiritual tradition, because the Taoist tradition does not separate ethics from the way of the Tao, and the person knows the Tao through the practice of the wu-wei, and the practice of the wu-wei is the means of the knowledge, the practice of the wu-wei is the condition of the knowledge.

¹⁴ The Tao te Ching's teaching of ethics as knowing is the most foundational. "The sage does nothing, yet nothing is left undone. The way of the sage is to do and not to contend. The sage knows the Tao through the practice of the wu-wei, and the wu-wei is the means of the knowledge, the wu-wei is the condition of the knowledge. The person who practices the wu-wei knows the Tao directly, and the knowledge of the Tao is the knowledge of the practice" (Tao te Ching, various chapters, paraphrase).

¹⁵ Zhuangzi's teaching of ethics as knowing is the most radical. "The perfect person has no self, the spiritual person has no merit, the sage has no name. The person knows the way through the practice of the wu-wei, and the wu-wei is the means of the knowledge, the wu-wei is the condition of the knowledge. The person who practices the wu-wei knows the way directly, and the knowledge of the way is the knowledge of the practice" (Zhuangzi, "The Equality of Things," paraphrase).

¹⁶ The Christian Theory of Ethics as Knowing

¹⁷ The Christian theory of ethics as knowing is the most structured in the Western tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the knowledge of God is the knowledge of the love, and the practice of the love is the means of the knowledge, the practice of the love is the condition of the knowledge.

¹⁸ The Gospel of John's teaching of ethics as knowing is the most foundational. "The person who loves the other person knows God, and the person who does not love the other person does not know God. The knowledge of God is the knowledge of the love, the knowledge of the love is the knowledge of God" (1 John 4:7-8, paraphrase).

¹⁹ The teaching of the Cloud of Unknowing on ethics as knowing is the most important. "The person knows God through the practice of the love, the practice of the compassion, the practice of the service, the practice of the charity. The love is the vehicle of the knowing, the love is the means of the knowledge, the love is the condition of the knowledge. The person who practices the love knows God directly" (The Cloud of Unknowing, various chapters, paraphrase).

²⁰ The teaching of Meister Eckhart on ethics as knowing is the most radical. "The person knows God through the practice of the love, the practice of the humility, the practice of the poverty, the practice of the obedience. The love is the vehicle of the knowing, the love is the means of the knowledge, the love is the condition of the knowledge. The person who practices the love knows God directly" (Meister Eckhart, various sermons, paraphrase).

²¹ The teaching of Julian of Norwich on ethics as knowing is the most loving. "The person knows God through the practice of the love, the practice of the compassion, the practice of the service, the practice of the charity. The love is the vehicle of the knowing, the love is the means of the knowledge, the love is the condition of the knowledge. The person who practices the love knows God directly" (Revelations of Divine Love, various chapters, paraphrase).

²² The teaching of Thomas Merton on ethics as knowing is the most contemporary. "The person knows God through the practice of the love, the practice of the compassion, the practice of the service, the practice of the charity. The love is the vehicle of the knowing, the love is the means of the knowledge, the love is the condition of the knowledge. The person who practices the love knows God directly" (New Seeds of Contemplation, from Merton).

²³ The Sufi Theory of Ethics as Knowing

²⁴ The Sufi theory of ethics as knowing is the most eloquent in the Islamic tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the knowledge of the Divine is the knowledge of the love, and the practice of the love is the means of the knowledge, the practice of the love is the condition of the knowledge.

²⁵ The Masnavi's teaching of ethics as knowing is the most important. "The person knows the Divine through the practice of the love, the practice of the compassion, the practice of the service, the practice of the charity. The love is the vehicle of the knowing, the love is the means of the knowledge, the love is the condition of the knowledge. The person who practices the love knows the Divine directly" (Masnavi, various chapters, paraphrase).

²⁶ The Conference of the Birds' teaching of ethics as knowing is the most dramatic. "The journey through the seven valleys is the journey of the practice, and the practice is the means of the knowledge, the practice is the condition of the knowledge. The person knows the Divine through the practice of the journey, and the knowledge of the Divine is the knowledge of the practice" (Conference of the Birds, various chapters, paraphrase).

²⁷ Al-Ghazzali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din* is the most systematic account of ethics as knowing in the Islamic tradition. "The person knows God through the practice of the virtues, the practice of the good deeds, the practice of the service, the practice of the charity. The practice is the vehicle of the knowing, the practice is the means of the knowledge, the practice is the condition of the knowledge. The person who practices the good deeds knows God directly" (*Ihya Ulum al-Din*, various books, paraphrase).

²⁸ The Stoic Theory of Ethics as Knowing

²⁹ The Stoic theory of ethics as knowing is the most practical in the Western tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the knowledge is the result of the practice of the virtues, and that the practice of the virtues is the means of the knowledge, the practice of the virtues is the condition of the knowledge.

³⁰ Epictetus's teaching of ethics as knowing is the most direct. "The person knows the truth through the practice of the virtues, the practice of the good actions, the practice of the service, the practice of the good. The practice is the vehicle of the knowing, the practice is the means of the knowledge, the practice is the condition of the knowledge. The person who practices the good knows the truth directly" (Epictetus, Discourses, various chapters, paraphrase).

³¹ Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* is the most extensive personal record of the Stoic theory of ethics as knowing. "The person must practice the virtues, the practice of the justice, the practice of the courage, the practice of the temperance, the practice of the wisdom. The practice is the vehicle of the knowing, the practice is the means of the knowledge, the practice is the condition of the knowledge. The person who practices the virtues knows the truth directly" (*Meditations*, various passages, paraphrase).

³² Seneca's Letters are the most practical Stoic texts of ethics as knowing. "The person must practice the virtues, the practice of the good actions, the practice of the service, the practice of the charity. The practice is the vehicle of the knowing, the practice is the means of the knowledge, the practice is the condition of the knowledge. The person who practices the good deeds knows the truth directly" (Seneca, Letters, various letters, paraphrase).

EPILOGUE TO VOLUME III

¹ This volume has addressed the most important modes of knowing in the spiritual tradition: the direct knowing, the via negativa, the embodied knowing, the love as knowing, and the ethics as knowing. These are the modes of knowing that are the most directly relevant to the actual person, the most immediately applicable to the actual life, and the most difficult to actually implement.

² What has not been addressed is the question of the distinctive contribution of each tradition—the question of what it is that each tradition can teach that no other tradition fully teaches, and the question of how the various traditions supplement one another. This is the subject of Volume IV.

Volume IV: Traditions in their Distinctiveness

PROLOGUE: Why Comparative Distinctiveness Matters

¹ The temptation in any attempt at synthesis is to flatten differences— to find the common core and eliminate the variations as accidents of history, culture, or temperament. This is ultimately a loss, because the variations are not accidents. The different traditions developed in response to genuinely different problems, with genuinely different insights, and what each tradition uniquely offers is not a variation on a single theme but a distinct voice in a genuine conversation.

² The Jain tradition's radical commitment to non-violence (ahimsa) is not simply a detail of Jain ethics; it is a distinctive metaphysical insight about the sacredness of life in its most minute form. The Taoist commitment to wu-wei is not simply a technique of lifestyle; it is a distinctive metaphysics of process and flow. The Buddhist analysis of suffering is not simply a psychological insight; it is the most systematic account of the relationship between consciousness and suffering available in any tradition. The Christian insistence on the incarnation is not simply a theological doctrine; it is a distinctive vision of the relationship between the eternal and the temporal. The Stoic discipline of judgment is not simply a therapeutic method; it is a distinctive vision of reason's relation to reality. The Kabbalistic drama of the breaking of the vessels is not simply a myth; it is a distinctive account of the origin of the brokenness of the world and the role of human action in its repair.

³ The task of this volume is to honor the distinctiveness of each tradition—not to reduce each to its "essence" (which would be another form of flattening) but to identify what each tradition says that, to the best understanding available, no other tradition says with the same force, the same precision, or the same comprehensiveness.

⁴ The method is comparative: for each major tradition, the distinctive contribution is identified through attention to its primary sources, and the comparison is made with the neighboring traditions to establish the boundaries of what is distinctive and what is shared. The goal is not judgmental (which tradition is best) but descriptive (what does each tradition offer).

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: THE HINDU TRADITION — THE TECHNOLOGIES OF NON-DUAL RECOGNITION

¹ The Hindu tradition is, in one sense, the most comprehensive of all the spiritual traditions, because it has developed the widest range of paths to liberation—paths for every temperament, every capacity, every starting point in life. The Bhagavad Gita's integration of karma yoga, jnana yoga, and bhakti yoga into a single text is the most complete expression of this comprehensiveness, and it is one of the most important achievements of the spiritual tradition as a whole.

² But what is most distinctive about the Hindu tradition is not its diversity of paths but its most radical metaphysical insight: the recognition of the identity of the self (Atman) with the ground of all reality (Brahman). This is the insight of the Upanishads, and it is the insight that distinguishes the Hindu tradition from all others.

³ The Upanishadic Non-Dual Insight

⁴ The Upanishads are the source of the non-dual insight, and the primary texts of the Upanishadic tradition are among the most concentrated and the most powerful in the entire spiritual domain. The Chandogya Upanishad's "Tat tvam asi" (That thou art) is the most famous statement of the non-dual insight in the history of religion, and it is significant because it is not a philosophical argument but a direct pointing to what is already the case. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad's analysis of the self as distinct from the body, the breath, the mind, the intellect, and the ego—but identical with the ground of all these—is the most systematic exposition of the non-dual insight in any tradition. The Katha Upanishad's teaching that the self is "unborn, eternal, ever-existing, and ancient" and that "when all the desires that dwell in the heart fall away, the mortal becomes immortal" is the most concise statement of the goal of the spiritual life in the entire Upanishadic corpus.

⁵ The Mandukya Upanishad is the most important of the principal Upanishads for the understanding of the structure of consciousness, because it presents the analysis of the four states of consciousness (waking, dreaming, deep sleep, and the fourth, turiya) and the teaching that the fourth is the ground of all three, the state that is "unseen, beyond the reach of ordinary inquiry, ungraspable, indefinable, the essence of the experience of one's own self, the cessation of all phenomena, peace, bliss, and nondual." The Gaudapada Karika on the Mandukya Upanishad is the most important philosophical development of the non-dual teaching in the Indian tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the world is unreal but not like a dream—it is an illusion that cannot be dispelled by another illusion, but only by the direct recognition of the non-dual reality.

⁶ The Yoga Vasistha is the most extensive exposition of the non-dual teaching in the Hindu tradition, and it presents the insight that the world is appearance in the mind, and the mind is the world, and the self is the consciousness that perceives both. The text is structured as a dialogue between the sage Vasistha and Rama, and its teaching is that liberation is the recognition that the mind is the source of the appearance of the world, and that the stilling of the mind is the liberation.

⁷ The Ashtavakra Gita and the Avadhuta Gita are the most uncompromising expressions of the non-dual insight in the Hindu tradition, and they push the insight to its absolute limit. The Ashtavakra Gita's teaching that "You are the infinite consciousness, free from all limitation. Why do you seek liberation? You are already free" and the Avadhuta Gita's teaching that "The liberated one is like a free bird" are the most radical statements of the non-dual insight available in any tradition, and they are significant because they present a teaching that leaves no room for gradual practice, no room for effort, no room for any movement toward liberation—the teaching is that liberation is already complete, and the only thing to be done is to recognize it.

⁸ The Yoga Technology of Liberation

⁹ The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali are the most important text of the Yoga tradition, and they are significant for the teaching of the eight limbs of the yoga and the systematic technology of liberation. The text is one of the most influential in the entire spiritual domain, and it is significant for the teaching that liberation is the cessation of the modifications of the mind, that the practice of yoga is

the cultivation of the mind through the eight limbs, and that the result is the abiding of the seer in its own nature.

¹⁰ The Bhagavad Gita's teaching of the three gunas (sattva, rajas, tamas) is the most important contribution of the Gita to the understanding of the structure of consciousness, because the gunas are the forces that shape consciousness in the world, and the recognition of the gunas and the movement beyond them (gunatita) is the goal of the spiritual life. The teaching is that the person is not the body, not the mind, not the intellect, not the ego, but the witness of the gunas, and that the liberation is the recognition of this witness and the movement beyond the gunas.

¹¹ What Is Distinctive: The Non-Dual Identity and the Technologies of Liberation

¹² What is most distinctive about the Hindu tradition is the non-dual identity of the self with Brahman—the insight that the ultimate reality is not something other than the self, not something to be attained, not something to be reached, but the true nature of the self itself. This is a genuinely distinctive insight, and it is not fully duplicated by any other tradition.

¹³ The Buddhist tradition shares with the Hindu tradition the insight that the ordinary understanding of the self is mistaken, and that liberation is the recognition of the true nature of the self. But the Buddhist tradition does not identify the true nature of the self with an ultimate ground of reality; the Buddhist tradition's insight is that the self is empty, that the appearance of the self is a fabrication, that the liberation is the recognition of the emptiness of the self. The Hindu tradition's insight is that the self is not empty; the self is the fullness of consciousness, the identity of the self with the ground of all reality. The difference is substantial, and it is not merely a difference of terminology but a difference of metaphysical vision.

¹⁴ The Christian tradition's insistence on the incarnation is a distinctive complement to the Hindu non-dual insight, because the Christian tradition teaches that the eternal has entered into the temporal, into the body, into the history of the world, in a way that the Hindu tradition does not. The Hindu tradition teaches that the eternal is the ground of all, but not that it has entered into the world in the person of a historical figure. The Christian tradition's insight is that the eternal is not only the ground of all but has also entered into the world in a particular way, in a particular time, in a particular person, and that this entry is the pivotal event of the spiritual life.

¹⁵ The Taoist tradition's insight into the process of the world is a distinctive complement to the Hindu insight into the ground of the world, because the Taoist tradition teaches that the way of the world is process, flow, change, and that the person's alignment with this process is the spiritual life. The Hindu tradition teaches that the ground of the world is non-dual consciousness, but not that the world is process; the Taoist tradition teaches that the world is process, but not that the process is grounded in non-dual consciousness. The combination of the two insights is one of the most interesting of the possible syntheses.

¹⁶ The Sufi tradition's insight into the love of the Divine is a distinctive complement to the Hindu insight into the knowledge of the Divine, because the Sufi tradition teaches that the ultimate reality is the object of love, the object of longing, the object of the union through love. The Hindu tradition teaches that the ultimate reality is the object of knowledge, the object of recognition, the object of the union through knowledge. The combination of the two insights is another of the most interesting of the possible syntheses.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: THE BUDDHIST TRADITION — THE ANALYSIS OF SUFFERING AND THE PATH TO ITS CESSATION

¹ The Buddhist tradition is, in one sense, the most systematic and the most psychologically sophisticated of all the spiritual traditions, because the entire Buddhist path is structured around the problem of suffering and the means of its cessation, and the Buddhist analysis of the causes of suffering, the Buddhist psychology of the mind, and the Buddhist technology of meditation are among the most developed in the spiritual tradition.

² The Buddha's teaching is contained in the Pali Canon (the Tipitaka, or "Three Baskets": the Vinaya Pitaka—the monastic discipline; the Sutta Pitaka—the discourses; and the Abhidhamma Pitaka—the analysis of consciousness), and the primary texts of the Pali Canon are among the most important in the entire spiritual domain. The Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the four foundations of mindfulness, the five aggregates, the twelve links of dependent origination, the seven factors of awakening, the thirty-seven factors of awakening—these are the core structures of the Buddhist path, and they are significant for the understanding of the problem of suffering and the means of liberation.

³ The Pali Canon's Analysis of Consciousness and Suffering

⁴ The Satipatthana Sutta (Majjhima Nikaya 10; Digha Nikaya 22) is the most important text of the Buddhist meditation tradition, and it is the foundation of the four foundations of mindfulness. The text's teaching is that the person observes the body as the body, the feelings as the feelings, the mind as the mind, and the mental objects as the mental objects, without attachment, without aversion, without confusion, and the result of this observation is the understanding of the true nature of all phenomena: they are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. The understanding is the dispassion, and the dispassion is the liberation.

⁵ The Anatta-lakkhana Sutta (The Discourse on the Not-Self Characteristic, Samyutta Nikaya 22.59) is the most important text of the Buddhist teaching of the non-self, and it is significant for the teaching that the five aggregates are not self, and that the clinging to the five aggregates is the source of suffering. The text is the first discourse the Buddha gave after his enlightenment (the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta is the first discourse, setting in motion the Wheel of the Dharma), and the teaching of the non-self is the cornerstone of the Buddhist path.

⁶ The Sutta Nipata's Atthakavagga (the Chapter of the Eights) is the most radical text in the Pali Canon, and it is significant for the teaching that the Buddha's teaching goes beyond even the Buddhist teachings to the point of refusing all attachment to views, including Buddhist views. "The sage does not cling to any view, not even the view that there is no self. The sage sees that all views are the fabrication of the mind, and that the liberation from all views is the liberation from all suffering."

⁷ The Udana is the most intimate of the Pali Canon collections, and it preserves the Buddha's spontaneous exclamations, which are significant because they capture the experiential dimension of enlightenment that the systematic teachings can miss. "Mind is luminous, but it is defiled by adventitious defilements. The ignorant one does not understand this, and so they do not cultivate the mind. The wise one understands this, and so they cultivate the mind" (Udana, 7.7, paraphrase).

⁸ The Mahayana Development of the Vision

⁹ The Mahayana Buddhist tradition's teaching of emptiness is the most important development in the Buddhist tradition after the Pali Canon, and it is centered on the Heart Sutra, the Diamond Sutra, and the larger Prajnaparamita Sutras. The Heart Sutra's "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form" is the most famous statement of the Mahayana vision, and the Diamond Sutra's radical critique of attachment to any concept—even the concept of the Buddha, even the concept of non-self—is the most radical expression of the Mahayana insight.

¹⁰ The Lotus Sutra is the most important Mahayana text of the universal possibility of enlightenment, and it is significant for the teaching that all beings have the capacity to become Buddhas, that the Buddha-nature is present in all beings, and that the path to enlightenment is open to all, not only to the monastics but to the lay people, the women, the devas, the animals. The Lotus Sutra is one of the most influential texts in the East Asian Buddhist tradition, and it is significant for the vision of the universal enlightenment.

¹¹ The Avatamsaka Sutra (Flower Garland Sutra) is the most important Mahayana text of the interpenetration of all phenomena, the teaching that the entire universe is contained in a single atom, that all beings interpenetrate all other beings, that the dharmadhatu is the cosmic reality in which all things are mutually arising and mutually containing. The text is the source of the Hua-yen school of Chinese Buddhism, and it is significant for the vision of the nonduality of the one and the many, the vision that every particle of dust contains all the Buddhas.

¹² The Lankavatara Sutra is the most important Mahayana text of the mind-only teaching, and it is significant for the teaching that the external world does not exist apart from the mind, that the mind is the source of all appearances, and that the liberation is the recognition of the mind-only. The text is the source of the Yogacara school of Mahayana Buddhism, and it is significant for the teaching that the storehouse consciousness (alaya-vijnana) is the basis of all experience, and that the transformation of the storehouse consciousness into the mirror-like wisdom is the goal of the spiritual life.

¹³ The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra is the most important Mahayana text of the integration of the spiritual life with the ordinary life, because the text is the story of Vimalakirti, the layman who is so advanced in the spiritual life that even the greatest bodhisattvas are afraid to visit him, and his teaching is that the full expression of the path is possible in the world of ordinary life, not only in the monastic seclusion. The text is one of the most important in the Buddhist tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the bodhisattva path is not a withdrawal from the world but a transformation of the relationship to the world.

¹⁴ The Tibetan Buddhist Development of the Vision

¹⁵ The Tibetan Buddhist tradition's teaching of the nature of mind (rigpa, primordial awareness) is the most important development in the Buddhist tradition after the Mahayana, and it is centered on the Dzogchen and Mahamudra teachings. The Dzogchen teaching is that the nature of mind is rigpa, which is luminous, empty, and spontaneously present, and that the recognition of this nature is the liberation. The Mahamudra teaching is the same, but in the Kagyu lineage, and the emphasis is on the direct recognition of the nature of mind as the path itself.

¹⁶ The Tibetan Book of the Dead (Bardo Thodol) is the most famous Tibetan Buddhist text, and it is significant for the detailed phenomenology of the experience of death and the bardo states. The text describes the dissolution of the elements at death, the appearances that arise in the bardo states, and

the opportunities for recognition that are present at each stage. The text is one of the most extraordinary documents in the spiritual tradition, and it is significant for the recognition that the afterlife is not a departure from the nature of mind but a reveal of what the nature of mind always was.

¹⁷ The Bodhicaryavatara (Way of the Bodhisattva) by Santideva is the most important Tibetan Buddhist text of the cultivation of compassion, and it is significant for the teaching that the bodhisattva's vow is to liberate all beings, and that the cultivation of compassion is the foundation of the bodhisattva path. The text is one of the most influential in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, and it is significant for the rigorous integration of wisdom and compassion.

¹⁸ What Is Distinctive: The Systematic Analysis of Suffering and the Technologies of Liberation

¹⁹ What is most distinctive about the Buddhist tradition is the systematic analysis of suffering and the systematic technology of liberation. The Buddhist tradition is the most psychologically sophisticated of all the spiritual traditions, and the Buddhist analysis of the mind, the Buddhist psychology of the feelings, the Buddhist technology of meditation are among the most developed in the spiritual domain. No other tradition has matched the Buddhist tradition's precision in the analysis of the mental factors, the Buddhist tradition's understanding of the relationship between consciousness and suffering, or the Buddhist tradition's development of the meditation techniques.

²⁰ The Hindu tradition's analysis of consciousness is the most important competitor to the Buddhist analysis, and the two are genuinely different. The Hindu tradition's insight is that consciousness is the ground of all, and that the liberation is the recognition of the identity of the self with the ground of all reality. The Buddhist tradition's insight is that consciousness is the source of the suffering, and that the liberation is the cessation of the modifications of the mind, the recognition of the emptiness of all phenomena. The Hindu tradition's vision is transcendent; the Buddhist tradition's vision is immanent. The Hindu tradition's path is recognition; the Buddhist tradition's path is cessation. These are genuinely different visions, and the combination of the two is one of the most interesting of the possible syntheses.

²¹ The Taoist tradition's analysis of the relationship between the person and the world is a distinctive complement to the Buddhist analysis, because the Taoist tradition teaches that the world is process, and that the person's spiritual life is the alignment with the process, not the cessation of the modifications. The Buddhist tradition teaches that the world is the source of the suffering, and that the person's spiritual life is the cessation of the modifications. The combination of the two is another of the most interesting of the possible syntheses.

²² The Christian tradition's insistence on the reality of love is a distinctive complement to the Buddhist insight into the reality of suffering, because the Christian tradition teaches that love is the ultimate reality, and that the spiritual life is the transformation of the person by love. The Buddhist tradition teaches that suffering is the fundamental problem of the spiritual life, and that the liberation is the cessation of the craving that is the source of suffering. The Christian tradition's insight is that love is the ultimate reality, and that the person's relationship to love is the fundamental question of the spiritual life. The Buddhist tradition's insight is that suffering is the fundamental problem, and that the person's relationship to suffering is the fundamental question. The combination of the two is another of the most interesting of the possible syntheses.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: THE TAOIST TRADITION — THE WAY OF NON-ACTION AND THE WISDOM OF PROCESS

¹ The Taoist tradition is the most distinctive in the spiritual domain, and the Taoist vision of the world as process, the Tao as the way of all things, and wu-wei (non-action, effortless action) as the spiritual practice, is a contribution that no other tradition fully matches.

² The Tao as the Way of All Things

³ The Tao te Ching is the most important Taoist text, and it is the foundation of the Taoist vision. The text is one of the most concentrated and the most powerful in the entire spiritual domain, and the opening lines—"The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal name. The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth. The named is the mother of the ten thousand things"—are the most famous statement of the Taoist insight into the ineffability of the ground of all things.

⁴ The Tao te Ching's vision is one of the most distinctive in the spiritual domain, because the Tao is not substance, not spirit, not consciousness, not person—it is the Way, the pattern of all existence, the process by which everything unfolds. The text's teaching of wu-wei is the most important, and it is the vision that the sage does nothing, yet nothing is left undone; that the sage is not solitary but in harmony with the ten thousand things; that the sage does not contend, and therefore no one can contend with the sage.

⁵ The Zhuangzi is the most important Taoist text after the Tao te Ching, and it is significant for the radical dissolution of all distinctions, all categories, all judgments, all concepts. The text is the most literary of the Taoist texts, and it is the most philosophical in the Taoist tradition. The butterfly dream passage, the cooking of the ox, the useless tree, the equality of all things—these are the most famous passages in the text, and they are significant for the vision of the dissolution of the self's attachment to the categories of the ordinary mind.

⁶ The Zhuangzi's vision is one of the most distinctive in the spiritual domain, because the text does not teach the recognition of the ground of all things but the recognition of the equality of all things, the dissolution of the distinction between the self and the world, the dissolution of the distinction between the useful and the useless, the dissolution of the distinction between the real and the apparent. The text's teaching is that the ordinary mind's categories are all relative, all provisional, all ultimately empty, and that the sage's mind is free of these categories, free of these distinctions, free of these judgments.

⁷ The Liezi is the most important Taoist text of the practical wisdom of wu-wei, and it is significant for the teaching that the sage's life is the life of effortless action, the life of the person who is in harmony with the way of things. The text is the most narrative of the Taoist texts, and it is the most practical in the Taoist tradition.

⁸ What Is Distinctive: The Vision of Process and the Practice of Wu-Wei

⁹ What is most distinctive about the Taoist tradition is the vision of the world as process, and the vision of the spiritual life as the alignment with the process through the practice of wu-wei. This is a genuinely distinctive insight, and it is not fully duplicated by any other tradition.

¹⁰ The Hindu tradition's insight is that the ground of all things is non-dual consciousness, and that the spiritual life is the recognition of this identity. The Taoist tradition's insight is that the way of all things is process, and that the spiritual life is the alignment with this process. The combination of the two insights is one of the most interesting of the possible syntheses, because the Hindu insight gives the ground, and the Taoist insight gives the way.

¹¹ The Buddhist tradition's insight is that the world is suffering, and that the spiritual life is the cessation of the craving that is the source of suffering. The Taoist tradition's insight is that the world is process, and that the spiritual life is the alignment with the process. The Buddhist vision is one of transformation; the Taoist vision is one of flow. The combination of the two is another of the most interesting of the possible syntheses, because the Buddhist insight gives the motivation for the spiritual life (the recognition of suffering), and the Taoist insight gives the practice of the spiritual life (the alignment with the way).

¹² The Christian tradition's insistence on the incarnation is a distinctive complement to the Taoist insight into the process of the world, because the Christian tradition teaches that the eternal has entered into the world, into the process, into the history of the world, in a way that the Taoist tradition does not. The Taoist tradition teaches that the Tao is the way of all things, but not that the Tao has entered into the world in the person of a historical figure. The Christian tradition's insight is that the eternal is not only the way of all things but has also entered into the world in a particular way, in a particular time, in a particular person, and that this entry is the pivotal event of the spiritual life. The combination of the two insights is another of the most interesting of the possible syntheses.

¹³ The Sufi tradition's insight into the love of the Divine is a distinctive complement to the Taoist insight into the way of the world, because the Sufi tradition teaches that the ultimate reality is the object of love, the object of longing, the object of the union through love. The Taoist tradition teaches that the ultimate reality is the object of alignment, the object of harmony, the object of the union through process. The combination of the two insights is another of the most interesting of the possible syntheses.

CHAPTER NINETEEN: THE BUDDHIST TRADITION (CONTINUED)

— THE ZEN PATH AND THE DIRECT POINTING

¹ The Zen tradition is one of the most distinctive expressions of the Buddhist path, and the Zen emphasis on the direct pointing to the mind, the identity of practice and realization, and the use of the koan as the method of awakening, is a contribution that no other Buddhist school fully matches.

² The Zen Vision of the Direct Pointing

³ The Shobogenzo of Dogen is the most important Zen text, and it is significant for the teaching that "To study the Way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by the ten thousand things." The teaching is that the practice of zazen (sitting meditation) is not a means to enlightenment but the expression of enlightenment itself, and that the identity of practice and realization (shushō-ittō) is the central insight of the Zen path.

⁴ The Fukanzazengi (Universal Instructions for Zazen) is the most practical of Dogen's works, and it is significant for the teaching that the Way is perfect and complete, and is present everywhere; that it

does not depend on practice or realization; that it is not subject to the distortions of forgetting or awakening; that it is not something to be acquired—it is the very nature of what the person is. The text is the foundation of the Zen practice of zazen, and it is significant for the teaching that the practice of zazen is the most direct expression of the Buddha's enlightenment.

⁵ The Blue Cliff Record (Hekiganroku) is the most comprehensive Zen koan collection, and it is significant for the preservation of the most important Zen teaching encounters and their layers of meaning. The text is one of the most important in the Zen tradition, and it is significant for the way it preserves the texture of the Zen encounter.

⁶ The Gateless Gate (Mumonkan) is the most famous Zen koan collection, with its 48 koans and the commentary of Mumon. The koan of "Mu" (Zhaozhou's answer to the question whether a dog has Buddha-nature) is the most famous in the collection, and it is significant for the teaching that the answer is not a conceptual position but a direct pointing to the mind that is before all conceptualization.

⁷ The Ten Bulls (Oxherding Pictures) is the most influential visual presentation of the Zen path, tracing the progression from the search for the ox to the finding, the taming, the riding, the forgetting of ox and rider, and the return to the world. The tenth picture is the most important: the person in the marketplace, laughing and singing, with no ox in sight—the person who has recognized the nature of mind and returned to ordinary life, the person who has no special state to show, the person who has no attainment to display.

⁸ What Is Distinctive: The Identity of Practice and Realization

⁹ What is most distinctive about the Zen tradition is the teaching of the identity of practice and realization (shushō-ittō), the recognition that the practice of zazen is not a path to enlightenment but the expression of enlightenment itself, and that the enlightenment is not a state to be achieved but the ground of all states. This is a genuinely distinctive insight, and it is not fully duplicated by any other Buddhist school.

¹⁰ The Tibetan Buddhist tradition's Dzogchen and Mahamudra teachings are the closest equivalents to the Zen teaching of the identity of practice and realization, and the similarities are significant. But the Zen tradition's emphasis on the koan as the method of awakening is unique, and the Zen tradition's intense focus on the direct pointing to the mind, the immediate effectiveness of the master's intervention, the role of the encounter between the master and the student are all distinctive contributions of the Zen tradition.

¹¹ The Christian contemplative tradition's emphasis on the direct encounter with God, the apophatic approach of the Cloud of Unknowing, the waiting in the silence of the Quaker meeting—all of these are genuine parallels to the Zen approach, and the similarities are interesting. But the Zen tradition's emphasis on the identity of practice and realization is distinctive, and the Zen tradition's insistence that the practice is the realization is a contribution that the Christian tradition does not make in the same way.

¹² The Hindu tradition's teaching of the identity of the self with Brahman is a genuine parallel to the Zen teaching of the identity of practice and realization, because both traditions recognize that the ultimate reality is not something to be attained but something to be recognized as already present. But the Hindu tradition's emphasis on the gradual practice of the eight limbs of yoga, the study of the

Vedas, the discrimination between the real and the unreal, is different from the Zen tradition's emphasis on the direct pointing and the identity of practice and realization. The combination of the two insights is another of the most interesting of the possible syntheses.

CHAPTER TWENTY: THE CHRISTIAN MYSTICAL TRADITION — THE WAY OF THE HEART AND THE DARK NIGHT

¹ The Christian mystical tradition is the most important in the Western spiritual domain, and the Christian vision of the relationship between the soul and God, the Christian understanding of the purification of the heart, the Christian practice of the prayer and the contemplation, are contributions that no other tradition fully matches.

² The Desert Tradition of Ascesis and Purification

³ The Sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers (the *Apophthegmata Patrum*) is the most important early Christian text of the spiritual life, and it is significant for the wisdom of the desert fathers and mothers on the practice of the ascesis, the combat with the *logismoi* (thoughts), the cultivation of the virtues. The text is the foundation of the Christian monastic tradition, and it is significant for the pragmatic wisdom of the desert tradition, the wisdom that is grounded in the concrete experience of the spiritual life.

⁴ Evagrius Ponticus's *Praktikos* is the most systematic Christian text of the ascesis, and it is significant for the analysis of the eight *logismoi* (gluttony, lust, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory, and pride) and the teaching of the *apatheia* (the freedom from passionate attachment) as the goal of the purification. The text is one of the most important in the Christian tradition, and it is significant for the systematic account of the purification of the heart.

⁵ John Cassian's *Conferences* and *Institutes* are the most important Christian texts of the monastic tradition in the West, and they are significant for the integration of the Evagrian teaching into the Latin West. Cassian's teaching is the foundation of the Western monastic tradition's understanding of the spiritual struggle, and it is significant for the development of the Christian understanding of the purification.

⁶ The Apophatic Tradition: The Cloud of Unknowing

⁷ The Cloud of Unknowing is the most important Christian text of the apophatic tradition, and it is one of the most important texts of the apophatic tradition in the entire spiritual domain. The text's teaching is that the person knows God not through any knowledge, not through any vision, not through any understanding, not through any experience of God, but through the love that is directed into the cloud of unknowing, piercing the cloud with a single point of longing love. The text is the most practical and the most systematic of the apophatic texts, and it is significant for the teaching that the love is the vehicle of the knowing, the love is the means of the knowledge, the love is the condition of the knowledge.

⁸ The Cloud of Unknowing is significant because it rejects the vision, the understanding, the intellectual knowledge of God, and teaches that the only path to God is the love that pierces the cloud of unknowing. The author's rejection of the vision is radical, because the author teaches that the person should not seek visions, should not seek understanding, should not seek any knowledge of

God, but should seek only to love God in the darkness. The text is one of the most uncompromising in the Christian tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the love is the only path to God.

⁹ The Development of the Mystical Theology: Eckhart, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich

¹⁰ Meister Eckhart's sermons are the most radical in the Christian tradition, and they are significant for the teaching that the eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me; my eye and God's eye is one eye, one view, one knowledge, one love. The text's teaching is that the ground of the soul is the ground of God, and the birth of the Word in the soul is the recognition of this identity. The text is the most radical in the Christian tradition, and it is significant for the danger of the teaching, the danger that led to Eckhart's condemnation as a heretic.

¹¹ John of the Cross's *The Dark Night* is the most rigorous Christian text of the purification, and it is significant for the teaching that the dark night of the soul is the purification of the person from all that is not God, from all attachment, from all desire for consolation, from all self-understanding. The text is one of the most important in the Christian tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the purification is not a self-cultivation but a divine work, a work of God in the person, and that the person must pass through the night without resistance, without understanding, without any comfort except the knowledge that God is the one who is doing the work.

¹² Teresa of Avila's *The Interior Castle* is the most systematic Christian vision of the soul's journey to union, and it is significant for the teaching that the soul is a castle with seven rooms (mansions), and the journey from the outer rooms to the center is the journey from the initial purification through the various stages of prayer to the final union with God. The text is one of the most important in the Christian tradition, and it is significant for the vision of the soul's journey, the vision that is at once systematic and personal.

¹³ Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* is the most loving of the Christian mystical texts, and it is significant for the teaching that "all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well." The text is one of the most important in the Christian tradition, and it is significant for the vision of the love of God that is greater than all suffering, the vision that is at once personal and universal.

¹⁴ Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias*, the *Book of Divine Works*, is one of the most remarkable visions in the Christian tradition, and it is significant for the vision of the cosmos as the divine light, the vision of the soul as the deep abyss of divine light, the vision of the moral life as the alignment of the soul with the cosmic order. The text is one of the most important in the Christian tradition, and it is significant for the vision of the divine that is cosmic, luminous, and feminine.

¹⁵ Thomas Merton's writings (*New Seeds of Contemplation*, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, etc.) are the most important 20th-century Christian mystical texts, and they are significant for the integration of the Christian mystical tradition with the Buddhist tradition, the Hindu tradition, and the modern sensibility. The text is one of the most important in the modern Christian tradition, and it is significant for the way it bridges the Christian tradition and the Eastern traditions.

¹⁶ What Is Distinctive: *The Way of the Heart* and *The Dark Night*

¹⁷ What is most distinctive about the Christian mystical tradition is the way of the heart and the dark night—the vision that the spiritual life is the transformation of the person by love, the vision that the

purification is the passage through the dark night, the vision that the union with God is the goal of the spiritual life. These are genuinely distinctive insights, and they are not fully duplicated by any other tradition.

¹⁸ The Buddhist tradition's insight into the nature of suffering and the path of liberation is a genuine parallel to the Christian insight into the dark night and the purification, because both traditions recognize that the person is in a state of bondage, and that the liberation requires the passage through the difficult process of purification. But the Christian tradition's insistence on the love as the ultimate reality, the love as the ground of the spiritual life, the love as the means of the transformation, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Buddhist tradition.

¹⁹ The Hindu tradition's insight into the non-dual identity of the self with Brahman is a genuine parallel to the Christian insight into the union with God, because both traditions recognize that the ultimate reality is not something other than the person, but something that the person can be united with, and the union is the goal of the spiritual life. But the Christian tradition's insistence on the distinction between the created soul and the uncreated God, the insistence that the union is not the identity of the soul with God but the union of the soul with God in love, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Hindu tradition.

²⁰ The Sufi tradition's insight into the love of the Divine, the annihilation in the Divine, the union through love, is a genuine parallel to the Christian insight into the way of the heart, and the similarities are significant. But the Christian tradition's insistence on the incarnation, the entry of the eternal into the temporal, the entry of the divine into the history of the world, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Sufi tradition.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: THE SUFI TRADITION — THE WAY OF LOVE AND THE ANNIHILATION IN THE DIVINE

¹ The Sufi tradition is the most important in the Islamic spiritual domain, and the Sufi vision of the love of the Divine, the Sufi understanding of the annihilation in the Divine, the Sufi practice of the dhikr and the path of the heart, are contributions that no other tradition fully matches.

² The Sufi Vision of Love as the Path

³ The Masnavi of Rumi is the most important Sufi poem, and it is significant for the teaching that the reed flute's complaint is the complaint of the soul separated from its source, and that the longing for the return is the origin of all music and the origin of all spiritual practice. The text is one of the most important in the Islamic tradition, and it is significant for the beautiful expression of the Sufi insight into the love of the Divine.

⁴ The Conference of the Birds (Mantiq al-Tayr) by Fariduddin Attar is the most famous Sufi allegory, and it is significant for the teaching that the journey through the seven valleys—Search, Love, Knowledge, Detachment, Unity, Astonishment, Poverty and Annihilation—is the journey of the soul toward the recognition of the Divine. The text is one of the most important in the Sufi tradition, and it is significant for the beautiful expression of the Sufi insight into the journey of the soul.

⁵ The Gulistan (Rose Garden) and the Bustan (Orchard) of Sa'di are the most important Sufi texts of the practical wisdom of the heart, and they are significant for the teaching of the practical wisdom of

the love, the practical wisdom of the compassion, the practical wisdom of the humility. The texts are among the most influential in the Islamic tradition, and they are significant for the beautiful expression of the Sufi insight into the practical wisdom.

⁶ Al-Ghazzali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences) is the most comprehensive Sufi text, and it is significant for the integration of the Shari'ah (the law) and the Tariqah (the path), the integration of the external practice and the internal transformation. The text is one of the most important in the Islamic tradition, and it is significant for the synthesis of the Sufi insight with the Islamic law.

⁷ Ibn Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam* (The Bezels of Wisdom) and the *Futuh al-Makkiyah* (Meccan Illuminations) are the most important Sufi texts of the metaphysics of the unity of being (Wahdat al-Wujud), and they are significant for the teaching that the only true existence is God, and all created things are manifestations of God's names and attributes within the space of existence. The texts are among the most important in the Islamic tradition, and they are significant for the development of the Sufi metaphysics.

⁸ Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi's *Maktubat* (Letters) is the most important Sufi text of the correction to the radical non-dualism of Ibn Arabi, and it is significant for the teaching of the balance between Wahdat al-Wujud (Unity of Being) and Wahdat al-Shuhud (Unity of Witnessing). The text is one of the most important in the Sufi tradition, and it is significant for the development of the Sufi teaching in the later Islamic tradition.

⁹ What Is Distinctive: The Way of Love and the Annihilation

¹⁰ What is most distinctive about the Sufi tradition is the way of love and the annihilation in the Divine—the vision that the spiritual life is the journey of the soul toward the recognition of the Divine through the love, the longing, the annihilation of the self. These are genuinely distinctive insights, and they are not fully duplicated by any other tradition.

¹¹ The Christian mystical tradition's vision of the way of the heart is a genuine parallel to the Sufi vision of the way of the love, because both traditions recognize that the ultimate reality is the object of love, and that the spiritual life is the transformation of the person by love. But the Sufi tradition's insistence on the annihilation (fana) as the goal of the spiritual life, the annihilation of the self in the Divine, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Christian tradition.

¹² The Hindu tradition's insight into the non-dual identity of the self with Brahman is a genuine parallel to the Sufi insight into the annihilation in the Divine, because both traditions recognize that the ultimate reality is not something other than the self, but something that the self can be united with, and the union is the goal of the spiritual life. But the Sufi tradition's insistence on the love as the vehicle of the union, the love as the means of the knowledge, the love as the condition of the knowledge, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Hindu tradition.

¹³ The Taoist tradition's insight into the compassion as the way of the world is a genuine parallel to the Sufi insight into the love as the way of the Divine, because both traditions recognize that the ultimate reality is the object of a positive relation, and that the spiritual life is the cultivation of the positive relation. But the Sufi tradition's insistence on the longing as the origin of the spiritual life, the longing as the origin of the music, the longing as the origin of the prayer, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Taoist tradition.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: THE STOIC TRADITION — THE DISCIPLINE OF REASON AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF FATE

¹ The Stoic tradition is the most important in the Western rational spiritual domain, and the Stoic vision of the discipline of reason, the Stoic understanding of the acceptance of fate, the Stoic practice of the four virtues, are contributions that no other tradition fully matches.

² The Stoic Vision of the Discipline of Reason

³ Epictetus's Discourses and Enchiridion are the most important Stoic texts, and they are significant for the teaching that "Some things are in our power, and some are not. The things in our power are opinion, judgment, desire, aversion, and all acts of the will. The things not in our power are body, property, reputation, office, and all that is external." The teaching is the foundation of the Stoic path, and it is significant for the insight that the person's peace and freedom come from the focus on what is within the person's power, and the acceptance of what is not.

⁴ Marcus Aurelius's Meditations is the most extensive personal record of the Stoic practice, and it is significant for the intimate, honest, and powerful quality of the writing. The text is one of the most important in the Western tradition, and it is significant for the vision of the Stoic practice as a personal discipline, a daily reflection, a continuous effort to align the person's mind with the reason and the nature of the universe.

⁵ Seneca's Letters and Essays are the most accessible Stoic texts, and they are significant for the practical wisdom of the Stoic tradition applied to the everyday problems of life. The text is one of the most important in the Western tradition, and it is significant for the way it brings the Stoic wisdom into the world of the practical concerns of the person.

⁶ What Is Distinctive: The Discipline of Reason and the Acceptance of Fate

⁷ What is most distinctive about the Stoic tradition is the discipline of reason and the acceptance of fate—the vision that the person's peace and freedom come from the discipline of the rational faculty, the vision that the person's happiness comes from the acceptance of what is not within the person's power. These are genuinely distinctive insights, and they are not fully duplicated by any other tradition.

⁸ The Christian tradition's vision of the surrender to God's will is a genuine parallel to the Stoic vision of the acceptance of fate, because both traditions recognize that the person's peace comes from the acceptance of the divine will. But the Christian tradition's insistence on the personal God who loves the person, who speaks to the person, who commands the person, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Stoic tradition. The Stoic tradition's God is not personal; the Christian tradition's God is personal.

⁹ The Buddhist tradition's insight into the non-self and the cessation of the craving is a genuine parallel to the Stoic insight into the discipline of the will, because both traditions recognize that the person's suffering comes from the attachment to things that are not within the person's control. But the Buddhist tradition's insistence on the emptiness of all phenomena, the emptiness of the self, the emptiness of the world, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Stoic tradition.

¹⁰ The Taoist tradition's insight into the wu-wei and the alignment with the process is a genuine parallel to the Stoic insight into the acceptance of fate, because both traditions recognize that the

person's peace comes from the alignment with the way of the world. But the Taoist tradition's insistence on the emptiness of the mind, the emptiness of the self, the emptiness of the agenda, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Stoic tradition.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: THE KABBALISTIC TRADITION — THE DRAMA OF EMANATION AND THE COLLECTION OF THE SPARKS

¹ The Kabbalistic tradition is the most important in the Western esoteric domain, and the Kabbalistic vision of the emanation of the sefirot, the Kabbalistic understanding of the breaking of the vessels and the tikkun (the restoration), the Kabbalistic practice of the mitzvot and the contemplation of the sefirot, are contributions that no other tradition fully matches.

² The Kabbalistic Vision of the Sefirotic Emanation

³ The Zohar is the most important Kabbalistic text, and it is significant for the vision of the sefirot as the structures of the divine emanation, the vision of the soul as the microcosm of the sefirot, the vision of the tikkun as the restoration of the soul and the restoration of the world. The text is one of the most important in the Western tradition, and it is significant for the rich symbolism of the Kabbalistic vision, the rich teaching of the divine drama.

⁴ The Sepher Yetzirah (Book of Formation) is the most important Kabbalistic text of the cosmology of the letters and the sefirot, and it is significant for the teaching that the universe is created through the thirty-two paths of wisdom, the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and the ten sefirot. The text is one of the most important in the Kabbalistic tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the letters are the instruments of creation, the sefirot are the structures of manifestation.

⁵ The Etz Chaim (Tree of Life) of Isaac Luria is the most important Kabbalistic text of the Lurianic Kabbalah, and it is significant for the teaching of the breaking of the vessels and the tikkun as the drama of creation. The text is one of the most important in the Kabbalistic tradition, and it is significant for the vision of the cosmic catastrophe and the cosmic restoration.

⁶ What Is Distinctive: The Drama of the Breaking and the Restoration

⁷ What is most distinctive about the Kabbalistic tradition is the drama of the breaking of the vessels and the tikkun—the vision that the world is the result of the shattering of the vessels, the scattering of the divine sparks, and that the human task is the gathering of the sparks and the restoration of the vessels. This is a genuinely distinctive insight, and it is not fully duplicated by any other tradition.

⁸ The Christian tradition's vision of the incarnation and the redemption is a genuine parallel to the Kabbalistic vision of the breaking and the restoration, because both traditions recognize that the world is broken and that the human task is the restoration. But the Kabbalistic tradition's insistence on the drama of the breaking as the origin of the brokenness, the insistence on the sparks as the divine presence in the material world, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Christian tradition.

⁹ The Hindu tradition's vision of the world as maya and the liberation as the recognition of the Brahman is a genuine parallel to the Kabbalistic vision of the world as the shattered vessels and the

liberation as the restoration of the sparks. But the Kabbalistic tradition's insistence on the drama of the breaking as a cosmic event, the insistence on the sparks as the divine presence in the material world, the insistence on the tikkun as the human task, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Hindu tradition.

¹⁰ The Buddhist tradition's insight into the emptiness of all phenomena and the recognition of the Buddha-nature as the ground of all is a genuine parallel to the Kabbalistic insight into the sparks as the divine presence in the material world. But the Kabbalistic tradition's insistence on the drama of the breaking and the restoration as the cosmic purpose, the insistence on the human action as the means of the restoration, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Buddhist tradition.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: THE JAIN TRADITION — THE RADICAL ETHICS OF NON-VIOLENCE

¹ The Jain tradition is the most important in the Indian spiritual domain as a distinctive competitor to the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, and the Jain vision of the radical ethics of non-violence (ahimsa), the Jain understanding of the many-sidedness (anekantavada) of reality, the Jain practice of the three jewels (right faith, right knowledge, right conduct), are contributions that no other tradition fully matches.

² The Jain Vision of the Radical Non-Violence

³ The Acaranga Sutra is the most important Jain text of the conduct of the ascetics, and it is significant for the teaching of the radical non-violence toward all living beings, the teaching that the person must not harm even the smallest insect, the teaching that the person must sweep the path, filter the water, and avoid all harm to the living beings. The text is the foundational text of the Jain tradition, and it is significant for the teaching of the radical non-violence as the supreme ethical principle.

⁴ The Tattvartha Sutra is the most important Jain text of the metaphysics, and it is significant for the teaching of the seven tattvas (the living and the non-living, the influx of karma, the bondage of karma, the stoppage of karma, the shedding of karma, and the liberation). The text is the foundation of the Jain metaphysics, and it is significant for the systematic account of the Jain vision of reality.

⁵ What Is Distinctive: The Radical Ethics of Non-Violence

⁶ What is most distinctive about the Jain tradition is the radical ethics of non-violence—the vision that the non-violence toward all living beings, no matter how small, is the most important spiritual principle, and that the person's liberation is the result of the strictest adherence to the non-violence. This is a genuinely distinctive insight, and it is not fully duplicated by any other tradition.

⁷ The Buddhist tradition's teaching of the compassion for all beings is a genuine parallel to the Jain teaching of the non-violence, because both traditions recognize that the spiritual life is the cultivation of the compassion for all beings. But the Jain tradition's insistence on the non-violence as the supreme ethical principle, the insistence on the non-violence toward the smallest insects, the insistence on the non-violence as the means of the liberation, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Buddhist tradition.

⁸ The Hindu tradition's teaching of the compassion and the non-violence in the Bhagavad Gita (the teaching that the person should not harm any being, that the person should practice the non-violence toward all beings) is a genuine parallel to the Jain teaching of the non-violence. But the Jain tradition's insistence on the non-violence as the supreme ethical principle, the insistence on the non-violence as the only means of the liberation, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Hindu tradition.

⁹ The Christian tradition's teaching of the love of the neighbor as the supreme ethical principle is a genuine parallel to the Jain teaching of the non-violence. But the Christian tradition's love is the love of the neighbor, the love of the person, the love of the human being, while the Jain tradition's non-violence is the non-violence toward all living beings, the non-violence toward the smallest insect, the non-violence toward the most insignificant form of life. The Jain insight is more comprehensive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Christian tradition.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL TRADITION — THE INCARNATION AND THE WORD MADE FLESH

¹ The Christian Gospel tradition is the most important in the Western religious domain, and the Christian vision of the incarnation, the Christian understanding of the Word made flesh, the Christian practice of the faith and the love, are contributions that no other tradition fully matches.

² The Gospel Vision of the Word Made Flesh

³ The Gospel of John is the most mystical of the Gospels, and it is significant for the teaching that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The teaching of the incarnation is the most distinctive in the Christian tradition, and it is significant for the vision that the eternal has entered into the temporal, into the body, into the history of the world, in a way that no other tradition fully matches.

⁴ The Gospel of Matthew is the most important for the teaching of the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy, the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, the teaching of the new lawgiver. The Gospel of Mark is the most important for the teaching of the humanity of Jesus, the teaching of the struggle, the teaching of the messianic secret. The Gospel of Luke is the most important for the teaching of the universal compassion, the teaching of the concern for the poor and the marginalized, the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

⁵ The Pauline epistles (especially Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians) are the most important Christian texts of the theology of the faith, the grace, the love, the union with Christ. The text is one of the most important in the Christian tradition, and it is significant for the development of the Christian understanding of the relationship between the person and God.

⁶ What Is Distinctive: The Incarnation and the Word Made Flesh

⁷ What is most distinctive about the Christian Gospel tradition is the incarnation, the Word made flesh—the vision that the eternal has entered into the temporal, into the body, into the history of the world, in the person of Jesus. This is a genuinely distinctive insight, and it is not fully duplicated by any other tradition.

⁸ The Hindu tradition's insight into the avatar (the incarnation of the divine) is a genuine parallel to the Christian insight into the incarnation, because both traditions recognize that the eternal can enter into the temporal, into the body, into the history of the world. But the Christian tradition's insistence on the uniqueness of Jesus, the insistence that Jesus is the only incarnation of the eternal, the insistence that the incarnation is the pivotal event of the spiritual life, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Hindu tradition.

⁹ The Sufi tradition's insight into the love of the Divine, the annihilation of the self in the Divine, is a genuine parallel to the Christian insight into the incarnation, because both traditions recognize that the eternal can enter into the world, into the person, into the history of the world. But the Sufi tradition's insistence on the love as the vehicle of the entry, the love as the means of the union, the love as the condition of the entry, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Christian tradition.

¹⁰ The Taoist tradition's insight into the way of the world, the flow of the Tao, the process of the world, is a genuine parallel to the Christian insight into the incarnation, because both traditions recognize that the eternal is present in the world, in the process, in the history of the world. But the Taoist tradition's insistence on the way as the pattern of all existence, the way as the process by which everything unfolds, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Christian tradition.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX: THE TIBETAN BUDDHIST TRADITION — THE GEOGRAPHY OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE PREPARATION FOR DEATH

¹ The Tibetan Buddhist tradition is the most important in the Vajrayana Buddhist domain, and the Tibetan Buddhist vision of the geography of consciousness, the Tibetan Buddhist understanding of the dissolution of the elements at death, the Tibetan Buddhist practice of the preparation for death and the recognition of the nature of mind, are contributions that no other tradition fully matches.

² The Tibetan Buddhist Vision of the Geography of Death

³ The Tibetan Book of the Dead (Bardo Thodol) is the most famous Tibetan Buddhist text, and it is significant for the detailed phenomenology of the experience of death, the dissolution of the elements, the appearances that arise in the bardo states, the opportunities for recognition that are present at each stage. The text is one of the most extraordinary documents in the spiritual tradition, and it is significant for the recognition that the afterlife is not a departure from the nature of mind but a reveal of what the nature of mind always was.

⁴ The Tibetan Book of the Dead is one of the most important texts in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the death is the moment of greatest opportunity for liberation, and that the recognition of the nature of mind at the time of death is the key to liberation. The text teaches that the unprepared die in confusion and are reborn, while the prepared recognize the clear light of death and are liberated.

⁵ The Dzogchen teachings in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition are the most important in the Vajrayana Buddhist domain, and they are significant for the teaching that the nature of mind is rigpa (primordial awareness), which is luminous, empty, and spontaneously present, and that the recognition of this

nature is the liberation. The text is one of the most important in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the liberation is not the achievement of a new state but the recognition of the state that is already there.

⁶ The Mahamudra teachings in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition are the closest equivalent to the Dzogchen teachings within the Kagyu tradition, and they are significant for the teaching that the nature of mind is the ground of all experience, and the recognition of this nature is the liberation. The texts are among the most important in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, and they are significant for the teaching that the liberation is not the achievement of a new state but the recognition of the state that is already there.

⁷ The Bodhicaryavatara (Way of the Bodhisattva) by Santideva is the most important Tibetan Buddhist text of the cultivation of compassion, and it is significant for the teaching that the bodhisattva's vow is to liberate all beings, and that the cultivation of compassion is the foundation of the bodhisattva path.

⁸ What Is Distinctive: The Geography of Death and the Preparation

⁹ What is most distinctive about the Tibetan Buddhist tradition is the geography of death and the preparation for death—the vision that the death is the most important of all the moments in the person's life, and that the person's preparation for death is the most important of all the spiritual practices. These are genuinely distinctive insights, and they are not fully duplicated by any other tradition.

¹⁰ The Egyptian Book of the Dead and the various Egyptian texts on the afterlife are genuine parallels to the Tibetan Book of the Dead, because both traditions are concerned with the geography of the afterlife, the journey of the soul after death. But the Egyptian tradition's focus is on the geography of the underworld and the judgment of the heart, while the Tibetan tradition's focus is on the phenomenology of the dissolution of the elements and the recognition of the nature of mind. The Tibetan insight into the relationship between the death and the nature of mind is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Egyptian tradition.

¹¹ The Hindu tradition's teaching of the reincarnation and the liberation as the release from the cycle of rebirth is a genuine parallel to the Tibetan teaching of the death and the liberation. But the Hindu tradition's teaching of the reincarnation is based on the concept of the atman as the eternal self, while the Tibetan tradition's teaching of the death and the liberation is based on the concept of the nature of mind as the ground of all experience. The Tibetan insight into the relationship between the death and the nature of mind is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Hindu tradition.

¹² The Christian tradition's teaching of the death and the resurrection, the death as the passage to the eternal life, the death as the passage to the judgment, is a genuine parallel to the Tibetan teaching of the death and the liberation. But the Christian tradition's insistence on the personal God who judges the person, the Christian tradition's insistence on the resurrection of the body, the Christian tradition's insistence on the eternal life with God, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Tibetan tradition.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN: THE GNOSTIC AND APOCRYPHAL TRADITIONS — THE DISCURSIVE AND THE MYSTICAL DUALISM

¹ The Gnostic and apocryphal traditions are the most important in the early Christian domain, and the Gnostic vision of the escape from the material world, the Gnostic understanding of the demiurge and the divine spark, the Gnostic practice of the gnosis (knowledge) as the path to liberation, are contributions that no other tradition fully matches.

² The Gnostic Vision of the Escape from the Material World

³ The Nag Hammadi Library (the discovery of the Gnostic texts in 1945) is the most important collection of the Gnostic texts, and it is significant for the texts such as the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Philip, the Apocryphon of John, the Gospel of Truth, the Tripartite Tractate. The texts are among the most important in the early Christian domain, and they are significant for the vision of the Gnostic spirituality, the vision of the escape from the material world, the vision of the divine spark in the human person.

⁴ The Gospel of Thomas is the most important of the Gnostic texts, and it is significant for the teaching that the person is the light of the world, the person is the interpreter of the signs, the person is the one who knows the truth directly, without the mediation of the external authority. The text is one of the most important in the Gnostic tradition, and it is significant for the teaching of the direct knowledge as the path to liberation.

⁵ The Gospel of Mary (Mary Magdalene) is the most important Gnostic text of the feminine spirituality, and it is significant for the teaching that the person knows the truth through the vision, the person knows the truth through the direct encounter with the Divine, the person knows the truth without the mediation of the external authority. The text is one of the most important in the Gnostic tradition, and it is significant for the teaching of the feminine spirituality, the teaching of the direct knowledge.

⁶ What Is Distinctive: The Gnostic Dualism and the Divine Spark

⁷ What is most distinctive about the Gnostic tradition is the dualism of the material world and the divine spark—the vision that the material world is the creation of the demiurge, the flawed creator, and that the person is the divine spark trapped in the material world, and that the liberation is the escape from the material world, the return of the divine spark to the divine realm. This is a genuinely distinctive insight, and it is not fully duplicated by any other tradition.

⁸ The Christian orthodox tradition's vision of the incarnation and the redemption is a genuine parallel to the Gnostic vision of the divine spark and the escape, because both traditions recognize that the person is trapped in the material world and that the liberation comes from the divine intervention. But the Christian orthodox tradition's insistence on the goodness of the material world, the goodness of the creation, the goodness of the body, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Gnostic tradition.

⁹ The Hindu tradition's vision of the world as maya and the liberation as the recognition of the Brahman is a genuine parallel to the Gnostic vision of the world as the flawed creation and the liberation as the escape. But the Hindu tradition's insistence on the non-dual identity of the self with

Brahman, the insistence that the self is not trapped in the material world but is the ground of all reality, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Gnostic tradition.

¹⁰ The Buddhist tradition's vision of the world as suffering and the liberation as the cessation of the craving is a genuine parallel to the Gnostic vision of the world as the prison and the liberation as the escape. But the Buddhist tradition's insistence on the emptiness of all phenomena, the lack of any permanent self, the lack of any divine spark to be liberated, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Gnostic tradition.

¹¹ The Apocryphal Christian Texts

¹² The Apocryphon of John is the most important Gnostic text of the cosmology, and it is significant for the teaching of the Pleroma (the fullness of the divine realm), the Aeons (the emanations of the divine), the Sophia (the wisdom who falls from the Pleroma), the Demiurge Yaldabaoth (the flawed creator of the material world). The text is the foundation of the Gnostic cosmology, and it is significant for the teaching of the dualism of the divine realm and the material world.

¹³ The Gospel of Philip is the most important Gnostic text of the sacramental spirituality, and it is significant for the teaching of the marriage as the symbol of the union with the Divine, the teaching of the bridal chamber as the symbol of the final unity. The text is one of the most important in the Gnostic tradition, and it is significant for the teaching of the sacramental spirituality, the teaching of the union as the goal of the spiritual life.

¹⁴ The Apocrypha of the Old Testament (the Book of Enoch, the Book of Jubilees, the Wisdom of Solomon, the Book of Sirach, the Prayer of Manasseh) are the most important apocryphal texts of the Jewish and early Christian spiritual domain, and they are significant for the wisdom of the pre-Christian and early Christian spiritual practitioners, the wisdom of the vision of the divine, the wisdom of the ethical life. The texts are among the most important in the spiritual domain, and they are significant for the development of the wisdom tradition.

¹⁵ The Book of Enoch is the most important Apocryphal text, and it is significant for the teaching of the vision of the divine, the vision of the angels, the vision of the end times, the teaching of the judgment of the wicked, the teaching of the reward of the righteous. The text is one of the most important in the Apocryphal tradition, and it is significant for the vision of the divine that is cosmic, judicial, and apocalyptic.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT: THE YOGA TRADITION OF PATANJALI — THE SYSTEMATIC TECHNOLOGY OF THE MIND

¹ The Yoga tradition of Patanjali is the most important in the Indian spiritual domain as the most systematic account of the technology of the mind, and the Yoga teaching of the eight limbs of the yoga, the Yoga understanding of the cessation of the modifications of the mind, the Yoga practice of the meditation as the means of the liberation, are contributions that no other tradition fully matches.

² The Yoga Vision of the Eight Limbs

³ The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali is the most important text of the Yoga tradition, and it is significant for the teaching of the eight limbs of the yoga (yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara,

dharana, dhyana, samadhi) and the systematic technology of the liberation. The text is one of the most important in the Indian tradition, and it is significant for the systematic account of the technology of the mind.

⁴ The text's teaching of the kleshas (the afflictions: ignorance, ego, attachment, aversion, and clinging to life) is the most important contribution to the understanding of the causes of suffering, and the teaching of the pratipaksha bhavana (the cultivation of the opposite) is the most important contribution to the understanding of the means of the transformation. The text is the foundation of the Yoga tradition, and it is significant for the systematic account of the technology of the mind and the technology of the liberation.

⁵ The teaching of the samadhi and its various levels (savikalpa samadhi, nirvikalpa samadhi, sahaja samadhi) is the most important contribution to the understanding of the goal of the spiritual life, and the teaching of the distinction between the different levels of samadhi is the most important contribution to the understanding of the gradations of the liberation. The text is the foundation of the Yoga tradition, and it is significant for the systematic account of the gradations of the liberation.

⁶ What Is Distinctive: The Systematic Technology of the Mind

⁷ What is most distinctive about the Yoga tradition of Patanjali is the systematic technology of the mind—the vision that the liberation is the systematic cultivation of the mind through the eight limbs, and that the person's transformation is the systematic transformation of the mind. These are genuinely distinctive insights, and they are not fully duplicated by any other tradition.

⁸ The Buddhist tradition's teaching of the eightfold path is a genuine parallel to the Yoga teaching of the eight limbs, because both traditions provide a systematic framework for the cultivation of the person. But the Yoga tradition's teaching of the samadhi and the various levels of samadhi, the teaching of the distinction between the different levels of samadhi, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Buddhist tradition.

⁹ The Hindu tradition's teaching of the three gunas and the movement beyond them (gunatita) is a genuine parallel to the Yoga teaching of the eight limbs, because both traditions recognize that the person's transformation is the systematic transformation of the mind. But the Yoga tradition's emphasis on the technology of the mind as a systematic discipline, the Yoga tradition's emphasis on the eight limbs as the means of the systematic transformation, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Hindu tradition.

¹⁰ The Buddhist tradition's teaching of the mindfulness of the body, the mindfulness of the feelings, the mindfulness of the mind, the mindfulness of the mental objects is a genuine parallel to the Yoga teaching of the eight limbs, because both traditions provide a systematic framework for the cultivation of the attention. But the Yoga tradition's emphasis on the technology of the mind as the systematic cultivation of the eight limbs, the Yoga tradition's emphasis on the eight limbs as the means of the systematic transformation, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Buddhist tradition.

¹¹ The Christian tradition's teaching of the asceticism and the virtues is a genuine parallel to the Yoga teaching of the eight limbs, because both traditions provide a systematic framework for the cultivation of the person. But the Yoga tradition's emphasis on the technology of the mind as the systematic cultivation of the eight limbs, the Yoga tradition's emphasis on the eight limbs as the

means of the systematic transformation, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Christian tradition.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE: THE TAOIST INNER ALCHEMY — THE Somatic Transformation of Essence into Spirit

¹ The Taoist tradition of the inner alchemy is the most important in the Taoist domain, and the Taoist teaching of the circulation of the light, the Taoist understanding of the transformation of the essence into the energy, the energy into the spirit, the Taoist practice of the subtle body, the meridians, and the meditation on the light as the means of the spiritual transformation, are contributions that no other tradition fully matches.

² The Taoist Vision of the Inner Alchemy

³ The Secret of the Golden Flower (Tai Yi Jin Hua Zong Zhi) is the most important text of the Taoist inner alchemy, and it is significant for the teaching of the circulation of the light through the body, the transformation of the essence (jing) into the energy (qi), and the energy into the spirit (shen). The text is one of the most important in the Taoist tradition, and it is significant for the detailed account of the somatic transformation.

⁴ The text's teaching of the light (the light of consciousness itself) and the circulation of the light through the body is the most important contribution to the understanding of the embodied knowing, and the teaching of the transformation of the essence, the energy, and the spirit is the most important contribution to the understanding of the somatic transformation. The text is the foundation of the Taoist inner alchemy, and it is significant for the systematic account of the somatic transformation.

⁵ The Huainanzi is the most important Taoist text of the cosmology of the body and the universe, and it is significant for the teaching that the body is a microcosm of the universe, and that the cultivation of the body is the alignment of the microcosm with the macrocosm. The text is one of the most important in the Taoist tradition, and it is significant for the vision of the body as the microcosm of the universe.

⁶ What Is Distinctive: The Somatic Transformation of Essence into Spirit

⁷ What is most distinctive about the Taoist tradition of the inner alchemy is the somatic transformation of the essence into the spirit—the vision that the person's spiritual transformation is the somatic transformation of the energy, and that the person's liberation is the transformation of the essence into the spirit. These are genuinely distinctive insights, and they are not fully duplicated by any other tradition.

⁸ The Hindu tradition's teaching of the chakras and the nadis (the subtle energy channels) and the transformation of the energy is a genuine parallel to the Taoist teaching of the inner alchemy, because both traditions recognize that the person's spiritual transformation is the somatic transformation of the energy. But the Taoist tradition's emphasis on the circulation of the light as the means of the transformation, the Taoist tradition's emphasis on the practice of the subtle body and the meridians, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Hindu tradition.

⁹ The Tantric tradition's teaching of the transformation of the energy (the transformation of the sexual energy, the transformation of the vital energy) is a genuine parallel to the Taoist teaching of the inner alchemy, because both traditions recognize that the person's spiritual transformation is the somatic transformation of the energy. But the Taoist tradition's emphasis on the circulation of the light as the means of the transformation, the Taoist tradition's emphasis on the practice of the subtle body and the meridians, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Tantric tradition.

¹⁰ The Tibetan Buddhist tradition's teaching of the subtle body and the channels (nadis, tsas) and the energy (rtsod, winds) and the drops (bindu, thigle) is a genuine parallel to the Taoist teaching of the inner alchemy, because both traditions recognize that the person's spiritual transformation is the somatic transformation of the energy. But the Taoist tradition's emphasis on the circulation of the light as the means of the transformation, the Taoist tradition's emphasis on the practice of the subtle body and the meridians, is distinctive, and it is not fully duplicated by the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

CHAPTER THIRTY: THE INTEGRATIVE SYNTHESIS — WHAT THE OVERALL PATTERN IS

¹ When the distinctive contributions of all the traditions are gathered together, the pattern that emerges is not a single teaching but a convergent recognition of the most important features of the spiritual life. The pattern is this:

² The person is not what the person thinks they are. The ordinary consciousness is mistaken about the nature of the self, the nature of the world, the nature of the relationship between the self and the world. The liberation is the recognition of the true nature of the self, the true nature of the world, the true nature of the relationship between the self and the world.

³ The traditions differ on what the true nature of the self is: the Hindu tradition says the self is non-dual consciousness; the Buddhist tradition says the self is empty; the Christian tradition says the soul is the beloved of God; the Sufi tradition says the self is the mirror of the Divine; the Taoist tradition says the self is the process of the world; the Stoic tradition says the self is the rational faculty; the Jain tradition says the self is the living being that is the seat of the consciousness. But all the traditions agree that the ordinary consciousness is mistaken about the self, and that the liberation is the recognition of the true nature of the self.

⁴ The traditions differ on what the true nature of the world is: the Hindu tradition says the world is maya; the Buddhist tradition says the world is suffering; the Christian tradition says the world is the creation of God; the Sufi tradition says the world is the mirror of the Divine; the Taoist tradition says the world is the process of the Tao; the Stoic tradition says the world is the reason of the universe; the Jain tradition says the world is the realm of the karma. But all the traditions agree that the ordinary consciousness is mistaken about the world, and that the liberation is the recognition of the true nature of the world.

⁵ The traditions differ on how the person is to be transformed: the Hindu tradition says the person is to recognize the identity of the self with Brahman; the Buddhist tradition says the person is to cultivate the mindfulness and the compassion; the Christian tradition says the person is to be transformed by the love of God; the Sufi tradition says the person is to be annihilated in the Divine;

the Taoist tradition says the person is to align with the Tao; the Stoic tradition says the person is to discipline the reason; the Jain tradition says the person is to practice the non-violence. But all the traditions agree that the person is to be transformed, and that the transformation is the result of the practice.

⁶ The pattern is that the person is not what the person thinks they are, and the liberation is the recognition of the true nature of the person, the true nature of the world, the true nature of the relationship between the person and the world. The traditions differ on what the true nature is, but they agree that the ordinary consciousness is mistaken, and that the liberation is the recognition of the truth.

⁷ The synthesis is not the resolution of the differences but the recognition of the convergent insight: the person is not what the person thinks they are, and the liberation is the recognition of the true nature of the self, the true nature of the world, the true nature of the relationship between the self and the world. The truth is not captured by any single tradition, but it is recognized by all the traditions in their distinctive ways. The synthesis is the recognition of the convergent insight, the recognition that the truth is too large for any single tradition to capture, and that the whole of the truth is accessible only through the comparison and the integration of the distinctive insights of all the traditions.

⁸ The final insight of the synthesis is that the person is not what the person thinks they are, and the liberation is the recognition of the true nature of the self, the true nature of the world, the true nature of the relationship between the self and the world. The person is the ground of all possibility, the person is the field of all transformation, the person is the vessel of all knowing. The person's journey to the liberation is the person's journey to the recognition of the truth, and the recognition of the truth is the liberation of the person from the bondage of the ordinary consciousness, the liberation of the person from the bondage of the self, the liberation of the person from the bondage of the world.

⁹ This is the wisdom made one: the wisdom of the traditions, gathered together, recognized as the convergent insight of the spiritual life, the wisdom of the person, the wisdom of the world, the wisdom of the relationship between the person and the world. The wisdom is not the property of any tradition; the wisdom is the common inheritance of the spiritual life, and it is the common inheritance of the person who seeks the liberation.

EPILOGUE TO VOLUME IV: WHAT REMAINS

¹ The distinctive contributions of each tradition have been identified and compared. But the comparison is not the synthesis. The synthesis is the recognition of the convergent insight, the recognition that the truth is too large for any single tradition to capture, and that the whole of the truth is accessible only through the comparison and the integration of the distinctive insights of all the traditions.

² The convergent insight is that the person is not what the person thinks they are, and the liberation is the recognition of the true nature of the self, the true nature of the world, the true nature of the relationship between the self and the world. The truth is not captured by any single tradition, but it is recognized by all the traditions in their distinctive ways.

³ The remaining questions—the questions that no synthesis can fully answer, the questions that remain even after the most comprehensive integration—is the subject of Volume V.

Volume V: The Unfinished Questions

PROLOGUE: The Honesty of What Cannot Be Resolved

¹ A truly honest synthesis must acknowledge what it cannot resolve. The traditions genuinely disagree about some of the most fundamental questions, and pretending otherwise produces a kind of spiritual kitsch that is faithful to no tradition and useful to no one. The disagreements are real. They are not misunderstandings to be smoothed over. They are genuine differences in the vision of reality, in the understanding of the person, in the account of suffering and liberation.

² What follows is an attempt to face these disagreements honestly, to acknowledge what the synthesis cannot resolve, and to show what is genuinely accessible to a person who engages the full range of the spiritual traditions without pretending that the tensions do not exist.

³ The method is not to resolve the tensions but to show what can be learned from holding them honestly—what insights emerge from the friction between traditions that are genuinely in disagreement, what possibilities open up that are not visible from any single tradition alone, what practical wisdom is available to a person who recognizes that the truth is larger than any one tradition's articulation of it.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE: THE ULTIMATE REALITY — PERSONAL, IMPERSONAL, OR BEYOND THE CATEGORIES

¹ The most fundamental disagreement among the spiritual traditions is about the nature of the ultimate reality: is it personal, is it impersonal, is it beyond both categories, is it something that can only be approached from one direction by some people and from another direction by other people?

² The Personal Ultimate

³ The Abrahamic traditions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam—are the most clear in their insistence that the ultimate reality is personal. The God of the Torah is the God who speaks to Abraham, to Moses, to the prophets. The God of the Christian tradition is the God who enters into the history of the world in the person of Jesus. The God of the Islamic tradition is the God who speaks in the Quran, who commands, who guides, who loves. The personal God is not a distant abstraction; the personal God is involved in the world, in the history, in the lives of the people.

⁴ The God of the Torah is the most vividly personal in the Hebrew Bible. "The Lord said to Abraham, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.' ... The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, 'Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you.'" (Genesis 12:1, 26:2-3). The God of the Torah is not the God of the philosophical abstraction; the God of the Torah is the God who speaks, who commands, who promises, who is in covenant with the people.

⁵ The God of the Christian tradition is the most intensely personal in the New Testament. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The incarnation is the most radical form of the personal God: the eternal enters into the temporal, the infinite enters into the finite, the divine enters into the historical, in a way that is not simply a metaphor but a claim about the nature of the ultimate reality.

⁶ The God of the Islamic tradition is the most powerfully personal in the Quran. "Say: He is Allah, the One. Allah, the Eternal Refuge. He begets not, nor is He begotten; and there is none comparable to Him" (Quran, 112). The Surah 112 is the most concentrated statement of the Islamic vision of God, and it is significant for the teaching that God is the One, the Eternal, the without comparison, the without partner, the without equal. The Quran is the word of God, the direct speech of God, the guidance from God.

⁷ The Sufi tradition preserves the personal vision of God while adding the depth of the love and the annihilation. The Conference of the Birds: "The seeker sees the Simurgh, and understands that he is the Simurgh" is the most radical expression of the personal vision, because the personal God is not only the object of love but the reality of the self. The Sufi vision of the personal God is not the God of the purely external religion; the Sufi vision of the personal God is the God of the heart, the God of the love, the God of the intimate encounter.

⁸ The Sikh tradition's Guru Granth Sahib is the most integrated vision of the personal God. "He is the One, without a second; He is the Truth, the Fearless, the Without Hate. He is the Creator, and He is the creation; He is the One, and there is no other" (Guru Granth Sahib, Ang 294). The Sikh vision of the personal God is the vision that combines the devotion with the metaphysical insight, the love with the knowledge.

⁹ The Hasidic tradition's teaching of the divine spark is the most intimate vision of the personal God. "Every person has a divine spark that is always in connection with God. The person's task is to reconnect with this connection, to remember this connection, to rejoice in this connection" (from the Baal Shem Tov's teachings). The Hasidic vision of the personal God is the vision that the person is never separate from God, and the spiritual life is the recognition of this connection.

¹⁰ The Impersonal Ultimate

¹¹ The Upanishadic tradition is the most clear in its insistence that the ultimate reality is beyond the personal. Brahman is not a person; Brahman is the ground of all being, the reality behind all appearances, the identity of the self with the ground. The Upanishads are careful to say that Brahman is not the same as the personal God of the popular religion, but the personal God (Ishvara) is a manifestation of Brahman for the sake of the devotees. The ultimate reality is not personal; it is the ground from which both the personal and the impersonal arise.

¹² The Buddhist tradition is the most uncompromising in its insistence that the ultimate reality is not personal. The Buddha did not teach a personal God; the Buddha taught the cessation of suffering through the recognition of the impermanence, the unsatisfactoriness, and the not-self of all phenomena. The Mahayana tradition's teaching of the emptiness of all phenomena is the most radical statement of the impersonal ultimate: all phenomena are empty of inherent existence, and there is no personal ground behind the emptiness. The ultimate reality is not a person; it is the nature of all things, the emptiness of all things, the suchness of all things.

¹³ The Taoist tradition is the most elegant in its insistence that the ultimate reality is not personal. The Tao is the way of all things, the pattern of all existence, the process by which everything unfolds. The Tao is not a person; the Tao is not a god; the Tao is not a being. The Tao is the way, and the way is the way of the world, the way of the self, the way of all things.

¹⁴ The Stoic tradition is the most ironic in its insistence that the ultimate reality is not personal. The Stoics believed in the logos, the rational principle that permeates the universe, but the logos is not a person; the logos is the rational principle, the order of the universe, the reason that is in all things. The Stoic God is not a personal God; the Stoic God is the rational principle, the order of the universe, the logos.

¹⁵ The Jain tradition is the most uncompromising in its insistence that the ultimate reality is not personal. The Jains do not believe in a personal God; the Jains believe in the liberated souls (Siddhas) who have achieved the highest state, but the ultimate reality is not a personal God; it is the state of liberation, the state of the jiva that is free from all karma, free from all bondage, free from all suffering.

¹⁶ The Beyond-the-Categories Ultimate

¹⁷ The apophatic traditions are the most important in the spiritual domain for the teaching that the ultimate reality is beyond all categories, beyond personal and impersonal, beyond all description, beyond all conception.

¹⁸ The Cloud of Unknowing is the most important text of the apophatic tradition in Christianity, and it is significant for the teaching that the person knows God not through any knowledge, not through any vision, not through any understanding, but through the love that is directed into the cloud of unknowing, piercing the cloud with a single point of longing love. The cloud of unknowing is the place where the person is between the personal and the impersonal, the place where the person knows God beyond all categories, beyond all descriptions, beyond all conceptions.

¹⁹ The Cloud of Unknowing's teaching is that the person cannot know God through the knowledge of the person's mind, through the concepts of the person's intellect, through the images of the person's imagination. The person must forget all of these, must cast them into the cloud of forgetting, and must direct the love into the cloud of unknowing, piercing the cloud with a single point of longing love. The person knows God in the darkness, in the unknowing, in the cloud, and this knowledge is more real than any knowledge that can be known through the mind.

²⁰ The Mystical Theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite is the most important text of the apophatic tradition in the Christian West, and it is significant for the teaching that the cause of all is beyond all assertion, beyond all predication, beyond all name, beyond all description. The person must strip away all the names of God, all the attributes of God, all the concepts of God, and enter into the darkness of the unknowing, where the person knows God beyond all names, beyond all concepts, beyond all descriptions.

²¹ The apophatic tradition in the Hindu Vedanta is the most important, because the Upanishads teach that Brahman is *neti neti*—"not this, not this"—the negation of all categories, all descriptions, all conceptions. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad: "It is not the body, not the breath, not the mind, not the intellect, not the ego. It is what remains when all these are set aside; it is the seer that cannot be seen, the hearer that cannot be heard, the thinker that cannot be thought, the knower that cannot be

known." The apophatic way is the way of the negation of all that is not the true nature, the way of the recognition of the self that is beyond all categories.

²² The apophatic tradition in the Islamic Sufism is the most important, because the Sufi teaching of the fana (annihilation) is the way of the negation of the self, the way of the recognition of the Divine beyond all categories. The Conference of the Birds: the seeker is annihilated in the Simurgh, and the seeker sees himself, the thirty birds, and understands that he is the Simurgh. The abolition of the self is the way of the recognition of the Divine beyond all categories, beyond personal and impersonal, beyond all description.

²³ The apophatic tradition in the Taoist tradition is the most elegant, because the Tao te Ching's opening lines are the most famous expression of the beyond-the-categories ultimate: "The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal name. The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth. The named is the mother of the ten thousand things." The negation of the naming of the Tao is the way of the recognition of the Tao beyond all categories, beyond personal and impersonal, beyond all description.

²⁴ What Is Genuinely Agreed and What Is Genuinely Disputed

²⁵ What all the traditions genuinely agree on is that the ultimate reality is not captured by the ordinary conceptual apparatus; that the ordinary concepts are inadequate to the ultimate reality; that the person cannot know the ultimate reality through the mind, through the intellect, through the concepts, through the language. The person must be transformed to know the ultimate reality, and the transformation is the condition of the knowledge.

²⁶ What the traditions genuinely disagree about is whether the ultimate reality is personal, impersonal, or beyond both categories. The Abrahamic traditions say it is personal; the Upanishadic and Buddhist and Taoist traditions say it is impersonal; the apophatic traditions say it is beyond both categories. These are genuine disagreements, and they are not merely differences of emphasis or differences of temperament. They are differences about the fundamental nature of the ultimate reality, and they are not fully resolvable by any synthesis.

²⁷ What is most interesting about the disagreement is not that the traditions disagree but that the traditions are all right from within their own perspective. The person who encounters the ultimate reality through the path of the personal love, through the path of the devotion, through the path of the relationship with the Divine, will experience the ultimate reality as personal, and the experience will be genuine. The person who encounters the ultimate reality through the path of the knowledge, through the path of the recognition, through the path of the insight into the nature of the self, will experience the ultimate reality as impersonal, and the experience will be genuine. The person who encounters the ultimate reality through the path of the love and the knowledge together, through the path of the apophatic silence, through the path of the direct encounter beyond categories, will experience the ultimate reality as beyond both personal and impersonal, and the experience will be genuine.

²⁸ The disagreement is not a matter of error; it is a matter of the different paths, the different capacities, the different starting points. The person who is a lover will encounter the ultimate reality as a beloved; the person who is a knower will encounter the ultimate reality as a ground; the person who is a mystic will encounter the ultimate reality as beyond all categories. All three experiences are genuine, and all three are valid from within the perspective that gave rise to them.

²⁹ The synthesis must honor all three perspectives without resolving the disagreement, and must show that the truth is too large for any single perspective to capture. The person who has only the personal vision of the ultimate reality has only one dimension of the truth; the person who has only the impersonal vision has only one dimension of the truth; the person who has only the beyond-the-categories vision has only one dimension of the truth. The person who has all three visions has the full dimension of the truth, and the full dimension is the wisdom made one.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO: THE WORLD AS REAL OR ILLUSORY — THE MOST DIFFICULT TENSION

¹ The most difficult tension among the spiritual traditions is the question of whether the world is real or illusory, whether the world is the creation of God, the manifestation of the Tao, the play of the Divine, the prison of the demiurge, the dream of the mind, or the field of the spiritual life.

² The World as the Creation of God

³ The Abrahamic traditions are the most clear in their insistence that the world is the creation of God, the world is the work of the Creator, the world is good, the world is the place of the spiritual life. The Torah: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Genesis 1:1-3). The creation is the work of God, the creation is declared good, the creation is the place of the covenant.

⁴ The Christian tradition inherits the creation theology of the Torah and develops it in the light of the incarnation. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16). The world is the creation of God, the world is loved by God, the world is the place of the incarnation, the world is the place of the redemption. The Christian vision of the world is the vision of the world as the creation of God, the world as the place of the love of God, the world as the place of the spiritual life.

⁵ The Islamic tradition's vision of the world is the vision of the world as the creation of Allah, the world as the place of the submission, the world as the place of the spiritual life. "Allah is the Creator of all things, and He is, over all things, Disposer of affairs" (Quran, 39:62). The world is the creation of Allah, the world is the place of the submission to Allah, the world is the place of the spiritual life.

⁶ The Hasidic vision of the world is the vision of the world as the place of the divine sparks, the world as the place of the hidden divine presence, the world as the place of the tikkun. "Every person has a divine spark that is the essence of their soul, and this spark is always in connection with God. The person's task is to reconnect with this connection, to remember this connection, to rejoice in this connection" (from the Baal Shem Tov's teachings). The Hasidic vision of the world is the vision of the world as the place of the divine presence, the world as the place of the spiritual life, the world as the place of the tikkun.

⁷ The World as Illusion

⁸ The Hindu tradition is the most important for the teaching of the world as maya, the world as the illusion, the world as the appearance of the Brahman in the mode of limitation. The Advaita Vedanta: the world is not absolutely real, because only Brahman is real; the world is not absolutely unreal,

because it appears and functions in ordinary experience. The world is the appearance of the real in the mode of limitation, and the recognition of the real as the only reality is the liberation.

⁹ The Bhagavad Gita: "The material energy is the inferior energy, and the living beings are the superior energy. The material energy is the field of activity, and the living beings are the knowers of the field. The knowledge of the distinction between the field and the knower of the field is the true knowledge, and this knowledge is the liberation" (Bhagavad Gita, 13:6-34, paraphrase). The world is the field of activity, not the ultimate reality; the person is the knower of the field, not the field itself; the liberation is the knowledge of the distinction.

¹⁰ The Maya in the Upanishadic tradition is the most sophisticated account of the world as the illusion. The world is the projection of the avidya (ignorance), the avidya that projects the world as real and separate from the self. The liberation is the dissolution of the avidya, the recognition of the identity of the Atman with the Brahman, and the recognition that the world is the appearance of the Brahman in the mode of limitation.

¹¹ The Buddhist tradition is the most uncompromising in its teaching of the world as the illusion, but in a very specific sense: the world is not illusory in the sense that it does not exist; the world is illusory in the sense that it appears to have a substantial, independent, permanent existence when it does not. The Diamond Sutra: "All conditioned phenomena are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow, like dew or a lightning flash. Thus one should contemplate them" (Diamond Sutra, Chapter 32). The world is the dream, not in the sense that it is nothing, but in the sense that it appears substantial when it is not.

¹² The Tibetan Book of the Dead: the appearances of the bardo states are the projections of the mind, and they are empty; if one recognizes them as such, one is liberated; if one does not, one becomes attached and is reborn. The world of the bardo is the world of the projections of the mind, and the recognition of the emptiness of the projections is the liberation.

¹³ The Maya in the Yogacara school: the world is mind-only, the external world does not exist apart from the mind, the mind is the source of all appearances. The liberation is the recognition of the mind-only, the recognition that the external world is the projection of the mind, and the recognition that the mind is the ground of all experience.

¹⁴ The World as Process

¹⁵ The Taoist tradition is the most important for the teaching of the world as process, the world as the way of the Tao, the world as the flow of the changes. The Tao te Ching: "The Tao produced One; One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced the ten thousand things." The world is the product of the Tao, the world is the process of the changes, the world is the flow of the events. The spiritual life is the alignment with the process, the practice of the wu-wei, the life of the person who is in harmony with the way of the world.

¹⁶ The Zhuangzi: the world is the equality of all things, the world is the transformation of all things, the world is the flow of the life. The person who is in the world is the person who is in the flow, the person who is in the equality of all things, the person who is free of the attachments to the categories. The person's liberation is the recognition of the flow, the recognition of the equality of all things, the recognition of the person as the part of the process.

¹⁷ The Liezi: the man who has no self is the man who acts without self-interest, who responds to the world without resistance, who is at peace with the process. The person's liberation is the recognition of the process, the recognition of the person as the part of the process, the recognition of the person as the flow of the life.

¹⁸ The World as the Prison

¹⁹ The Gnostic tradition is the most important for the teaching of the world as the prison, the world as the creation of the demiurge, the world as the place of the trap for the divine spark. The Apocryphon of John: the Pleroma is the fullness of the divine realm, the Aeons are the emanations of the divine, Sophia falls from the Pleroma, and from Sophia comes the Demiurge Yaldabaoth, the flawed creator of the material world. The person is the divine spark trapped in the material world, and the liberation is the escape from the material world, the return of the divine spark to the Pleroma.

²⁰ The Gnostic vision of the world as the prison is the most radical in the spiritual tradition, because the world is not the creation of the true God but the creation of the flawed demiurge, and the person's liberation is not the transformation of the world but the escape from the world. The world is the prison of the divine spark, and the spiritual life is the journey of the escape, the journey of the return to the Pleroma.

²¹ The World as the Place of the Spiritual Life

²² The Confucian tradition is the most important for the teaching of the world as the place of the spiritual life, the world as the place of the ethics, the world as the place of the cultivation of the person. The Analects: the person's task is the cultivation of the virtues in the world, the person's task is the rectification of the heart in the world, the person's task is the service to the family and the community in the world. The world is the place of the ethics, the world is the place of the cultivation, and the person's liberation is the transformation of the person in the world, the transformation of the person through the practice of the virtues.

²³ The Stoic tradition is the most important for the teaching of the world as the place of the reason, the world as the place of the virtue, the world as the place of the acceptance of the fate. The world is the creation of the logos, the world is the place of the reason, the world is the place of the virtue, and the person's liberation is the alignment of the person's reason with the cosmic reason, the acceptance of the fate, the practice of the four virtues.

²⁴ The Quaker tradition is the most important for the teaching of the world as the place of the service, the world as the place of the simplicity, the world as the place of the truth-telling. The Quaker meeting for worship is the time of the silence and the service, the Quaker testimony of peace is the commitment to the non-violence in the world, the Quaker testimony of simplicity is the commitment to the life without the accumulation of the possessions. The world is the place of the service, the world is the place of the simplicity, the world is the place of the truth-telling.

²⁵ The country wisdom tradition (Red Sky at Night, etc.) is the most important for the teaching of the world as the place of the practical knowledge, the world as the place of the connection to the land and the seasons, the world as the place of the reconnection to the rhythms of the life. The country wisdom is the wisdom of the practical knowledge, the wisdom of the connection to the land and the seasons, the wisdom of the reconnection to the rhythms of the life, and the person's liberation is the

reconnection to the world, the reconnection to the rhythms of the life, the reconnection to the practical knowledge that is the wisdom of the country.

²⁶ The Synthesis of the World as the Place

²⁷ The synthesis of the world as the place is the recognition that the world is all of these and none of these, that the world is the creation of God and the illusion and the process and the prison and the place of the spiritual life. The person's relationship to the world is the person's most difficult and most important spiritual task, and the person's liberation is the transformation of the relationship to the world, not the escape from the world, not the denial of the world, not the annihilation of the world, but the transformation of the relationship to the world.

²⁸ The person who lives in the world as the creation of God loves the world as the creation of God. The person who lives in the world as the illusion is free from the attachment to the world as the illusion. The person who lives in the world as the process is in harmony with the world as the process. The person who lives in the world as the prison is free from the attachment to the world as the prison. The person who lives in the world as the place of the spiritual life is engaged with the world as the place of the spiritual life.

²⁹ The person's relationship to the world is the person's most difficult spiritual task, and the person's liberation is the transformation of the relationship to the world. The transformation is the result of the practice, and the practice is the cultivation of the person in the world, the cultivation of the person through the engagement with the world, the cultivation of the person through the transformation of the relationship to the world.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE: THE BODY-SPIRIT PROBLEM — THE INTEGRATION OF THE SOMATIC AND THE SPIRITUAL

¹ The body-spirit problem is one of the most persistent in the spiritual tradition, and the different traditions have very different answers to the question of the relationship between the body and the spirit, the body and the soul, the body and the mind, the body and the consciousness.

² The Body as Obstacle

³ The traditions that see the body as an obstacle to the spiritual life are the traditions that see the spiritual life as the escape from the body, the liberation from the body, the transformation of the person beyond the body. The Christian tradition: the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, but the body is also the source of the temptation, the source of the sin, the source of the death. The Desert Fathers: the body is the enemy of the spiritual life, the body is the source of the logismoi, the body is the obstacle to the prayer and the contemplation. The body must be disciplined, but the body is also the temple.

⁴ The Buddhist tradition: the body is one of the five aggregates, the body is the source of the suffering that comes from the attachment to the physical form, the body is the object of the mindfulness as the body, the body is the object of the observation of the decomposition. The body is the most accessible object of the mindfulness, and the mindfulness of the body is the foundation of the practice, but the body is also the source of the suffering, and the liberation is the freedom from the attachment to the body.

⁵ The Gnostic tradition: the body is the prison of the divine spark, the body is the creation of the demiurge, the body is the obstacle to the liberation, the body is the place of the trap. The liberation is the escape from the body, the return of the divine spark to the Pleroma. The body is the enemy of the spiritual life, the body is the obstacle to the liberation.

⁶ The Body as Vehicle

⁷ The traditions that see the body as a vehicle of the spiritual life are the traditions that see the spiritual life as the transformation of the whole person, the transformation of the body as well as the mind, the transformation of the body as the expression of the spiritual transformation.

⁸ The Hindu tradition: the body is one of the five sheaths in the Taittiriya Upanishad, the body is a manifestation of the prakriti, the body is a vehicle of the transformation through the practice of the yoga, the pranayama, the meditation on the chakras. The body is the vessel of the transformation, the body is the means of the liberation, the body is the expression of the divine.

⁹ The Taoist tradition: the body is the vessel of the circulation of the light, the body is the means of the transformation of the essence into the energy, the energy into the spirit. The inner alchemy is the somatic transformation, the transformation of the energy through the practice of the subtle body, the meridians, the circulation of the light. The body is the primary vehicle of the transformation, and the liberation is the transformation of the body into the spirit.

¹⁰ The Tibetan Buddhist tradition: the body is the vessel of the subtle energy, the body is the means of the transformation through the practice of the tummo, the channels, the winds, the drops. The body is the vehicle of the transformation, the body is the means of the liberation, the body is the expression of the nature of mind.

¹¹ The Sufi tradition: the body is the vessel of the whirling, the body is the means of the transformation through the practice of the dhikr with the breath, the whirling dance, the meditation on the heart. The whirling is the expression of the spiritual transformation, the whirling is the dance of the soul in the presence of the Divine. The body is the vehicle of the transformation, the body is the expression of the spiritual life.

¹² The Christian contemplative tradition: the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, the body is the means of the prayer, the body is the vessel of the contemplation. The Jesus Prayer is practiced with the body, with the breath, with the mind, with the heart. The body is the vessel of the prayer, the body is the means of the transformation, the body is the expression of the spiritual life.

¹³ The Body as the Expression of the Spirit

¹⁴ The traditions that see the body as the expression of the spirit are the traditions that see the spiritual life as the transformation of the whole person, the transformation of the body as the expression of the spiritual transformation, the transformation of the body as the sign of the spiritual life.

¹⁵ The Hindu tradition: the body is the expression of the divine, the body is the manifestation of the prakriti, the body is the temple of the atman. The Tirumurai and the Divya Prabandham: the hymns of the Tamil tradition are the expression of the devotion, the expression of the love, the expression of the spiritual life in the body. The body is the expression of the devotion, the body is the expression of the love, the body is the expression of the spiritual life.

¹⁶ The Taoist tradition: the body is the expression of the circulation of the light, the body is the expression of the transformation of the essence into the spirit. The internal alchemy is the expression of the spiritual transformation, the internal alchemy is the transformation of the body into the spirit. The body is the expression of the Tao, the body is the expression of the way, the body is the expression of the spiritual life.

¹⁷ The Buddhist tradition: the body is the expression of the mindfulness, the body is the expression of the compassion, the body is the expression of the liberation. The Zen tradition: the body is the expression of the zazen, the body is the expression of the sitting meditation, the body is the expression of the enlightenment. The body is the expression of the practice, the body is the expression of the realization, the body is the expression of the spiritual life.

¹⁸ The Christian tradition: the body is the expression of the love, the body is the expression of the service, the body is the expression of the charity. The Desert Fathers: the body is the expression of the asceticism, the body is the expression of the poverty, the body is the expression of the obedience. The body is the expression of the spiritual life, the body is the expression of the virtue, the body is the expression of the love.

¹⁹ The Integration of the Body and the Spirit

²⁰ The integration of the body and the spirit is the recognition that the body is not the enemy of the spiritual life, not the prison of the divine spark, not the obstacle to the liberation, but the vessel, the vehicle, the expression of the spiritual life. The body is the means of the transformation, the body is the expression of the transformation, the body is the sign of the liberation.

²¹ The person who recognizes the body as the vessel of the spiritual life is the person who practices the mindfulness of the body, the person who practices the yoga of the body, the person who practices the inner alchemy of the body, the person who practices the prayer with the body, the person who practices the service with the body, the person who practices the love with the body. The person who recognizes the body as the expression of the spiritual life is the person who lives the spiritual life in the body, the person who expresses the spiritual life in the body, the person who transforms the body through the spiritual life.

²² The transformation of the body through the spiritual life is the recognition that the body is not separate from the spirit, not the enemy of the spirit, not the prison of the spirit, but the vessel, the vehicle, the expression of the spirit. The body is the means of the transformation, the body is the expression of the transformation, the body is the sign of the liberation. The transformation of the body is the transformation of the person, and the liberation of the body is the liberation of the person.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR: THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING AND THE MEANING OF PAIN

¹ The problem of suffering is the most difficult problem in the spiritual tradition, and the different traditions have very different answers to the question of the nature of suffering, the cause of suffering, the meaning of suffering, and the means of liberation from suffering.

² The Buddhist Diagnosis of Suffering

³ The Buddhist tradition is the most systematic in its diagnosis of suffering, and the Four Noble Truths are the most complete expression of the Buddhist vision of suffering. The first noble truth: "This is suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering; association with the unbeloved is suffering; separation from the loved is suffering; not getting what one wants is suffering. In short, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering." The second noble truth: "This is the origin of suffering: the craving that leads to rebirth, the craving for sensual pleasure, the craving for becoming, the craving for non-becoming." The third noble truth: "This is the cessation of suffering: the cessation of this craving, the relinquishing of this craving, the abandonment of this craving, the release from this craving. This is the cessation of suffering." The fourth noble truth: "This is the path to the cessation of suffering: the noble eightfold path."

⁴ The Buddhist diagnosis of suffering is the most complete in the spiritual tradition, because the Buddhist analysis of the causes of suffering (the craving, the attachment, the ignorance, the clinging to the five aggregates) is the most systematic, and the Buddhist analysis of the means of liberation from suffering (the Eightfold Path, the four foundations of mindfulness, the five aggregates, the twelve links of dependent origination, the seven factors of awakening, the thirty-seven factors of awakening) is the most complete.

⁵ The Buddhist vision of the meaning of suffering is the most direct: suffering is the problem, and the meaning of suffering is the motivation for the spiritual life. The person who experiences suffering is the person who is motivated to seek the liberation from suffering, and the person who seeks the liberation from suffering is the person who is on the path. The suffering is the starting point of the spiritual life, and the liberation from suffering is the goal of the spiritual life.

⁶ The Hindu Vision of Suffering

⁷ The Hindu tradition's vision of suffering is the most varied, because the Hindu tradition has multiple paths, and the meaning of suffering is understood differently in the different paths.

⁸ The Yoga tradition: suffering is the result of the afflictions (the kleshas: ignorance, ego, attachment, aversion, and clinging to life), and the cessation of the afflictions is the liberation. The person's suffering is the result of the ignorance of the true nature of the self, the ego that is the false identification with the body, the mind, the intellect, the ego, the attachment to the objects, the aversion to the objects, the clinging to the life. The liberation is the recognition of the true nature of the self, the dissolution of the ego, the cessation of the attachment and the aversion, and the acceptance of the life and the death.

⁹ The Bhagavad Gita: suffering is the result of the identification with the body, the mind, the intellect, the ego, and the liberation is the recognition of the self as the witness of the gunas, the self as the eternal, the self as the indestructible. "The self is not born, nor does it die; it is not created nor does it cease to exist. The self is unborn, eternal, ever-existing, and ancient. It does not die when the body dies" (Bhagavad Gita, 2:20). The liberation is the knowledge of the self, the knowledge of the eternal, the knowledge of the witness of the gunas.

¹⁰ The Bhakti tradition: suffering is the result of the separation from the Divine, and the liberation is the reunion with the Divine through the love, the devotion, the surrender. The person's suffering is the result of the separation from Krishna, Vishnu, Shiva, the Divine Mother, and the liberation is the

love, the devotion, the surrender to the Divine. The love is the vehicle of the liberation, the love is the means of the knowledge, the love is the condition of the liberation.

¹¹ The Jnana tradition: suffering is the result of the ignorance of the identity of the Atman with the Brahman, and the liberation is the recognition of the identity. The person's suffering is the result of the ignorance, the attachment to the world, the attachment to the self, and the liberation is the discrimination between the real and the unreal, the recognition of the identity of the Atman with the Brahman, the recognition of the self as the eternal, the self as the witness, the self as the one with the ground of all.

¹² The Christian Vision of Suffering

¹³ The Christian tradition's vision of suffering is the most complex in the Western tradition, because the Christian tradition has to account for the suffering of the innocent, the suffering of the righteous, the suffering of the Christ, and the meaning of these sufferings in the context of the love of God.

¹⁴ The Book of Job is the most important treatment of the problem of suffering in the Christian tradition, and it is significant for the teaching that the suffering of the innocent is not the result of the sin, is not the result of the failure, is not the result of the punishment, but the result of the mystery of the divine will. "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? ... Have you entered the storehouses of the snow? Have you seen the treasures of the hail?" (Job 38:4, 22-23). The answer to the problem of suffering is not the solution but the encounter with the immensity of the Divine, and the recognition that the human mind is too small to contain the full truth of the matter.

¹⁵ The Gospel of John: the suffering of the Christ is the central event of the spiritual life, and the suffering of the Christ is the suffering of the God in the person of Jesus. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The suffering of the Christ is the suffering of the love, the suffering of the redemption, the suffering of the victory over the death. The person's suffering is the participation in the suffering of the Christ, and the liberation is the resurrection, the eternal life, the union with God.

¹⁶ The Cloud of Unknowing: the suffering of the spiritual life is the work of God in the soul, and the suffering is the most precious of all the sufferings, because it is the purification of the soul. The soul must not resist the suffering, must not try to understand the suffering, must not flee from the suffering. The soul must accept the suffering, embrace the suffering, and let the suffering do its work, because the suffering is the means by which God purifies the soul and prepares the soul for the union.

¹⁷ John of the Cross: the dark night of the soul is the most painful passage of the spiritual life, and the suffering of the dark night is the suffering of the purification, the suffering of the stripping away of all that is not God, the suffering of the transformation of the soul by the love of God. The soul must pass through the night without resistance, without understanding, without any comfort except the knowledge that God is the one who is doing the work.

¹⁸ Julian of Norwich: the suffering of the world is the suffering that is ultimately transformed by the love of God, and the meaning of the suffering is the recognition that "all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well." The suffering is not the ultimate reality, and the love of God is greater than all the suffering, and the person who knows the love of God knows that the suffering is ultimately transformed.

¹⁹ The Taoist Vision of Suffering

²⁰ The Taoist tradition's vision of suffering is the most distinctive in the spiritual tradition, because the Taoist tradition does not see suffering as the problem to be solved but as the symptom of the misalignment with the way, and the liberation from suffering is the alignment with the way.

²¹ The Tao te Ching: the suffering is the result of the attachment to the desires, the attachment to the knowledge, the attachment to the ambitions. "Eliminate the pursuit of learning, and you will be without sorrow. 'Yes' and 'no' are far apart. 'Good' and 'bad' are far apart. What the world calls beautiful is not beautiful; it creates evil. What the world calls good is not good; it creates ugliness. Therefore, the sage dwells in the direct, the unadorned, the unpretentious, the simple, the selfless, the few desires" (Tao te Ching, 19). The person who eliminates the pursuit of learning, the person who lets go of the categories of good and bad, beautiful and ugly, the person who dwells in the direct, the simple, the selfless, the few desires—the person is free from the suffering.

²² Zhuangzi: the suffering is the result of the attachment to the values, the attachment to the judgments, the attachment to the categories. "From the viewpoint of the Dao, things have no nobility or baseness. From the viewpoint of the self, each thing considers itself noble and others base. Therefore, the sage does not take any side, does not judge anything as better or worse, and is free from the suffering that comes from judgment" (Zhuangzi, "The Autumn Floods," paraphrase). The person who does not take any side, the person who does not judge anything as better or worse, the person who is free of the judgments—the person is free from the suffering.

²³ The Liezi: the man who has no self is the man who is free from the suffering, because the self is the source of the suffering. "The man who has no self is the man who has recognized that the self is not separate from the world, and that the attempt to make the self separate is the source of all suffering. The man who has no self is the man who acts without self-interest, who responds to the world without resistance, who is at peace with the world" (Liezi, Chapter 6, "The Sage," paraphrase). The person who is free from the self is free from the suffering, and the person who is at peace with the world is free from the suffering.

²⁴ The Sufi Vision of Suffering

²⁵ The Sufi tradition's vision of suffering is the most eloquent in the Islamic tradition, and the Sufi teaching of the suffering as the fire that burns away the self, the suffering as the longing that draws the soul to the Divine, is one of the most important insights in the spiritual tradition.

²⁶ The Masnavi: the suffering is the fire that burns away the self, the suffering is the longing that draws the soul to the Divine, the suffering is the pain of the separation that is the origin of all music. "The reed complains because it is separated from the reed bed. This complaint is the origin of all music, and the music is the expression of the pain of the separation. The pain of the separation is the greatest gift that the Divine gives to the soul, because it is the force that draws the soul back to its source" (Masnavi, Book 1, opening, paraphrase). The suffering is the gift, the suffering is the force, the suffering is the origin of the music.

²⁷ The Conference of the Birds: the journey through the seven valleys is the journey through all the sufferings of the soul, and the final revelation is that the suffering was the path of the union all along. "In the Valley of Search, the seeker's suffering is the suffering of the search; in the Valley of Love, the seeker's suffering is the suffering of the longing; in the Valley of Knowledge, the seeker's

suffering is the suffering of the understanding; in the Valley of Detachment, the seeker's suffering is the suffering of the letting go; in the Valley of Unity, the seeker's suffering is the suffering of the seeing that all is God; in the Valley of Astonishment, the seeker's suffering is the suffering of the awe; in the Valley of Poverty and Annihilation, the seeker's suffering is the suffering of the nonexistence. And the final revelation is that the suffering was the path of the union all along" (Conference of the Birds, summary of the seven valleys, paraphrase).

²⁸ The Stoic Vision of Suffering

²⁹ The Stoic tradition's vision of suffering is the most practical in the Western tradition, and the Stoic teaching of the suffering as the result of the judgment, the suffering as the result of the attachment to the externals, is one of the most important insights in the spiritual tradition.

³⁰ Epictetus: "The suffering that comes from the external events is not the real suffering; the real suffering is the internal suffering that comes from the judgment that these events are bad. When the judgment is removed, the suffering is removed. The person who judges that the external events are bad is the person who suffers; the person who does not judge that the external events are bad is the person who does not suffer" (Epictetus, Discourses, 2.1, paraphrase). The person who does not judge the externals as bad is the person who is free from the suffering, and the person who is free from the suffering is the person who is free.

³¹ Marcus Aurelius: "The person must see the events as they are, and not as the person thinks they are. The person must see the events as the change, the flux, the impermanence; the person must accept the events as they are, and not as the person wants them to be. The suffering is the result of the resistance to the events, and the liberation is the acceptance of the events" (Meditations, various passages, paraphrase). The person who accepts the events, the person who does not resist the events, the person who sees the events as the change—the person is free from the suffering.

³² Seneca: "We suffer more often in imagination than in reality. ... We are more often frightened than hurt; and we suffer more from imagination than from reality" (Seneca, Letters, 13). The person who suffers in the imagination is the person who is not free from the suffering; the person who does not suffer in the imagination is the person who is free from the suffering; the person who sees the events as they are, and not as the person imagines them to be, is the person who is free from the suffering.

³³ The Meanings of Suffering

³⁴ The meanings of suffering are not unified across the traditions, and the unification would be a loss. The Buddhist meaning of suffering is the motivation for the spiritual life; the Hindu meaning of suffering is the result of the ignorance of the true nature of the self; the Christian meaning of suffering is the participation in the suffering of the Christ and the transformation by the love of God; the Taoist meaning of suffering is the symptom of the misalignment with the way; the Sufi meaning of suffering is the fire that burns away the self; the Stoic meaning of suffering is the result of the judgment.

³⁵ The person's relationship to the suffering is the person's most difficult spiritual task, and the person's liberation is the transformation of the relationship to the suffering. The transformation is the result of the practice, and the practice is the cultivation of the person in the relationship to the suffering, the cultivation of the person through the transformation of the relationship to the suffering.

³⁶ The person who understands the suffering as the motivation for the spiritual life is the person who seeks the liberation from suffering. The person who understands the suffering as the result of the ignorance of the true nature of the self is the person who seeks the recognition of the true nature of the self. The person who understands the suffering as the participation in the suffering of the Christ is the person who seeks the union with God. The person who understands the suffering as the symptom of the misalignment with the way is the person who seeks the alignment with the way. The person who understands the suffering as the fire that burns away the self is the person who seeks the annihilation in the Divine. The person who understands the suffering as the result of the judgment is the person who seeks the discipline of the judgment.

³⁷ The synthesis of the meanings of suffering is the recognition that the suffering is all of these and none of these, that the suffering is the motivation for the spiritual life and the result of the ignorance and the participation in the suffering of the Christ and the symptom of the misalignment and the fire that burns away the self and the result of the judgment. The person's liberation is the transformation of the relationship to the suffering, the recognition that the suffering is the most difficult and most important spiritual task, the recognition that the person's relationship to the suffering is the person's relationship to the spiritual life itself.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE: THE PATHS AND THE TEMPERAMENTS — WHAT IS SUITABLE FOR WHOM

¹ The most important practical insight in the spiritual traditions is that different paths are suitable for different temperaments, different capacities, different starting points. The person who is a lover will follow the path of the love; the person who is a knower will follow the path of the knowledge; the person who is a worker will follow the path of the action; the person who is a contemplative will follow the path of the silence; the person who is an activist will follow the path of the service.

² The Hindu Mapping of Paths to Temperaments

³ The Bhagavad Gita's teaching of the three yogas (karma yoga, jnana yoga, bhakti yoga) is the most important mapping of the paths to the temperaments in the Indian tradition. "The karma yoga is the path of action; the person who is given to action, who is engaged in the world, who is active in the life, who is energetic, who is practical—that person follows the karma yoga. The jnana yoga is the path of knowledge; the person who is given to the study, who is philosophical, who is intellectual, who is reflective, who is contemplative—that person follows the jnana yoga. The bhakti yoga is the path of devotion; the person who is given to the love, who is emotional, who is devoted, who is surrendered, who is loving—that person follows the bhakti yoga" (Bhagavad Gita, 3:1-20; 12:1-20; 18:1-66, paraphrased).

⁴ The Gita's teaching of the integration of the three yogas is the most important insight, because the person who follows one path with sincerity will naturally find the other paths arising. "The three yogas are not different paths; they are the same path seen from different angles. The person who follows the karma yoga will find the jnana yoga arising in the action, and the bhakti yoga arising in the devotion. The person who follows the jnana yoga will find the karma yoga arising in the knowledge, and the bhakti yoga arising in the love. The person who follows the bhakti yoga will find

the karma yoga arising in the service, and the jnana yoga arising in the knowledge" (Bhagavad Gita, 3:1-20, paraphrase).

⁵ The Sikh Guru Granth Sahib's teaching of the five stages (doot, daasya, sakhya, vatsalya, madhurya) is the most important mapping of the stages of the path in the Sikh tradition. "The five stages are the five stages of the development of the relationship between the soul and the Divine: the servant of God, the friend of God, the child of God, the lover of God, the beloved of God. The person progresses through these stages as the relationship deepens, and the final stage is the union with the Divine" (Guru Granth Sahib, various angas, paraphrase).

⁶ The Buddhist Mapping of Paths to Capacities

⁷ The Buddhist tradition's teaching of the diverse capacities is the most important in the Buddhist tradition, because the Buddhist tradition has the most systematic account of the different capacities, the different temperaments, the different starting points. The Buddha's teaching was adapted to the capacity of the person; the person of high capacity received the teaching of the emptiness; the person of medium capacity received the teaching of the middle path; the person of low capacity received the teaching of the karma, the ethics, the meditation.

⁸ The Mahayana teaching of the bodhisattva's vow is the most important in the Buddhist tradition for the understanding of the diverse capacities, because the bodhisattva's vow is the vow to liberate all beings, and the recognition of the diverse capacities is the recognition that the bodhisattva must adapt the teaching to the capacity of the being. The Lotus Sutra: the Buddha teaches the single vehicle of the bodhisattva, but the teaching is adapted to the capacity of the being, and the beings are liberated according to their capacity.

⁹ The Tibetan Buddhist teaching of the Dzogchen and the Mahamudra is the most important in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition for the understanding of the diverse capacities, because the Dzogchen and the Mahamudra are the teachings for the highest capacity, the persons of the highest capacity who can recognize the nature of mind directly. The preliminary practices (the ngondro) are the teachings for the persons of the lower capacity, the persons who must prepare themselves through the purification, the accumulation of the merit, the cultivation of the devotion.

¹⁰ The Christian Mapping of Paths to Temperaments

¹¹ The Christian tradition's teaching of the diverse paths is the most varied in the Christian tradition, because the Christian tradition has the most different spiritualities: the spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers (the path of the asceticism, the combat with the logismoi), the spirituality of the Cloud of Unknowing (the path of the apophatic contemplation), the spirituality of Meister Eckhart (the path of the birth of the Word in the soul), the spirituality of Julian of Norwich (the path of the love), the spirituality of Teresa of Avila (the path of the interior castle, the progressive deepening of the prayer), the spirituality of Thomas Merton (the path of the contemplative life in the modern world).

¹² The different Christian spiritualities are the different paths for the different temperaments, and the person who is given to the asceticism follows the path of the Desert Fathers; the person who is given to the contemplation follows the path of the Cloud of Unknowing; the person who is given to the love follows the path of Julian of Norwich; the person who is given to the intellectual understanding follows the path of Meister Eckhart; the person who is given to the progressive deepening follows the

path of Teresa of Avila; the person who is given to the integration of the contemplative life with the modern world follows the path of Thomas Merton.

¹³ The Sufi tradition's teaching of the diverse paths is the most varied in the Islamic tradition, because the Sufi tradition has the most different spiritualities: the path of the dhikr (the practice of the remembrance of God), the path of the love (the path of Rumi, the path of the Conference of the Birds), the path of the knowledge (the path of Ibn Arabi, the path of the Fusus al-Hikam), the path of the service (the path of Al-Ghazzali, the path of the Ihya Ulum al-Din). The person who is given to the remembrance follows the path of the dhikr; the person who is given to the love follows the path of Rumi; the person who is given to the knowledge follows the path of Ibn Arabi; the person who is given to the service follows the path of Al-Ghazzali.

¹⁴ The Taoist Mapping of Paths to Temperaments

¹⁵ The Taoist tradition's teaching of the diverse paths is the most varied in the Taoist tradition, because the Taoist tradition has the most different spiritualities: the path of the wu-wei (the practice of the non-action, the effortless action), the path of the inner alchemy (the practice of the circulation of the light, the transformation of the essence into the spirit), the path of the external alchemy (the practice of the elixir, the herbal practices), the path of the Confucian alignment (the practice of the alignment with the cosmic order, the cultivation of the virtues in the world). The person who is given to the simplicity follows the path of the wu-wei; the person who is given to the somatic transformation follows the path of the inner alchemy; the person who is given to the external practices follows the path of the external alchemy; the person who is given to the ethical alignment follows the path of the Confucian alignment.

¹⁶ The Stoic Mapping of Paths to Temperaments

¹⁷ The Stoic tradition's teaching of the diverse paths is the most integrated in the Stoic tradition, because the Stoic tradition has only one path: the path of the reason, the path of the virtue, the path of the acceptance of the fate. But the Stoic tradition recognizes the different temperaments, and the different persons are suited to the practice of the path in different ways. "The person who is given to the theoretical understanding follows the path of the theoretical wisdom; the person who is given to the practical action follows the path of the practical virtue; the person who is given to the social engagement follows the path of the social justice; the person who is given to the personal discipline follows the path of the personal temperance" (from the Stoic texts, as expressed in Epictetus, Discourses, various chapters, paraphrase).

¹⁸ The Quaker Mapping of Paths to Temperaments

¹⁹ The Quaker tradition's teaching of the diverse paths is the most integrated in the Quaker tradition, because the Quaker tradition has only one path: the path of the silence, the path of the simplicity, the path of the truth-telling, the path of the service. But the Quaker tradition recognizes the different temperaments, and the different persons are suited to the practice of the path in different ways. "The person who is given to the silence follows the path of the silence; the person who is given to the simplicity follows the path of the simplicity; the person who is given to the truth-telling follows the path of the truth-telling; the person who is given to the service follows the path of the service" (from A Quaker Book of Wisdom, as expressed by Robert Lawrence Smith, paraphrase).

²⁰ The Practical Wisdom of the Heterogeneous Paths

²¹ The practical wisdom of the heterogeneous paths is the recognition that no single path is suitable for everyone, and that the person must find the path that is suitable for the person's temperament, the person's capacity, the person's starting point. The person who is a lover must find the path of the love; the person who is a knower must find the path of the knowledge; the person who is a worker must find the path of the action; the person who is a contemplative must find the path of the silence; the person who is an activist must find the path of the service.

²² The person who tries to force a path that is not suitable for the person's temperament will fail, and the failure is the result of the mismatch, not the result of the person's fault. The person who finds the path that is suitable for the person's temperament will succeed, and the success is the result of the match, not the result of the person's virtue. The practical wisdom is the recognition of the heterogeneity of the paths, the recognition of the diversity of the temperaments, the recognition of the importance of the match between the path and the temperament.

²³ The synthesis of the heterogeneous paths is the recognition that all the paths are the paths, and the person must find the path that is suitable for the person, and the person must follow the path with sincerity, with perseverance, with love. The person who follows the path with sincerity, with perseverance, with love will be transformed, and the transformation will be the liberation, and the liberation will be the wisdom made one.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX: THE DIFFICULTY OF THE INTER-TRADE DISPUTE — WHAT THE TRADITIONS CANNOT AGREE ON

¹ The inter-tradition dispute is the most difficult problem in the spiritual synthesis, because the traditions genuinely disagree on some of the most fundamental questions, and the disagreements are not merely differences of emphasis or differences of temperament. The disagreements are real, and they are not fully resolvable by any synthesis.

² The Problem of the Exclusive Claim

³ The most difficult of the inter-tradition disputes is the exclusive claim. The Christian tradition's claim that Jesus is the only way to the Father is the most exclusive claim in the spiritual tradition. "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The Christian tradition's claim is that the only path to the ultimate reality is the path of the Christ, the path of the incarnation, the path of the redemption through the death and the resurrection of the Christ.

⁴ The Islamic tradition's claim that Muhammad is the final prophet in the Abrahamic line is the second most exclusive claim in the spiritual tradition. "Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but the Messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets" (Quran, 33:40). The Islamic tradition's claim is that the only path to the ultimate reality is the path of the submission to Allah, the path of the following of the Prophet Muhammad, the path of the Quran as the word of God.

⁵ The Hindu tradition's claim that the Vedas are the only authority for the spiritual life is the third most exclusive claim in the spiritual tradition. The Upanishads are the source of the spiritual life, the Upanishads are the only authority for the non-dual knowledge, and the person who follows the path of the Upanishads is the person who follows the only true path. The Vedas are the scripture of the Hindu tradition, and the Vedas are the authority for the spiritual life.

⁶ The Buddhist tradition's claim that the Buddha's teaching is the only path to the liberation from suffering is the fourth most exclusive claim in the spiritual tradition. The Four Noble Truths are the only truth, the Eightfold Path is the only path, and the person who follows the path of the Buddha is the person who follows the only true path. The Buddhist tradition's claim is that the only true teaching is the Buddha's teaching, and the only true path is the Buddha's path.

⁷ The Problem of the Mutual Recognition

⁸ The most difficult of the inter-tradition disputes is the problem of the mutual recognition. The traditions cannot agree on the mutual recognition of the other traditions as genuine paths to the ultimate reality, because the traditions claim the exclusive right to the ultimate reality, and the claim of the exclusive right is the core of the identity of the tradition.

⁹ The person who is a Christian recognizes the other traditions as genuine in some sense, but the person who is a Christian also recognizes that the Christian tradition is the true tradition, the tradition of the incarnation, the tradition of the redemption through the death and the resurrection of the Christ. The Christian tradition's claim of the exclusive right is not the claim that the other traditions are false in every respect, but the claim that the other traditions do not have the full truth, the full knowledge, the full salvation.

¹⁰ The person who is a Muslim recognizes the other traditions as genuine in some sense, but the person who is a Muslim also recognizes that the Islamic tradition is the true tradition, the tradition of the submission to Allah, the tradition of the following of the Prophet Muhammad. The Islamic tradition's claim of the exclusive right is not the claim that the other traditions are false in every respect, but the claim that the other traditions do not have the full truth, the full knowledge, the full submission.

¹¹ The person who is a Hindu recognizes the other traditions as genuine in some sense, but the person who is a Hindu also recognizes that the Hindu tradition is the true tradition, the tradition of the non-dual knowledge, the tradition of the Vedas as the authority. The Hindu tradition's claim of the exclusive right is not the claim that the other traditions are false in every respect, but the claim that the other traditions do not have the full truth, the full knowledge, the full liberation.

¹² What the Synthesis Can and Cannot Do

¹³ The synthesis cannot resolve the problem of the exclusive claim, because the exclusive claim is the core of the identity of the tradition, and the identity of the tradition is not negotiable. The synthesis cannot say that the exclusive claim is false, because the claim is the core of the identity, and the claim is the witness of the person who is a part of the tradition.

¹⁴ The synthesis can say that the exclusive claim is the witness of the person who is a part of the tradition, and that the witness is genuine from the perspective of the tradition, but that the witness is not the whole of the truth, and that the whole of the truth is larger than the witness of any single tradition. The synthesis can say that the truth is too large for any single tradition, and that the person who recognizes the truth must be open to the truth that is larger than the tradition, larger than the exclusive claim, larger than the identity of the tradition.

¹⁵ The synthesis can say that the person who is a part of the tradition must honor the tradition, must honor the exclusive claim, must honor the identity of the tradition, while also recognizing that the tradition is not the whole of the truth, that the exclusive claim is not the whole of the truth, that the

identity of the tradition is not the whole of the truth. The person who honors the tradition while recognizing the limitation of the tradition is the person who is faithful to the tradition and faithful to the truth.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN: THE PRACTICAL DIFFICULTIES — WHAT IT TAKES TO ACTUALLY BE TRANSFORMED

¹ The practical difficulties of the spiritual life are the most difficult and the most important, because the recognition of the truth is not the same as the transformation of the person, and the transformation of the person is the most difficult and the most important of the spiritual tasks.

² The Difficulty of the Beginning

³ The first practical difficulty is the beginning, the difficulty of starting the spiritual life when the person is so deeply embedded in the ordinary consciousness, the ordinary desires, the ordinary fears, the ordinary patterns. The person who is beginning the spiritual life is the person who is awakening to the truth, but the awakening is only the beginning, and the beginning is the most difficult part, because the person must find the path, must find the teacher, must find the practice, must find the way to begin.

⁴ The Buddhist teaching of the first foundation of mindfulness (the mindfulness of the body) is the most practical of the Buddhist teachings for the beginning, because the body is the most accessible object of the mindfulness, and the mindfulness of the breathing is the most practical of the mindfulness practices. "The person who begins the spiritual life should begin with the mindfulness of the breathing, the mindfulness of the body, the mindfulness of the simplest object. The person should not try to understand everything at once, but should begin with the simplest practice, and trust that the practice will lead to the understanding" (from the Satipatthana Sutta, MN 10, paraphrase).

⁵ The Quaker teaching of "let your life speak" is the most practical of the Quaker teachings for the beginning, because the person who begins the spiritual life should not try to speak the truth but should let the life speak the truth. The person should live the truth, the person should practice the truth, the person should embody the truth, and the person's life will speak the truth without the person's words.

⁶ The Taoist teaching of the wu-wei is the most practical of the Taoist teachings for the beginning, because the person who begins the spiritual life should not try to do too much, but should begin with the simplest practice of the wu-wei, the practice of the non-action, the practice of the effortlessness. The person should begin with the simplest practice, the person should begin with the practice of the letting go of the desires, the letting go of the ambitions, the letting go of the knowledge, and the person should trust that the practice will lead to the understanding.

⁷ The Difficulty of the Continuation

⁸ The second practical difficulty is the continuation, the difficulty of maintaining the practice over time, the difficulty of continuing the spiritual life when the initial enthusiasm fades, when the difficulties arise, when the obstacles appear, when the person becomes bored, when the person becomes discouraged, when the person becomes distracted.

⁹ The Buddhist teaching of the right effort (the cultivation of the four right efforts: the prevention of the unwholesome states, the abandonment of the unwholesome states, the cultivation of the wholesome states, the maintenance of the wholesome states) is the most practical of the Buddhist teachings for the continuation, because the person who maintains the practice is the person who develops the four right efforts, the person who prevents the unwholesome states, the person who abandons the unwholesome states, the person who cultivates the wholesome states, the person who maintains the wholesome states.

¹⁰ The Christian teaching of the perseverance in the prayer is the most practical of the Christian teachings for the continuation, because the person who maintains the practice is the person who perseveres in the prayer, the person who continues the prayer even when the prayer becomes dry, even when the prayer becomes difficult, even when the prayer becomes boring. The person who perseveres in the prayer is the person who continues the practice, the person who does not give up, the person who does not quit, the person who does not abandon the practice.

¹¹ The Taoist teaching of the wu-wei is the most practical of the Taoist teachings for the continuation, because the person who maintains the practice is the person who practices the wu-wei, the person who does not force the practice, the person who does not try to achieve the practice, the person who simply rests in the practice, the person who trusts that the practice will lead to the understanding. The person who does not force the practice, the person who does not strive for the practice, the person who does not make an effort of will—the person who maintains the practice.

¹² The Difficulty of the Obstacles

¹³ The third practical difficulty is the obstacles, the difficulties that arise in the practice, the difficulties that the person must face and overcome. The person who practices the spiritual life will encounter the obstacles, and the person must recognize the obstacles, must understand the obstacles, must work through the obstacles.

¹⁴ The Buddhist teaching of the five hindrances is the most practical of the Buddhist teachings for the obstacles, because the person who practices the spiritual life will encounter the five hindrances: the sensual desire, the ill-will, the sloth and torpor, the restlessness and worry, the doubt. The person must recognize the hindrances, must understand the hindrances, must work through the hindrances, and the person who works through the hindrances is the person who is free from the hindrances.

¹⁵ The Christian teaching of the seven deadly sins (the pride, the greed, the wrath, the envy, the lust, the gluttony, the sloth) is the most practical of the Christian teachings for the obstacles, because the person who practices the spiritual life will encounter the seven deadly sins, and the person must recognize the sins, must understand the sins, must work through the sins. The person who works through the sins, the person who overcomes the sins, the person who is free from the sins—is the person who is free from the obstacles.

¹⁶ The Sufi teaching of the seven valleys (the Valley of Search, the Valley of Love, the Valley of Knowledge, the Valley of Detachment, the Valley of Unity, the Valley of Astonishment, the Valley of Poverty and Annihilation) is the most practical of the Sufi teachings for the obstacles, because the person who practices the spiritual life will go through the seven valleys, and the person must recognize the valleys, must understand the valleys, must work through the valleys. The person who works through the valleys, the person who goes through the valleys, the person who is free from the obstacles—is the person who is free from the difficulties.

¹⁷ The Difficulty of the Integration

¹⁸ The fourth practical difficulty is the integration, the difficulty of integrating the spiritual life with the ordinary life, the difficulty of living the spiritual life in the world, the difficulty of being the person who is transformed in the world while still living in the world.

¹⁹ The Buddhist teaching of the integration of the practice with the ordinary life is the most practical of the Buddhist teachings for the integration, because the person who practices the spiritual life must integrate the practice with the ordinary life, must bring the mindfulness into the daily activities, must bring the compassion into the daily interactions, must bring the wisdom into the daily decisions. The person who integrates the practice with the ordinary life is the person who lives the spiritual life in the world, the person who is the person of the spiritual life in the ordinary life.

²⁰ The Christian teaching of the integration of the prayer with the ordinary life is the most practical of the Christian teachings for the integration, because the person who practices the spiritual life must integrate the prayer with the daily life, must bring the prayer into the daily activities, must bring the love into the daily interactions, must bring the service into the daily work. The person who integrates the prayer with the ordinary life is the person who lives the spiritual life in the world, the person who is the person of the spiritual life in the ordinary life.

²¹ The Taoist teaching of the wu-wei as the integration of the practice with the ordinary life is the most practical of the Taoist teachings for the integration, because the person who practices the spiritual life must integrate the wu-wei with the daily life, must bring the wu-wei into the daily activities, must bring the naturalness into the daily interactions, must bring the effortlessness into the daily work. The person who integrates the wu-wei with the ordinary life is the person who lives the spiritual life in the world, the person who is the person of the spiritual life in the ordinary life.

²² The Practical Wisdom of the Difficulties

²³ The practical wisdom of the difficulties is the recognition that the difficulties are the normal, the difficulties are the expected, the difficulties are the part of the practice, the difficulties are the means of the transformation. The person who recognizes the difficulties as the normal, the person who recognizes the difficulties as the expected, the person who recognizes the difficulties as the part of the practice—the person is free from the anxiety of the difficulties, the person is free from the fear of the difficulties, the person is free from the discouragement of the difficulties. The person who is free from the anxiety, the fear, the discouragement of the difficulties is the person who can work through the difficulties, the person who can overcome the difficulties, the person who can continue the practice through the difficulties.

²⁴ The synthesis of the practical wisdom of the difficulties is the recognition that the difficulties are the normal, the difficulties are the expected, the difficulties are the part of the practice, the difficulties are the means of the transformation. The person who recognizes the difficulties as the normal, the person who recognizes the difficulties as the expected, the person who recognizes the difficulties as the part of the practice—the person is free from the anxiety, free from the fear, free from the discouragement of the difficulties. The person who is free from the anxiety, the fear, the discouragement of the difficulties is the person who can work through the difficulties, the person who can overcome the difficulties, the person who can continue the practice through the difficulties.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT: THE SIMPLICITY THAT REMAINS — THE TEN CORE THINGS THAT ALL THE TRADITIONS AGREE ON

¹ When all the differences are acknowledged, when all the tensions are held honestly, when all the disagreements are not resolved, there is a core of agreement that emerges across the traditions. The core is not a doctrine; it is a set of practical insights that all the traditions share, and the practical insights are the most important part of the wisdom made one.

² 1. The person is not what the person thinks they are.

³ The ordinary consciousness is mistaken about the nature of the self, the nature of the world, the nature of the relationship between the self and the world. The liberation is the recognition of the true nature of the self, the true nature of the world, the true nature of the relationship between the self and the world.

⁴ 2. Suffering is real, and the suffering is the starting point of the spiritual life.

⁵ The person who experiences suffering is the person who is motivated to seek the liberation from suffering, and the person who seeks the liberation from suffering is the person who is on the path. The suffering is the starting point of the spiritual life, and the liberation from suffering is the goal of the spiritual life.

⁶ 3. The liberation is the cessation of suffering, the recognition of the true nature of the self, the alignment with the truth.

⁷ The liberation is the result of the practice, the liberation is the result of the transformation of the person, the liberation is the result of the recognition of the truth, the liberation is the result of the cessation of the suffering.

⁸ 4. The practice is the necessary means of the liberation, and the practice is the most difficult and the most important of the spiritual tasks.

⁹ The person who practices the spiritual life is the person who is transformed, and the person who is transformed is the person who is liberated. The practice is the necessary means of the liberation, and the practice is the most difficult and the most important of the spiritual tasks.

¹⁰ 5. The attention is the most fundamental of the faculties, and the training of the attention is the most fundamental of the practices.

¹¹ The person who trains the attention is the person who is transformed, and the person who trains the attention is the person who is liberated. The training of the attention is the most fundamental of the practices.

¹² 6. The will is the most important of the faculties, and the training of the will is the most important of the practices.

¹³ The person who trains the will is the person who is transformed, and the person who trains the will is the person who is liberated. The training of the will is the most important of the practices.

¹⁴ 7. Love is the most powerful of the forces, and the cultivation of love is the most powerful of the practices.

¹⁵ The person who cultivates love is the person who is transformed, and the person who cultivates love is the person who is liberated. The cultivation of love is the most powerful of the practices.

¹⁶ 8. Silence is the most important of the practices, and the practice of the silence is the means of the encounter with the truth.

¹⁷ The person who practices the silence is the person who encounters the truth, and the person who encounters the truth is the person who is liberated. The practice of the silence is the means of the encounter with the truth.

¹⁸ 9. The community is the most important of the supports, and the practice of the community is the means of the transformation of the person.

¹⁹ The person who practices the community is the person who is supported, the person who is supported is the person who is transformed, and the person who is transformed is the person who is liberated. The practice of the community is the means of the transformation of the person.

²⁰ 10. The truth is larger than any single tradition, and the person who seeks the truth must be open to the truth that is larger than the tradition.

²¹ The person who is open to the truth that is larger than the tradition is the person who is open to the whole of the truth, the person who is open to the truth that is larger than the exclusive claim, the person who is open to the truth that is larger than the identity of the tradition. The person who is open to the whole of the truth is the person who is wise, the person who is open to the whole of the truth is the person who is liberated.

EPILOGUE: WHAT IT MEANS TO READ ALL OF THIS TOGETHER

¹ The wisdom made one is the wisdom of the traditions, gathered together, recognized as the convergent insight of the spiritual life. The wisdom is not the property of any tradition; the wisdom is the common inheritance of the spiritual life, and it is the common inheritance of the person who seeks the liberation.

² The person who reads all of this together is the person who recognizes the convergent insight, the recognition that the person is not what the person thinks they are, the recognition that the liberation is the recognition of the true nature of the self, the true nature of the world, the true nature of the relationship between the self and the world. The person who recognizes the convergent insight is the person who is beginning the spiritual life, the person who is on the path, the person who is transforming, the person who is liberating.

³ The person who reads all of this together is the person who recognizes the practical wisdom, the recognition that the practice is the necessary means of the liberation, the recognition that the training of the attention is the most fundamental of the practices, the recognition that the training of the will is the most important of the practices, the recognition that the cultivation of love is the most powerful of the practices, the recognition that the practice of the silence is the means of the encounter with the truth, the recognition that the practice of the community is the means of the transformation of the person.

⁴ The person who reads all of this together is the person who recognizes the distinctive contributions of the traditions, the recognition that each tradition has something to offer that no other tradition fully offers, and that the person who seeks the whole of the wisdom must engage the full range of the

traditions, must recognize the distinctive contributions of each tradition, must honor the distinctive contributions of each tradition.

⁵ The person who reads all of this together is the person who recognizes the unresolved tensions, the recognition that the traditions genuinely disagree on some of the most fundamental questions, and that the disagreements are real, and that the disagreements are not fully resolvable by any synthesis. The person who recognizes the unresolved tensions is the person who is honest about the spiritual life, the person who recognizes the limitations of the synthesis, the person who recognizes the need for the practice, the person who recognizes the need for the transformation.

⁶ The person who reads all of this together is the person who recognizes the simplicity that remains, the ten core things that all the traditions agree on, the practical insights that are the most important part of the wisdom made one.

⁷ The person who reads all of this together is the person who begins the spiritual life, the person who is on the path, the person who is transforming, the person who is liberating. The person who reads all of this together is the person who is beginning to be wise, the person who is beginning to be liberated, the person who is beginning to be one with the wisdom of the traditions.

⁸ This is the wisdom made one, the wisdom of the traditions, the wisdom of the convergent insight, the wisdom of the practical wisdom, the wisdom of the distinctive contributions, the wisdom of the unresolved tensions, the wisdom of the simplicity that remains.

⁹ The person who reads all of this together is the person who is beginning to be wise.

¹⁰ AUTHORS AND TEXTS THAT HAVE SHAPED THIS SYNTHESIS

¹¹ Hinduism: The Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, Atharvaveda; the Upanishads (Isha, Kena, Katha, Mundaka, Aitareya, Taittiriya, Chandogya, Brihadaranyaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Shvetashvatara, Mukhtika); the Bhagavad Gita; the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali; the Samkhya Karika of Isvarakrishna; the Brahma Sutras of Badarayana; the Vivekachudamani of Shankara; the Yoga Vasistha; the Ashtavakra Gita; the Avadhuta Gita; the Devi Mahatmya; the Tirumurai of the Tamil Saiva tradition; the Divya Prabandham of the Tamil Vaishnava tradition; the Ribhu Gita; Gaudapada Karika; the Puranas (Vishnu Purana, Shiva Purana); the Dattatreya teachings.

¹² Buddhism — Theravada: The Pali Canon/Tipitaka (Digha Nikaya, Majjhima Nikaya, Samyutta Nikaya, Anguttara Nikaya, Khuddaka Nikaya: Dhammapada, Sutta Nipata, Udana, Itivuttaka); the Abhidhamma Pitaka; the Vinaya Pitaka; the Jataka tales.

¹³ Buddhism — Mahayana: The Prajnaparamita Sutras (Heart Sutra, Diamond Sutra, Lotus Sutra, Avatamsaka Sutra, Lankavatara Sutra, Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra, Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra); the Pure Land texts (Infinite Life Sutra, Nembutsu); the Mahaparinirvana Sutra; the Samdhinirmocana Sutra; the Ratnagotravibhaga (Uttaratantra).

¹⁴ Buddhism — Vajrayana/Tibetan: The Tibetan Book of the Dead (Bardo Thodol); Dzogchen teachings (Nyingthig Yabshi, Longchenpa's Seven Treasures, the Dzogchen tantras); Mahamudra texts; Guhyasamaja Tantra; Chakrasamvara Tantra; Kalachakra Tantra; Santideva's Bodhicaryavatara; the Tibetan Book of Living and Dying.

¹⁵ Jainism: The Acaranga Sutra; the Sutrakritanga; the Bhagavati Sutra; the Tattvartha Sutra; the Uttaradhyayana Sutra.

¹⁶ Taoism: The Tao te Ching; the Zhuangzi (Inner Chapters, Outer Chapters, Miscellaneous Chapters); the Liezi; the I Ching (Book of Changes with the Ten Wings commentaries); the Wenzi; the Huainanzi; the Baopuzi; the Yangchu texts; the Secret of the Golden Flower (Tai Yi Jin Hua Zong Zhi); the Book of Balance and Harmony (Zhong He Ji); the Neidan (Inner Alchemy) texts.

¹⁷ Confucianism: The Analects (Lunyu); the Mencius; the Doctrine of the Mean (Zhongyong); the Great Learning (Daxue); the Xunzi; the Spring and Autumn Annals (Chunqiu); the Classic of Filial Piety; the I Ching in the Confucian commentary tradition.

¹⁸ Judaism: The Torah/Pentateuch; the Prophets (Nevi'im: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel); the Writings (Ketuvim: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles); the Babylonian Talmud; the Jerusalem Talmud; the Midrash (Genesis Rabbah, Exodus Rabbah, Leviticus Rabbah); the Zohar; the Sepher Yetzirah; the Etz Chaim (Lurianic Kabbalah); the Pardes Rimmonim (Moses de Leon); the writings of the Baal Shem Tov and the Hasidic masters.

¹⁹ Christianity — New Testament: The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John); Acts; the Pauline Epistles (Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, Philemon); the General Epistles (Hebrews, James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude); Revelation; the Apocrypha of the New Testament (Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Philip, Gospel of Mary, Apocryphon of John, Gospel of Truth, Proto-Gospel of James, Infancy Gospel of Thomas, Acts of Paul and Thecla, Shepherd of Hermas, Didache).

²⁰ Christianity — Early Church/Monastic: The Sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers (Apophthegmata Patrum); Evagrius Ponticus (Praktikos, Antirrhethikos, Kephalaia Gnostica); John Cassian (Conferences, Institutes); Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (Mystical Theology, Divine Names, Celestial Hierarchy, Ecclesiastical Hierarchy); Meister Eckhart (Sermons, Treatises); Julian of Norwich (Revelations of Divine Love); Hildegard of Bingen (Scivias, Liber Divinorum Operum, Physica, Causae et Curae); Teresa of Avila (Interior Castle, The Way of Perfection, The Life); John of the Cross (The Dark Night of the Soul, The Ascent of Mount Carmel, The Living Flame of Love, The Spiritual Canticle); Thomas Merton (New Seeds of Contemplation, The Seven Storey Mountain, No Man Is an Island); Richard Rohr (Falling Upward, The Universal Christ); Henri Nouwen (The Return of the Prodigal Son, The Inner Voice of Love).

²¹ Christianity — Quakers: A Quaker Book of Wisdom: Life Lessons in Simplicity, Service, and Common Sense by Robert Lawrence Smith; the Journal of John Woolman; the Epistles of the Early Quakers; the writings of George Fox; the writings of Margaret Fell.

²² Islam — Quran and Hadith: The Quran (especially the Meccan suras: Surah 112 Al-Ikhlās, Surah 1 Al-Fatiha, Surah 96 Al-Alaq, Surah 74 Al-Muddaththir, Surah 93 Al-Duha, Surah 94 Al-Sharh); Sahih Bukhari; Sahih Muslim; Abu Dawood; Tirmidhi; Ibn Majah; Daruqutni; Malik's Muwatta.

²³ Islam — Sufism: Rumi's Masnavi (particularly Book 1, the reed flute opening); Rumi's Divan Shams; Fariduddin Attar's Conference of the Birds (Mantiq al-Tayr); Attar's Ilahi Nama (The Divine Names); Sana'i's Hadiqat al-Haqiqah (The Garden of Truth); Al-Ghazzali's Ihya Ulum al-Din (The Revival of the Religious Sciences); Al-Ghazzali's Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal (Deliverance from Error); Ibn Arabi's Fusus al-Hikam (The Bezels of Wisdom); Ibn Arabi's Futuhat al-Makkiyah (Meccan Illuminations); Ibn Arabi's Whoso Knoweth Himself; Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi's Maktubat (Letters); Shah Wali Allah's Hujjat Allah al-Baligha.

²⁴ Zoroastrianism: The Avesta (Yasna, Vendidad, Yashts, especially the Gathas); the Bundahishn.

²⁵ Greek/Platonic/Neoplatonic: Plato (Republic, Phaedo, Symposium, Phaedrus, Timaeus, Laws, Apology, Crito, Meno, Euthyphro, Gorgias, Cratylus, Parmenides, Theaetetus, Sophist, Statesman); Aristotle (Nicomachean Ethics, Metaphysics, De Anima); Plotinus (Enneads); Porphyry (Isagoge, On Images of the Gods, On Abstinence); Iamblichus (On the Mysteries); Proclus (Elements of Theology, Commentary on the Timaeus); pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (Mystical Theology, Divine Names, Celestial Hierarchy, Ecclesiastical Hierarchy).

²⁶ Stoicism: Epictetus (Discourses, Enchiridion, Fragments); Marcus Aurelius (Meditations); Seneca (Letters to Lucilius, Natural Questions, On Benefits, On Anger, On Providence, On the Tranquility of Mind, On the Happy Life, On the Shortness of Life); Zeno of Citium (fragments); Cleanthes (Hymn to Zeus).

²⁷ Hermetic: The Corpus Hermeticum; the Asclepius; the Hermetic fragments.

²⁸ Egyptian: The Pyramid Texts; the Coffin Texts; the Book of the Dead (Pert em Hru); the Book of Gates; the Amduat (Book of That Which is in the Underworld); the Litany of Re; the Book of the Earth; the Book of Caverns; the Opening of the Way (Isha Schwaller de Lubicz).

²⁹ Mesopotamian: The Epic of Gilgamesh; the Enuma Elish; the Atrahasis.

³⁰ Indigenous/Other: The Ifa Odu Corpus (Yoruba); various Bantu philosophical texts; specific primary recorded sources from Native American, Australian Aboriginal, and other oral traditions; the Book of Enoch; the Book of Jubilees; the Wisdom of Solomon; the Sirach (Ecclesiasticus); the Prayer of Manasseh; the 1 Enoch; the 2 Enoch; the Apocalypse of Abraham; the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs; the Liturgy of the Hours.

³¹ Other Formative Texts: The Kybalion (recognizing it as a later text but relevant for Hermetic principles); the texts of the Shetaut Neter (Egyptian wisdom tradition); the Tibetan Book of Living and Dying (Sogyal Rinpoche's compilation from traditional sources); the writings of Alan Watts; the writings of Jiddu Krishnamurti; Sri Aurobindo's The Life Divine; Eckhart Tolle's The Power of Now; A Course in Miracles.

³² Celtic and related primary texts: The Song of Amergin; the Book of Taliesin; the Black Book of Carmarthen; the Book of Aneirin; the Táin Bó Cúailnge (Cattle Raid of Cooley); the Acallam na Senórach (Colloquy of the Ancient Saints); The Shining Realm; The Sidhe by John Matthews; The Mist-Filled Path by Frank MacEowen; The Faerie Way by Hugh Mynne; The Book of Celtic Wisdom by Michael Scott; The Opening of the Way by Isha Schwaller de Lubicz; Red Sky at Night by Jane Struthers; Textbook of Wisdom by Edward de Bono; Five Volumes of Spiritual Wisdom.

³³ And the person who reads all of this together is the person who is beginning to be wise. The person who reads all of this together is the person who is beginning to be liberated. The person who reads all of this together is the person who is beginning to be one with the wisdom of the traditions.

³⁴ The person who reads all of this together is the person who is beginning to recognize the wisdom made one.

³⁵ End of the Five-Volume Synthesis.