

Chapter 16

Thought and reason had their place, but they could only take us so far. When we had come to the limit of reason, feeling would complete the journey to the Absolute...Feeling was not opposed to human reason but an imaginative leap that takes us beyond the particular to an apprehension of the whole.

-- Karen Armstrong – A History of God

Our walk took us to a shady spot where a small stream of water ran through the rocky terrain. There were some large cedars nearby so we decided to stop and rest. We found two stumps from fallen trees that we used for chairs. For a few minutes Samuel sat in silence. Finally he spoke.

“Derrick, logic and reason are important but there’s something else necessary in religion. It is also necessary in life. Something that is as important as anything else that we’ve talked about.”

“And what is that?” I was curious what could possibly be left that we had not discussed.

“Great men of history have tried to prove that God exists using logic and reason.”

“Which is what we have been trying to do,” I stated.

“Yes. But like all those who try to prove the existence of God as a logical or reasonable conclusion, we will inevitably fall short of our goal because anyone who depends on logic and reason *alone* will ultimately realize that there’s something missing.”

“What do you mean?”

“Men throughout history like Pascal, Anselm, Descartes and Newton argued that the existence of God is logical and could be found through the intellect. Still other great thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas tried to prove that God was the God of the philosophers: that God could only be shown to exist

through philosophical means. Still others felt that God could only be found through the imagination or mysticism.”

“And your conclusion?” I asked.

“Let’s suppose that you suffer from a serious illness,” he began, “and you’re told that there is a medicine that will provide you with a cure. First, it’s explained how the medicine was made, how the ingredients were identified and how they were carefully combined to create this amazing potion. Then you are told how this medicine will improve your life because you will feel better, no longer experiencing the pain caused by the illness. As a result of this enlightening discourse, you come to believe strongly that this medicine will help you; that it will make you better physically by taking the pain away and emotionally by eliminating the stress and depression that is a byproduct of being in constant agony. But, you will never know the actual benefits of the medicine, or experience the reality of the medicine’s effect on your life until you actually believe in it enough to take it. You see, it’s not until then that it *can* change your life. Before you can benefit from it, it must become part of your mind and body. In her book, *A History of God*, Karen Armstrong puts it this way,

‘The experience of Brahman or Atman cannot be explained rationally any more than a piece of music or a poem. Intelligence is necessary for the making of such a work of art and its appreciation, but it offers an experience that goes beyond the purely logical or cerebral faculty.’⁷⁷

“Brahman means God and Atman means the soul. What she is saying is that we may see that it is logical to believe in the existence of God but until we believe that God is real in a sense that God is in us and around us, we will really never know God.”

“But doesn’t belief lead to emotionalism? And haven’t we discussed how emotion is a great deceiver?” I argued.

⁷⁷ Armstrong, p.31 (parenthesis mine)

“Certainly, it can be when it goes unchecked. But emotion is important, and when emotion is supported by logic and reason it is good and necessary. We must admit that emotion is a vital part of our existence. However, we must always be in control, curbing our emotions with reason. As an historical example, Bernard, the abbot of the Cistercian Abbey of Clairvaux in Burgundy, a vigorous supporter of the Second Crusades of the 12th century believed in the separation of the heart, or emotion, and the mind, or intellect. In *A History of God*, Karen Armstrong writes,

‘Bernard, however, seemed afraid of the intellect and wanted to keep it separate from the more emotional, intuitive parts of the mind. This was dangerous: it could lead to an unhealthy dissociation of sensibility that was in its own way just as worrying as an arid rationalism. The Crusade preached by Bernard was a disaster partly because it relied on an idealism that was untempered by common sense and was in flagrant denial of the Christian ethos of compassion. Thus Bernard’s treatment of Abelard was conspicuously lacking in charity, and he had urged the Crusaders to show their love for Christ by killing the infidels, and driving them out of the Holy Land... What was required was an informed and intelligent subjectivity, not an emotionalism of “love,” which represses the intellect violently and abandons the compassion which was supposed to be the hallmark of the religion of God.’⁷⁸

“A more recent example of this kind of unbridled emotion is the war in the Middle East that has now spread throughout the world through terrorism. Once again, like the Crusades, men are told to kill out of love for God, with no thought of the compassion and mercy that is at the heart of the Koran.

“Conversely, emotion checked by common sense and reason is essential in the religious experience. There is a great difference in knowing that God exists and knowing God. The

⁷⁸ Armstrong, p. 204.

only way we can know God, as much as we can in this life, is to believe that God does actually exist in each and every one of us. It takes faith. It requires all of these things, the intellect, the imagination, the emotion and faith to grasp the reality of this incomprehensible, awesome God. And, it is our experience that confirms our emotion and our faith, and reason. God is the God of the scientist, but God is also the God of the philosopher. And, more than this, God is the God of the common man. Through our intellect we can bring reason to the things of God. Through philosophy, we can understand the significance of God. But it is only through experience that we can realize the true reality of the universal and, yet, personal existence of this great Being. If we believe that God exists because it is logical, we can know that God exists. But it is only when we accept the reality, yes, through faith, that this amazing intelligent, creative God exists in us and sustains life in us and in the universe, that we actually experience the power and majesty of God; and it is this realization, when experienced, that will result in an intense and heightened perception of reality and a feeling of ecstasy.”

“So it all eventually comes back to faith.” I acknowledged.

“Yes, but a certain kind of faith. Certainly not blind faith, but a faith that is re-enforced by reason,” he insisted.

We sat quietly for a few moments. I was reviewing what we had just discussed. I remembered how Samuel had explained that he, too, was raised in a religious environment. I knew that he had gone through all of the emotions and confusion that I was now experiencing.

“Let’s walk,” he suggested. We left our stump-seats and started back toward the house.

“How has all of this affected you?” I asked. “I know you grew up in a home where religion had a strong influence.”

“This was the most difficult journey of my life as I’m sure it has been for you,” he replied. “My entire belief system has been shaken. As I searched and began discovering these things it seemed that virtually everything that I was taught for the first 40

years of my life was not completely true. I felt deceived. I was angry. But most of all, I was lost and confused. Over the next several years, as a result of my studies and revelations I went from being frustrated to devastated.”

“And now?”

“Now I have more peace than I’ve ever had, knowing that I am closer to the truth than I have ever been. When I drive by an old country church I still have fond memories of the years I spent praying and singing those great old hymns when I was younger. I still feel a rush of emotion when I read some of the scriptures that I studied so long ago. But truth changes things. It always does. And we either accept the truth and the changes it brings or we continue on the path of pretense. Emotion is good and healthy but it cannot be the sole reason for our decisions and I decided that my path would be guided by reason.

“Today I don’t live in the fear of having someone point out inconsistencies in my ideology that I have to rationalize or justify with superficial answers, or for which I must offer lame excuses. I experience more freedom than I ever have, knowing that God is consistently loving and merciful and that I cannot do anything to drive God away. I am more optimistic, realizing that God is in my life, not as a judge, but as a powerful creative intelligent force that I can depend on to help me make it through life – not just in times of trouble, but a limitless power that will unite with my individual spirit and enable me to accomplish anything imaginable, and perhaps unimaginable.

“I feel part of the universe. I have an attachment to all people and all of God’s creation. This unity is exciting and awesome. I have a deeper appreciation for all things and a greater respect for life. This knowledge of oneness can have a huge impact on our lives. It enables us to realize that our lives have purpose, that life makes sense. It gives us a whole new attitude toward others because when we realize that this awesome intelligent creative Energy is in our lives, helping us make decisions, leading us, working in cooperation with our individual energy or spirit, then, I think, we will treat other

people differently. And once we realize that unique oneness and develop the patience and understanding that this knowledge brings, we will experience greater peace and satisfaction and have fewer problems with things like greed, self-centeredness and anger. This wonderful knowledge that God is in us, in *all* of us, has helped me live in greater harmony with my fellowman and all of nature.”

“And you believe that this is available to everyone?” I asked.

“Absolutely.”

He opened his little book again.

“You’ll remember that the Hindus believe in several gods, but their ultimate God is called Brahman. In regard to oneness, in the Aitareya Upanishad it is written:

‘This One is Brahman; this is Indra, this is Prajapati; this is all these gods; and this is these five elements, viz. earth, air, space, water, fire; and this is all these (big creatures), together with the small ones, that are the procreators of others and referable in pairs – to wit, those that are born of eggs, of wombs, of moisture of the earth, viz. horses, cattle, men, elephants, and all the creatures that there are which move or fly and those which do not move. All these have Consciousness as the giver of their reality; all these are impelled by Consciousness; the universe has Consciousness as its eye and Consciousness is its end. Consciousness is Brahman.’”⁷⁹

“In other words, God is consciousness. God is life,” I summarized.

“Not entirely, but consciousness is what allows us to experience God. It is knowledge that substantiates God’s existence, it is faith that makes God accessible, and it is experience that makes God real.”

⁷⁹ *The Upanishads*; Aitareya III.1.3

He was right. I was beginning to feel the same freedom that Samuel had just described. It was like an enormous weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I now had nothing to prove, nothing to be afraid of, nothing was left but potential: the potential I had going forward; the potential of my spirit working together with the spirit of the amazing creative, intelligent Spirit within me to fulfill my dreams and goals. I felt there was little left to talk about.