

# MODERN MYSTICS

Excerpt from *Finding Oneness in Loving Awareness*

By Thomas D. Stanks

## A. JOEL S GOLDSMITH

I go from the Middle Ages and two Sufi mystics of that era to our times and a modern day mystic. All three have been influenced by the Christian Scriptures and Jesus Christ. Joel S. Goldsmith, who died in 1964, was the founder of The Infinite Way, now a world-wide movement. He wanted to develop spiritual consciousness and offer a path for his meditating followers. This is what he says in the Introduction to PRACTICING THE PRESENCE: "This book is my personal life revealed. This book, THE ART OF MEDITATION, and LIVING THE INFINITE WAY reveal all that has happened to me in my entire spiritual career, and not only to me but to all those who have been taught in this way, whether by me or by any other spiritual teacher on this particular path."

I am going to look at key passages in these three books, paying particular attention to how his work explains and develops passages from Jesus and the Bible for concrete use by his practitioners. Some of his renderings may appear startling, but I ask the reader to let herself breathe the rarefied atmosphere of a true mystic. Everyone's experience is different because no two people are alike. The Apostle John's experience of loving Jesus and loving God, narrated earlier, was unique to him. I have my own experience and need to be at home with it. God calls each of us to our personal experience of Him, or he wouldn't have made us all different.

For Goldsmith, God is no far-off miracle worker. The Spirit of God, Infinity, Greatness, Goodness, can find outlet only as human consciousness, as your consciousness and mine. There is no God and me. There is only God manifested as individual being. God is our very own being. God fulfills Itself as our individual being. Goldsmith says to, "Enjoy watching the glory of the Father unfold as our individual experience."

Goldsmith is expressing here in simple and concrete words what many spiritual teachers worldwide have taught. If I take it seriously, then I must answer the question, "How can God be kind to the world if I am not?"

"What is God?" And the answer is "I AM." With this, I believe Goldsmith pushes the question of what is God to its ultimate conclusion. God is the mind and life of the individual. There is but one universal "I," and every one of us can say it because God is the only "I."

I embrace the world and all existence within myself. All that exist as persons, places, and things live within my own consciousness. I can never become aware of anything outside the



realm of my own mind. Anything that can be known is effect until I become one with what is. God is my being. True communion is without words or thoughts. God is the core of each and everything. Although we are all interconnected, it is up to each to realize its own divinity. The world is real and permanent because its substance is eternal Consciousness.

To further understand what consciousness is, Goldsmith says it is necessary to realize the truth of the Bible. They are no longer quotations, but statements of fact, and that brings us to the point of demarcation between 'knowing the truth' and 'taking no thought.'" I realize truth as an established truth within my own consciousness--the truth of my being. I do not take thought to make any good come to us. "We are realizing the truth, knowing the truth of our own identity, of our oneness with the Infinite, with our infinite capacities." The belief of separation I correct by realizing that my oneness with God constitutes my oneness with everything.

"Never forget that you cannot live scientifically as man or idea, but that you must realize yourself to be Life, Truth and Love. You must accept Jesus' revelation of the I AM until it becomes realization with you."

The activity I am engaged in, whether it is a business, a profession, or an art, is an activity of Consciousness. "It is even more than this. As an emanation of Consciousness, it is Consciousness Itself individually appearing and expressing Its own being, nature, and character...Consciousness alone is responsible. We learn to let go and let God, Consciousness, assume Its responsibilities."

Such claims prompt us to look more carefully at what human consciousness is, and how Goldsmith advises us to use it. He says the more truth that I read and hear, the more active truth is in my consciousness. Thus I learn to abide in the Word. This is the first step on the way. The second, and more important step, is to be able to receive truth from within, to be receptive and responsive to the truth that wells up within me. Thus I go from the letter to the Spirit. Goldsmith shows his own confidence, and urges me to follow, when he says to be unwilling to accept any authority other than my own interior revelation.

God is individual being. God is your being; God is my being; God is the being of every form of life-human, animal, vegetable, mineral. All that the Father is, I am; all that the Father hath is embodied within my consciousness. God is individual mind, and God is the only mind. The presence and the power of the Invisible is that which is made manifest to us as the visible, the one inseparable from the other. Some miracle of invisible activity has transformed a dry seed, a handful of earth, and a little water into a flower. What marvel, what wonder is this unfolding before our very eyes, unseen, unknown, inexplicable! The realization of God must come as an

individual unfoldment to every aspirant on the spiritual path. God is what I am. To uncover or reveal God, I must discover what I am.

The Oneness of God and its expression individually in the world is one of the chief teachings of Goldsmith. God is one: one Power, one Law, one Substance, one Cause, one Life. This teaching of oneness, he says, is probably the highest spiritual teaching ever given to the world. When I understand God as Life, there is only one Life and I can never have a life to save, or a life to heal or redeem. There is only one. One life has the highs and lows that I and all experience.

Goldsmith tries to aid some of his followers who may be overly concerned with "What is truth?" He says not to be so concerned with what is truth as with feeling truth. Give less thought to the letter and more receptivity to the feel. This word "feel" refers to the awareness, consciousness, or a sense of the truth. I am now not speaking truth but receiving truth. It may be experienced as a "felt sense."

Men, even great men, such as Jesus of Nazareth, Buddha of India, Lao-Tze of China, were messengers of divine truth. They were interpreted as the Light, whereas their message was not themselves. The sublime reality they brought was not something "out there" from our own selves; it was the light of truth within our own consciousness. An illumined consciousness can look upon an appearance of evil and perceive the divine reality. The world is in a process, perhaps eons long, of being transformed from the merely human to a divine reality.

Meditation leads to illumination, Goldsmith says, and illumination leads to communion with God. And communion leads finally to union. A God experience is an individual one. I may share my illumined unfoldment with others, but there can be no partner in this solitary experience. There is no limit to the depth of my attainment; Goldsmith calls it the depth of Christhood. Illumination leads to communion in which there is a reciprocal exchange, something flowing out from God into our consciousness and back again from our consciousness into the consciousness of God. It is an awareness carried to a deeper degree than has been experienced thus far, but I do not carry it-God carries it. No effort on our part can bring it about; I can only be patient and wait for it. It takes over and there is a peaceful, joyous interchange in which I feel the love of God touching us and our love for God returning to God.

Communion, carried to its ultimate, results in the final relationship which is union with God. One can feel the presence of The Lord. It is as if It were saying, "I am walking beside you;" then again It may say, "Heretofore, I have walked beside you, but now I am within you;" finally you hear It say, "Heretofore, I have been within you, but now I Am you-I think as you; I speak as

you; I act as you; your consciousness and My Consciousness are one and the same, because there is now only My Consciousness."

## **B. ANDREW HARVEY: SON OF MAN**

Andrew Harvey is briefly cited elsewhere in these writings. Born in 1952, he is an Oxford religious scholar who writes extensively on spiritual and mystic subjects. Here I want to give an extended view of his excellent work, for which the sub-title speaks for itself: SON OF MAN; THE MYSTICAL PATH TO CHRIST.

In his chapter, "Jesus and Power," Harvey quotes from the Gospel of Thomas. Salome asks Jesus, "Who are you that you have come up to my couch and eaten from my table?" Jesus replies, "I am he who exists from the undivided." Jesus, here characterizes Kingdom-consciousness as "existing from the undivided," living an "undivided" life...." Jesus condemnation of those who 'choose division' is fierce and sad: 'If he is divided, he will be filled with darkness.' To be 'divided' then, is not simply to be unable to enter the Kingdom of unity and wholeness and compassion; it is to be an active agent of darkness. Not to allow yourself to be 'destroyed' into love and to become an instrument in reality is to invite being 'filled with darkness' and to perpetuate the misery and squalor of that 'divided' life that keeps human beings separate from God, each other, and their own divine identity." 'That which exists from the undivided' is undivided mystical vision and just, compassionate action that flows naturally from it.

In talking about unity or the "undivided," it is revealing to see how at one time, and still for many, holiness was and is seen as separate and, perhaps, wholly other. Harvey quotes Marcus Borg on what the latter calls "the politics of holiness." "The introduction of Roman rule had brought a crisis into every aspect of Jewish life, religious, political, social, and economic; in response to the threat produced by the Roman occupation, the Jewish social world had become dominated by the 'politics of holiness.' It was expressed most succinctly in Judaism after the exile in the 'holiness code,' whose central words affirmed 'you shall be holy as I the Lord your God am holy.' "God was holy, and Israel was to be holy. That was to be...her way of life. Moreover, holiness was to be understood in a highly specific way, namely as separation. To be holy meant to be separate from everything that would defile holiness. The Jewish social world and its conventional wisdom became increasingly structured around the polarities of holiness as separation; clean and unclean, purity and defilement, sacred and profane, Jew and Gentile, righteous and sinner."

Thus, holiness originated as a survival strategy during the exile and afterwards. The Jewish people were determined to be faithful to God to avoid another outpouring of the divine judgment which led to their present predicament. Moreover, as a small social group, they also feared being assimilated into surrounding cultures. "The quest for holiness addressed both needs. It was the path to faithfulness and the path of social survival."

The next section I examine is what I consider central to Harvey's description of Jesus, where the Son of Man is teaching his disciples. "Being called 'master,' being set apart from others, would only unravel and destroy the core of his message to the world--that everyone would live in the divine glory of joy and power as he did; what Jesus wanted was a far more demanding intimacy and recognition. In the Gospel of Thomas, he is reported as saying, 'Let him who seeks continue seeking until he finds. When he finds he will be troubled. When he becomes troubled he will be astounded and he will rule over all.' The 'safety' of being a 'follower' has to be abandoned for the 'trouble' of discovering the vastness and majesty of one's own and everyone's divine identity, and for the 'astonishment' that follows on such a discovery and such an effort (an astonishment that dissolves all previous categories of understanding and reveals the divinity of the universe). The safety of being a 'seeker' has to be exchanged for the 'trouble,' 'astonishment,' and responsibility for rulership of being a 'finder.' Only then can the truth of what Jesus is and knows be recognized as the truth of all beings, and known not through worship but as he knows it himself in direct, suffering, astonishing, ecstatic knowledge."

"As Jesus says in the Secret Book of James: 'Become better than I, like the son of the holy spirit! Be eager to be saved without being urged. Instead, become zealous on your own, and if possible, surpass even me. For that is how the Father will love you.'"

"When Jesus says, then, 'I am the way, the truth and the life,' he is not speaking as a leader cajoling followers into accepting his authority (and his alone): he is speaking as the voice of the Kingdom within everyone, as the herald of that divine consciousness that is everyone's secret."

"The most complete statement that Jesus ever made about the nature of Union, and one of the key mystical clues to the transformation of the whole human being into a Christ, is found in Logion 22 of the Gospel of Thomas: "Jesus saw some babies nursing. He said to his disciples, 'These nursing babies are like those who enter the Kingdom' They said to him, 'Then shall we enter the Kingdom as babies?' Jesus said to them, 'When you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside and the above like the below, and when you make the male and the female one and the same so that the male not be male and the

female female; and when you fashion eyes in place of an eye, and a hand in place of a hand, a foot in place of a foot, and a likeness in place of a likeness, then you will enter the Kingdom"

"Every detail of this logion is revelatory. It begins by Jesus seeing some babies nursing. Immediately, this image of total at-oneness, trust, and abandon arouses in Jesus' awakened mind the image of resurrected consciousness. The Kingdom-consciousness is divine Child-consciousness, a consciousness that is drinking the milk of divine joy, wisdom, strength, and protection at every moment. To become a Christ is to become a 'nursing baby,' one who experiences the universe as a Mother, who nourishes, feeds, sustains, provides, guides at all times, who knows, in fact, perfect intimacy while in time and in a body with what St. John of the Cross calls 'the tenderness of the Life of God.'"

Harvey stresses the necessity of continuous learning on the path to Christhood: "Nothing real can be accomplished in the mystical journey to Christ without learning--and learning at ever-greater depth and with an ever-more acute and exacting fervor and sincerity--the 'feminine' wisdom of surrendering in trust and with an abandon of love to the mystery of ordeal."

In Part Four of SON OF MAN there are Twelve Sacred Practices and Thirty-one Meditations on the Mystical Christ. I would like to close our treatment of Harvey with one of these meditations, "The Divine Birth," by Meister Eckhart: "God gives birth to the Son as you, as me, as each one of us. As many beings, as many gods in God. In my soul, God gives birth to me as his son, he gives birth to me as himself, and himself as me. I find in this divine birth that God and I are the same. I am what I was and what I shall always remain, now and forever. I am transported above the highest angels; I neither decrease nor increase, for in this birth I have become the motionless cause of all that moves. I have won back what has always been mine. Here, in my soul, the greatest of all miracles has taken place--God has returned to God."

### **C. KEN WILBER**

I turn now to an American writer, Ken Wilber, who gives a solid basis dating back to ancient times for the argument that the ultimate reality is oneness. I will trace and condense his masterful study of the Nondual traditions as he unfolds their fuller meaning. Houston Smith, author of THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS, has written this about Wilber, "No one--not even Jung--has done as much to open Western psychology to the enduring insights of the world's wisdom traditions."

I will quote and paraphrase from Wilber's, THE EYE OF SPIRIT. This title, as well as that of his closing chapter, "Always Already," are very telling and indicate how he proceeds. The

last chapter begins: "The realization of the Nondual traditions is uncompromising: there is only Spirit, there is only God, there is only Emptiness in all its radiant wonder. All the good and all the evil, the very best and the very worst, the upright and the degenerate--each and all are radically perfect manifestations of Spirit precisely as they are. There is nothing but God, nothing but the Goddess, nothing but Spirit in all directions, and not a grain of sand, not a speck of dust, is more or less Spirit than any other." (p 281)

"This realization undoes the Great Search that is the heart of the separate-self sense. The separate-self is, at bottom, simply a sensation of seeking....The Great Search for Spirit is simply that impulse, the final impulse, which prevents the present realization, and it does so for a simple reason: the Great Search presumes the loss of God....Spirit must be fully, completely present right now--and you must be fully, totally, completely aware of it right now....There must be something about our PRESENT awareness that contains the entire truth....100 percent of Spirit is in your awareness right now---and the trick, as it were, is to recognize this ever-present state of affairs....And this simple recognition of an ALREADY PRESENT Spirit is the task, as it were, of the great Nondual traditions." (p281-283)

"Mysticism" or "transcendentalism" does not deny the world or the body and the senses and its vital life. The core understanding of the great Nondual mystics, from Plotinus and Eckhart in the West to Nagarjuna and Lady Tsogyal in the East is that absolute reality and the relative world are "not two" (which is the meaning of "non-dual"). The "other world" of Spirit and "this world" of separate phenomena are deeply and profoundly "not two," and this nonduality is a direct and immediate realization which occurs in certain meditative states--in other words, seen with the eye of contemplation--although it then becomes a very simple, very ordinary perception, whether you are meditating or not. (p 283)

"Every single thing that you perceive is the radiance of Spirit itself, so much so, that the Spirit is not seen apart from that thing: the robin sings, and just that is it, nothing else....We don't see that Spirit is fully and completely present right here, right now, because our awareness is clouded with some form of avoidance. We do not want to be choicelessly aware of the present....We will do anything except come to rest in the pure Presence of the present."(p 283-284)

"In nondual meditation or contemplation, the agitation of the separate-self sense profoundly relaxes, and the self uncoils in the vast expanse of all space....This realization may take many forms. A simple one is something like this: You might be looking at a mountain, and you have relaxed into the effortlessness of your own present awareness, and then suddenly the

mountain is all, you are nothing. Your separate-self sense is suddenly and totally gone, and there is simply everything that is arising moment to moment." (p 284)

"That simple witnessing awareness, the traditions maintain, is Spirit itself, is the enlightened mind itself, is Buddha-nature itself, is God itself, IN ITS ENTIRETY....In other words, the ultimate reality is not something seen, but rather the everpresent Seer....And thus, the ultimate state of consciousness--intrinsic Spirit itself--IS NOT HARD TO REACH BUT IMPOSSIBLE TO AVOID." (p 287-288)

"And so, as you rest in the pure Witness, you won't see anything in particular--whatever you see is fine. Rather as you rest in the radical subject or Witness, as you stop identifying with objects, you will simply begin to notice a sense of vast Freedom. This Freedom is not something you will see; it is something you are." When you are the Witness of thoughts or feelings, you are not bound by thoughts or feelings. "In place of your contracted self, there is simply a vast sense of Openness and Release. As an object, you are bound; as the Witness, you are free. We will not see this Freedom, we will rest in it. A vast ocean of infinite ease." (p 289)

"We do not contact or bring this Witness into being, but simply notice that it is always already present, as the simple and spontaneous awareness of whatever is happening in this moment....We also notice that this simple, ever present Witness is completely effortless....'The perfect person employs the mind as a mirror,' says Chuang Tsu. It neither grasps nor rejects; it receives, but does not keep'" (p 290).

"Eckhart said that 'God is closer to me than I am to myself,' because both God and I are one in the ever-present Witness, which is the nature of intrinsic Spirit itself....When I am not an object, I am God" (p 291).

"When I rest in the pure and simple Witness, I will even begin to notice that the Witness itself is not a separate thing or entity, set apart from what it witnesses. All things arise within the Witness, so much so that the Witness itself disappears into all things" ....Things and events simply arise as they are....They arise with Spirit, as Spirit, in the opening or clearing that I am....When all things arise in me, I am simply all things. There is no subject and object because I do not see the clouds, I am the clouds. I do not feel the breeze, I am the breeze. I do not hear the thunder clapping, I am the thunder clapping....I am no longer on this side of my face looking at the world out there; I simply am the world. I am not in here. I have lost face--and discovered my Original Face, the Kosmos itself (p 292-293).

"When I am not an object, I am God. When I seek an object, I cease to be God, and that catastrophe can never be corrected by more searching for more objects." (p 294)

"Every time I RECOGNIZE OR ACKNOWLEDGE the ever present Witness, I have broken the Great Search and undone the separate-self. And that is the ultimate, secret, nondual practice, the practice of no-practice, the practice of SIMPLE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, the practice of remembrance and recognition, founded timelessly and eternally on the fact that there is only Spirit, a Spirit that is not hard to find but impossible to avoid." (p 295)

"Spirit is the only thing that has NEVER been absent. It is the ONLY constant in your changing experience. You have known this for a billion years, literally. And you might as well acknowledge it. 'If you understand this, then rest in that which understands, and just that is Spirit. If you do not understand this, then rest in that which does not understand, and just that is Spirit.' For eternally and eternally and always eternally, there is only Spirit, the Witness of this and every moment, even unto the ends of the world." (p 296)

Wilber gives another look at the unified field in one of his earlier works, NO BOUNDARY. In it, he says, "We are always wave jumping, we are always resisting the present wave of experience. But unity consciousness and the present are one and the same thing. To resist one is to resist the other. In theological terms, we are always resisting God's presence which is nothing but the full present in all its forms. If there is some aspect of life that you dislike, there is some aspect of unity consciousness that you are resisting. Thus we actively, if secretly, deny and resist unity consciousness. The understanding of this secret resistance is the ultimate key to enlightenment." (p 131)

Wilber offers some, what I call, psychological aids to help us cross over our boundaries. "You cannot eradicate an illusion. You can only understand and see through the illusion itself. From this point of view, even trying to destroy the primary boundary through such elaborate activities as yoga, mental concentration, prayer, ritual, chanting, fasting--all of that merely assumes the primary boundary to be real and thereby enforces and perpetuates the very illusion it seeks to destroy. As Fenelon, Archbishop of Cambrai, put it, 'There is no more dangerous illusion than the fancies by which people try to avoid illusion.'"(p 44).

I may have to change my concept of self to get beyond our limitations. "An important change in one's sense of self and reality results," Wilber says, "from the simple healing of the split between mind and body, the voluntary and the involuntary, the willed and the spontaneous. To the extent you can feel your involuntary body processes as you, you can begin to ACCEPT as perfectly normal all manner of things which you cannot CONTROL....You may learn you

needn't control yourself in order to accept yourself. In fact your deeper self...lies beyond your control. It is both voluntary and involuntary, both perfectly acceptable as manifestations of YOU." (p 105)

Deepak Chopra has said this about Ken Wilber: "Ken Wilber is one of the most important pioneers in the field of consciousness in this century." I know from personal experience that what Wilber is saying above about accepting body processes can and does work to enlarge our horizon.

When I was having difficulty with my meditation, I asked a meditation teacher what I should do. After explaining my problem, he said to listen to my body and feel whatever comes up. Get a "felt sense," he said, of anything happening from head to toe. "Wait and watch within. You may feel a warmth, a release, an illumination, an inspiration, an opening. You may feel touched, or a stillness may come over you. Whatever it is, it is your private secret to explore.

Regard it as sacred." It worked! I found that the "felt sense" often turned into "felt realization" of something bigger. It took a while for my "feeling witness" to take over. When it did, I felt simultaneously grounded, at peace, and at one with my body. I now resort to this form of meditation frequently.

I can't find any summary more succinct or more profound than what Ken Wilber has offered me. As a contrast, a simple sentence from John Muir, the Scottish-American naturalist and conservationist shows his approach to oneness: "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe."