

The Religious Impulse

Can we bring about an ethical understanding,
a mind that is virtuous, innocent,
untouched by conventional moralistic thinking?

“Do we suffer because we are a divided human race, isolated from each other in beliefs and in primitive tribal associations formed around those beliefs?”

“Isn’t seeking the Divine really seeking our own projected wishes?”

“Why do religions promise a life in the hereafter, free of sorrow and suffering? Is it because we don’t know what to do with our problems now?”

“Is the process of trying to end suffering through religion, through idealistic thinking, actually creating and sustaining suffering?”

“Can we observe our minds and see the fact that thought has created all this, thought that has been formulated into beliefs, traditions, and unquestioningly conditioned into the brain?”

- from THE RELIGIOUS IMPULSE –
A Quest for Innocence
-

THE RELIGIOUS IMPULSE is concerned with the development of ethical and responsible behavior. This book questions the traditional religious process of becoming good, and examines how this process paradoxically cultivates irresponsible and immoral behavior through the inculcation of conventional theological beliefs.

The Religious Impulse

A Quest for Innocence

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Demon es Deus Invertes
The Devil is God Inverted

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Introduction

The intent of this book is to question traditional religious belief in order to discover if it creates and sustains conflict; the intent is also to enquire into the nature of the “religious mind,” a mind that is intelligent, mature, free of belief and all forms of conditioned thinking.

This book will ask simple, straightforward, fundamental questions.

It is the nature of a question to hold the intellectual mind in abeyance so one can *look* at the situation directly, immediately, and unbiasedly. The format of this book has been chosen carefully so as to stimulate *insight* into our conventional way of living. Too often books on religion are intellectual dissertations leading to more knowledge, more speculation, and confusion. Presented in the pages to come are *observations* on the traditional practice of religion. These observations are intended not as conclusions but as mirrors to reflect our state of mind. These observations are not THE TRUTH. They are not assertions to be accepted or rejected but are, rather, a means by which the reader can reflect on and creatively doubt what we have unquestioningly come to believe as true. The aim is to look anew at the age-old process of conventional religious thinking, to enquire into its purpose in living.

This book will not elaborate historically or sociologically into religion. It will not quote anyone to validate its perspective. There is no authority except for one’s own observation; only the reader can tell what is true, factual, by using the questions as working hypotheses to arouse his or her own enquiry. The intent of this book is not to answer questions but rather to raise them. Questioning denies the imposition of any psychological authority and cultivates doubt, which frees the intelligent mind to explore unhindered by conditioned restraints. It is the free mind that has the opportunity to discover that which is innocent, unspoiled, and creative.

The religious impulse is yearning for truth, life. The religious impulse is unencumbered by the past, by conventional prejudicial thinking. The religious mind is totally different from traditional religious thinking and practice.

It is important to understand that this book is not an attack on religion. It is not advocating an atheistic philosophy. Its primary intent is to question the *process* of becoming good, which is the underlying structure of many traditional religious practices. I am in total agreement with traditional religious thinking regarding the need to bring about what we call “good” behavior – a sense of kindness, generosity, cooperation, and love. We are only differing in *how* to bring these qualities about, whether through conditioned organized belief or through enquiry, intelligence. The need, then, is to examine what we are actually doing in the name of love and morality within the conventional structure of religious belief to see if we are, paradoxically, creating hate and violence.

I

CREATIVE DOUBT

Before we can enquire into traditional religious practice to see if, in fact, it creates conflict, we must first lay the groundwork for enquiry. We need to look at *how* we enquire, *how* we approach a problem. This is a simple, yet critical step in understanding for this is where conflict is first created. So, can we begin with understanding what it means to find out, to enquire? Then we can address the fundamental questions we may have about “how to” live the good, virtuous life, and about what causes the violence in relationship we live with every day.

Where do we start? What is the fundamental question? Can we begin simply with direct enquiry into the difference between traditional religious practice and the religious mind? Can we put aside our judgments, intellectual speculations, reactions, and beliefs to look anew? If we are committed to a particular view, can we question freely, intelligently, or are we prejudiced and therefore unable to look unbiasedly? Is it important to find out the difference, or are we just speculating, giving intellectual lip service to this issue?

How are we going to find out what the difference is? How are we going to approach this issue? If we approach this fundamental question with our minds already made up, then there is little chance of really finding out. So, how *do* we find out? What is the process of finding out? As we begin to examine this difference, are we comparing what we are reading here with what we already know, with some other book we have read, or with some authority on the subject? If we are doing this, will we be able to find out anything new, or will we just find what we already know? Are we projecting our acquired knowledge based on tradition, the past, onto the present situation?

So, what *is* the process of finding out what the question means; that is, what is the difference between conventional religious practice and a religious mind? We understand that when we look at this question with comparison, judgment, or any movement of the past, then we are projecting our conditioned views and beliefs, rather than opening to *learning*.^{*} If we see the truth of this statement, then aren't we beginning to look anew, to examine for ourselves? Aren't we beginning to enquire? Enquiry means to look for the truth of, to put aside (through understanding) all obstacles to learning. Enquiry is in the present; it is not projecting past prejudices but is, rather, the capacity of *insight* or *intelligence*, the capacity to be aware, alert, sensitive to living. It is insight or intelligence that sees that looking at something new can only be done when prejudgment and comparison are absent. The intelligent mind becomes aware when this is happening and, in so doing, goes beyond the confines of the past.

^{*}Learning here means in the present, not the kind of learning that we associate with the accumulation of knowledge from the past, which has a place in science and technology.

In order to understand the difference between religious practice and a religious mind, we will need to question, to creatively doubt, all established religious thinking. We need to, in other words, find out for ourselves what is true or false. So, right from the start, we are stepping out of conventional religious thinking and freeing the mind to learn. Learning without accumulation of the past is the essence of intelligence, which is the activity of a religious mind. It seems, then, that we need to understand what learning without accumulation is.

What *prevents* learning? Perhaps this is the appropriate question, instead of “What *is* learning?” It seems that the mind is naturally inquisitive, as when we are children. The mind wants to find out, it is curious, but obstacles are created to stifle learning. What are these obstacles? Why are they put in the way of learning?

Are we aware of what psychological conditioning is? We have all seen experiments to control animal behavior, to condition them to act in programmed, habitual ways. Some conditioning is necessary; for example, when we don't want our dog to run into the street, we either punish or reward the animal to act accordingly, and it works if we are consistent. But what does this have to do with what prevents learning? Can psychological conditioning be used in the human world to control behavior? What effect does psychological conditioning have on the mind, on learning? What relationship does psychological conditioning have to conventional religious thinking?

What is the process traditional religions use to affect behavior? Does religious belief influence the mind to act according to standards of “good” behavior? Does this influencing bring about ethical action, or does it, paradoxically, create conflict in relationship? Can the mind be free to enquire, to learn, when it is caught up in conflict, or when it is influenced or conditioned to act in a particular way? Are we interested in finding out what psychological conditioning is for ourselves, to see if it has had a devastating effect – to see if, in fact, it is the underlying process of bringing about moral behavior within traditional religious practice? As we explore the structure of religious practice, can we keep these questions in mind, to see if we have been conditioning the brain to such an extent that it is incapable of real learning or living?

If we are to understand our lives, why we act the way we do, isn't it important to see the truth – or falseness – of these questions? If we can, then we are learning, enquiring, in the present. Can the mind, in order to learn, step out of the past with all its entrapments, with all its confusion of beliefs and rituals, and see clearly what is actually happening?

Conditioned thinking is not questioning: It is believing or blind faith. Do we see the truth of that – not my truth versus your truth, which is only opinion, but *the fact*?

What is the energy or capacity that will break through conditioning? Will knowledge free the mind from habitual, conventional thinking? The intellectuals have their own conditioning; they believe that the power of the intellect will solve everything. Their God is the word and the more clever or erudite the words, the more noble the quest to find out – but will they? Are they confined by their very specialized perspective, limited by the confusion of words?

When we ask the question, “*What is the energy or capacity that can cut through conditioned, conventional thinking?*” what happens? Doesn’t the brain immediately react with some bit of knowledge it has collected; in other words, doesn’t the brain search for, or immediately come up with, “the answer”? Our brains have been educated or conditioned to do that. In the search and attainment of knowledge for use in technology and science, the brain has been conditioned to seek answers. This process is called *analysis*. Now, when we ask a question of a psychological nature, what does the mind do? It tries to answer with what it knows, but we’ve had millions of answers, endless idealistic theoretical speculations on the nature of the religious mind and that which prevents learning. But we are still in conflict and seemingly endless violence in relationship.

Can we actually *see*, observe, be aware of, have insight into, what this energy or capacity is? Insight is not knowledge. Insight is in the present; knowledge is the past. Insight uses knowledge to convey that which is observed in the present, so another can perhaps share in that insight if they then look for themselves. This knowledge, which comes from observation, can only point at what's real. Another person, observing for themselves, can then see the truth or falseness of what one is pointing at.

If we are seeing the truth of something because we have seen it for ourselves, isn't this the capacity or energy that breaks up conditioned thinking, that frees the brain from its habitual confines? Can we see that thinking about thinking only creates more confusion because it is of the past? Can the past understand the present? To define this energy as this or that hinders the necessary capacity to understand the question, for it categorizes intellectually and, therefore, doesn't bring about real awareness.

Creative doubt, questioning, understanding psychological conditioning, watching how the mind is caught in habitual thinking, intelligence, insight, awareness, seeing – these are all labels for that capacity or energy that is needed for clarity or perception. Can we *see* that these are *only* words and that words are not awareness? There is obviously a place for words, thinking, knowledge. We are just questioning that place and enquiring into the role of knowledge in perception, in understanding the state of the psychologically conditioned mind – the brain that is asleep, mesmerized through belief, habit, and routine.

When we are aware of our own mind, which is the human mind, the mind of all mankind, we will see the fixed conditioned assumptions we have about life. These fixed assumptions are conditioned thinking, beliefs that create habitual behavior and conflict in relationship because they divide. In that awareness, we observe assumptions first through thinking, which is thinking that is aware of itself. What we call hindsight is thinking that has become aware of itself in relation to its activity in the past. But if we are to see conditioned reaction in the present, observe its effect on our behavior as it arises, then what is needed is perception that is immediate. This perception is what we have called insight or intelligence and is the activity of the religious mind. Conventional religious beliefs and practices are based on knowledge, on the past, on a form of thinking which we have called conditioning. The religious mind is not caught in the limitations of belief, knowledge, the past; it is active, alive, questioning, doubting. It is the nature of the religious mind to enquire into that which is caught in time, confused by belief, seeking security in the known. It is the structure of traditional religious belief and practice to create security, to give a sense of hope and promise for the future. Whereas religious belief is building up through faith, the religious mind is breaking up belief through intelligence.

II

TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

Let us now look at the nature and structure of traditional religious belief and practice. We have understood that in order to look, we must be able to learn – to suspend the past and our opinions, beliefs, judgments, even our assertions about what is right or wrong. Being serious, we see the need to look anew. We are not for or against religion; we just want to find out, fundamentally, if it really accomplishes order and peace. Or is it, paradoxically, creating and sustaining the opposite – that is, conflict. Has the brain, not being aware of what it is doing, mistakenly created a process of attaining right behavior and a good life that actually creates immoral behavior and a world of tremendous violence?

Can we really look at what we call religion? Can we ask ourselves fundamental questions that can go to the core of this establishment, beyond the superficial, intellectual arguments of religious introspection and the debates of historical thinking? We have speculated for thousands of years and have only further divided human beings from each other, creating ideological schisms that bring terrible conflict under the name of peace and love. It is the nature of fundamental enquiry to see beyond the entrapments of speculation, to see to the heart of the matter and, therefore, understand it in its entirety.

The purpose of this enquiry, looking at established religion and religious practice, is not to accumulate more knowledge; we are not trying to formulate conclusions by logical deduction. We are only trying to stimulate or awaken the capacity of insight, or intelligence. This capacity can see through established conditioned thinking in the moment, to free the mind from the confines of belief *now* – which is the only time we can be free. Thinking takes time; it says, “We will solve this problem in the future.” That is the nature of thinking – it is a problem-solving mechanism. However, intelligence sees the situation as it arises. It doesn’t make a problem out of it; there is nothing to be “solved.” We just see conditioning as it happens and, in so seeing, in understanding, we are free. The conditioning may come back the next moment, but if we are alert, intelligent, then again that awareness cancels out the habitual effect of conditioning. It is really very simple! But it seems that the overly educated, highly intellectual mind says, “That can’t be so! Who am *I*? What makes me think *I* know? If the great authorities for centuries haven’t brought about understanding, how can *I*, a nobody, see these things for myself?” We have been told all our lives by intellectuals that *they know*, and we do not. These “authorities” have mesmerized us with sophisticated double-talk, convincing us of the validity of their power.

Can there be “An Authority” on understanding? Isn’t this a contradiction? An authority is full of answers. And if he says he doesn’t know, then that generally means that no one else does either. There is a place for authority, for one who knows, in technology or science. However, we are questioning the psychological, religious, or philosophical authority.

If the authority represents knowledge, can this person, who acts out of knowledge, know truth? Does learning which understands truth, what is, emanate from knowledge? We talked about knowledge and its place. Have we crossed over into an area that needs another type of learning? Have we simply fundamentally confused knowledge with understanding?

Can we look at the nature of conventional religious practice and thinking to simply learn – not to accumulate knowledge about it? Can we avoid trying to put it all together into some logical conclusion to prove or disprove what is being said by comparing it to what others have said? This proving, creating solutions and conclusions, comparing one set of ideas with another, is not the learning that we are talking about. This has a place, as we have explored, but it prevents nonaccumulative, in-the-moment learning or insight. And it is this capacity or energy that is needed to break free of the past, to end the destructive nature of conditioned thinking.

Are we awakening intelligence through these questions?
Can we use these questions to look for ourselves, to begin
to enquire into the structure of conventional religious
practice? How shall we begin to understand this
structure, the tremendous complexity of the tradition of
religion?

There are hundreds of issues we can look at in order to begin awakening this enquiring mind, the intelligent mind. We cannot look at all things religion has created, nor is it necessary. Again, if we look at all the pieces, wouldn't we be trying to intellectually understand by putting them all together into one logical conclusion? *THE ANSWER?!* The brain is so conditioned, so "educated" to do this, that we seem to need to be constantly reminded as to how we are approaching learning about ourselves. For it is ourselves, how we think and behave, that is fundamentally at question here. Religions, or religious beliefs, have been created by ourselves, the brain. (What reaction does the mind have to a statement like this? Are you aware of the mind now – not *your* mind or *my* mind, but the human mind or brain that is essentially alike, that has been conditioned for thousands of years to believe what it believes?)

In order to continue our enquiry, let's look at what traditional religion is, what conventional religious practice does, and its purpose. One definition of religion (from the American College Dictionary) is: "The quest for the values of the ideal life, involving three phases: the ideal, the practice for attaining the values of the ideal, and the theology or world view relating the quest to the environing universe." Also: "Recognition on the part of man of a controlling superhuman power entitled to obedience, reverence and worship." Can we begin here by enquiring slowly, step by step, into what this means, into what the intent of this definition has on our behavior, what the place of religion has in daily living? These are fundamental questions.

Let's be simple. Let's look at this definition "structurally," so to speak. First: the quest for . . . the ideal life . . . attaining the values of the ideal . . . Perhaps this is the crux of it, simply stated. Can we just touch on this process, not trying to solve anything and, in understanding one fundamental insight, let that go where it may?

What does it mean to “quest for” or attain “the values of the ideal life”? What does the brain do with this idea? It is asking us to change our behavior, quest for, attain, and lead the ideal or perfect life. Now how does one go about this ? And what is the capacity that will bring this about? It’s thought, is it not? Can we see that thinking is the capacity or tool that the mind uses to solve this problem, to create and attain the ideal life? Isn’t the ideal life just something made up by thinking? Isn’t the quest for the ideal life the process of attaining that perfection created by thought? Can we observe our minds and see the actual fact that thought has created all this, thought that has been passed down for centuries, thought that has been formulated into beliefs, traditions, and unquestioningly conditioned into the brain?

When thought enters the psychological realm, it does exactly what it does in the scientific and technological realm: It measures, compares, judges. Now, faced with the problem-solving task of bringing about ideal behavior, what does it do? Is the brain now coming up with answers? Can we just watch the brain and find out directly for ourselves? When we are asked to be “good,” to live the ideal life, which is what most of us want, what happens? Please look! Doesn’t the brain first seek out those qualities that are not ideal? Therefore, thinking judges and categorizes a quality as *not good*, which is in comparison to our conditioned views of what *is good*, or ideal. The brain, thought, decides that this quality is bad and not in accordance with ideal behavior. So, what we have is a quality, and the labeling or judging of that quality as “negative” or “bad.” What occurs now (and we can observe this in our brains) is that thinking takes the next logical comparative step, which is to create the “good” behavior that one wants to have and to eliminate the “bad” or undesirable behavior.

We need to look at what thought is, not scientifically, but functionally. How does thought work? Isn't thought a form of measurement, judgment, and comparison? We can see how it functions in technology, in building a house or bridge, or how it works in science. It compares, measures this with that, analyzes, synthesizes. This function of the human brain can do amazing things, such as sending a man to the moon and back. However, we are questioning its function in another realm, the psychological or "spiritual" realm, as some call it. What does it do there?

Can you see what is occurring in your own brain when you are watching its movement? We have the “eliminate the negative and accentuate the positive” dilemma. We are about to be caught between two opposing forces if we aren’t aware (and most of us aren’t). So what happens is that there is tension created between the desire to eliminate the bad behavior and fulfill the good; there is a struggle for domination of good over bad. This is where conventional religious thinking comes in. It reinforces this process by justifying, and even romanticizing, the struggle. The brain sets up the glory of the good and the destruction and damnation of the bad, and creates all sorts of ways to attain this end of good winning triumphantly over evil. The history of religious thinking is full of this justification.

Can we see that the capacity of thought judges and compares, thus setting up “bad” and “good” in the psychological realm, and creating the seemingly endless struggle that ensues? It reminds one of the dilemma of the Chinese finger puzzle where one’s fingers are trapped trying to get out of the puzzle by pulling in opposite directions.

Now, isn't this struggle for good over bad a form of conflict – individually and, hence, socially? Can we take a leap here and see how this seemingly simple error in human behavior has caused untold human suffering? How are we going to find out? Are we going to continue to enquire? If there is some truth to this observation, one doesn't have to continue reading. Direct observation is all that is really necessary. The observations are only pointers; one can carry on oneself at any point.

So, if we are to continue, what is next? Have we seen that the comparative, judgmental structure or function of thought, when it enters the psychological realm to change behavior, causes conflict between desires to eliminate the bad and become the good? Shall we look at this situation further?

What is an ideal? How do we attain it? What role does religion play in attaining the ideal life? Does this process of attaining the ideal cause conflict? What conflict? Do we need to struggle between the good and bad? In trying to attain the ideal life, have we, paradoxically, created its opposite?

If we try harder to be good, what does this do? If we try to be that ideal person we think we should be, what happens to the person we actually are?

Do you expect this book to give you the answers to these questions?

And if you are expecting that, aren't you making what is said here your authority, just adding more knowledge to the knowledge you already have?

Isn't part of the problem that the brain has been conditioned to intellectualize, gather, and store information? How can we do this when we need to see what is actually occurring in the brain each moment?

Have we gone too quickly to the root of the issue?
Perhaps we need to look further into conventional
religious practice. Perhaps we need to move more slowly,
going step by step into the structure of, and the reason
for, religion.

What are some of the main principles of religion or religious thinking? Perhaps belief is the most fundamental principle. Shall we look at the basic structure of belief to see if it creates order, goodness, peace?

Again, we are asking fundamental questions. Can we look at the structure of belief, what it actually does in our lives, what place it has?

Isn't religious thinking based on belief? What does it mean to believe? What happens to the mind when it believes? Isn't belief a set of ideas, thoughts, a theory or ideal one wants to have happen? Something isn't happening now, so one wishes that it will happen sometime in the future. For example, I believe that I can be a great athlete, so I set certain goals to attain that end and perhaps become that ideal. However, we are concerned here with religious belief. I believe that I can become good, I believe in God who is the ideal of goodness, and I believe in Heaven or in Hell (which is the reward or punishment for behavior). Is there a difference between setting physical goals, like becoming an athlete, and setting "spiritual" goals?

According to Webster's New World Dictionary, belief means "a mental acceptance of something as true, even though absolute certainty may be absent." The root meaning of belief is "to desire." Synonyms for belief are conviction, feeling, notion, opinion, persuasion, position, sentiment, and view. Belief means to accept as real or true because of a desire for something to be true. We accept a particular tenet, or persuasion, as truth even though "absolute certainty may be absent." We don't have to accept these definitions as correct; we don't have to "believe" in the word of the dictionary. What is important is to observe for oneself what the nature of belief is, how it functions. All a dictionary can do is to give the consensually accepted meaning. By observing the structure of our minds, can we actually see what belief does?

What is the purpose of belief in religious thinking? Does belief deny the fact, the truth, in favor of some type of wishful thinking, some fanciful, romantic notion? Life is full of pain and suffering, as we can all see. Do we invent notions of a greater life sometime in the future? Do we wish for a hereafter that is the opposite of what our lives actually are today? Isn't a belief an ideal, a perfect model one would wish for? If we look at the dictionary, not as a final authority but rather to get a view of what has been the view of others, the meaning of ideal is: "A perfect model, existing only in the mind as an image, fancy, or concept; imaginary." And idealism means: "Behavior or thought based on a conception of things as they should be or as one would wish them to be." Again, we are not accepting this as authority, but rather as a guide, a pointer.

Is this true? Is belief, opinion, wishful thinking, idealism, a fanciful imaginary concept existing only in the mind? If this is true, then are we aware of the effect this has on understanding our lives? If we want to understand why we are so violent, we must look at that! Our conventional approach to understanding ourselves and the problems we have created is through idealism, as we talked about earlier. Therefore, we are prevented from understanding our lives by our misunderstanding of how to approach our problems. It seems that the mind, not being capable of facing problems directly, runs away from them in idealism, in beliefs, in the hope that having ideals, in believing in a peaceful world in the future, is going to solve something. In fact, the opposite is true! The creation of ideals, believing in the future, has intensified and sustained the situation.

Let's go back to what we talked about earlier: that thought is being used to solve problems in the psychological or "spiritual" realm. If we return to the basic issue and relate our psychological and sociological problems to this fundamental misunderstanding of trying to change behavior through thinking, then we will be able to understand our problems at the root. As we enquire into religious thinking and practice, we can relate what we are looking at to this issue, but we can only do that if we see the necessity to do so.

Is belief a part of the function of thought, when applied to the psychological realm, used to change behavior? Is belief a measurement of thinking: the ideal created in reaction to the judged behavior? We are looking at the structure of belief, its function within the brain, what purpose it serves in living. We are not interested in what to believe, arguing this belief over that belief. We are seeing that belief is a mental process of trying to attain an ideal. We are looking at what this process actually does to behavior, to see if it addresses the problem, to see if it paradoxically creates the opposite of its intention.

Once we believe, once we have faith in something, does this close out any further questioning? Is the mind then terrified of doubt because it may begin to crumble our man-made security, our beliefs: in God, in the nation, in our political party, religion, family, and in ourselves? If we really see this dilemma for what it is – that is, the mind retreating into the structure of beliefs because of the intellectual confusion when the mind tries to solve the problems of relationship through conception rather than perception – can we drop this process? If we do see the truth of this, we have already moved away from the problem, because we have seen it for ourselves through direct observation. The “proof” is in the seeing, yet seeing does not need to be proved.

One can get endlessly lost in the content of belief, as people have done for thousands of years. My belief versus your belief, my ideology against your ideology, dividing people through the centuries. Today we can witness the Arab, the Israeli, the American, the Russian, the Catholic, the Fundamentalist Christian, each saying that their belief is the true belief, but can any *belief* be *true*? Truth means that which is real, “the quality of being in accordance with experience, facts, or reality.” Truth is “actual existence.” Again, we either accept the dictionary’s meaning or we have to find out for ourselves. We have to try it out, so to speak, to get the facts from directly observing the mind – the mind which is common in its function to all human beings.

Religious thinking is also based on faith. Again, let's look at this unemotionally, clearly, nonjudgmentally, not asserting our opinions. Faith means "unquestioning belief that does not require proof or evidence." Proof means "a testing or trying of something; anything serving to establish the truth of something." So, faith means unquestioning belief, and proof tends towards finding out through "testing" what is true. Perhaps here is where an error is made. If we consider testing out to be an intellectual exercise, having to prove something through analysis, time, then we are back into the conventional process of using thinking (removed from actual observation) as the resource for understanding the psychological nature of man. However, proof in its purest sense would, rather, come from *direct* observation. Thinking would express that observation but would not need to codify, expound, analyze, or think about it. One can see the misunderstanding if we notice that intellectual (not "observational" thinking adds endless theories and confusion to the problem. Therefore, we can see why faith would seem a logical alternative. Since thinking isn't solving the problem but is, in fact, adding to it, then the opposite of analysis, of conjecture, becomes the "natural" choice for dealing with the problem of relationship.

Faith means “unquestioning belief,” whereas getting proof has been thought of as a questioning in the analytical, intellectual sense – not questioning that opens the mind to direct, immediate observation, but questioning that seeks conclusions, solutions.

Isn't faith a reaction to doubt, that unnerving aspect of questioning? Has the mind become so afraid of its own capacity to confuse itself in its own thinking that it has become like a drowning person grasping for a lifesaver, something solid and secure to believe in?

Religious thinking is also dependent on hope, which is defined as “desire accompanied by expectation.” Isn’t this just another word for the same thing? Hope, belief, faith – aren’t these all manufactured by the process of thinking in trying to solve the problems of relationship through measurement and ideals, in the future? Can problems of relationship be solved in the future? We have tried this for centuries. Has it worked? Some say we need to have more faith or come up with the perfect theory or Utopian plan, but are we tricking ourselves? The future, psychologically, doesn’t exist. How can we solve a problem of the psyche, of the mind, in a future that doesn’t exist? The confusion comes because we have projected the internal problem outwardly onto society, and therefore think that reform is the answer. However, the root of the problem, its cause and hence the “cure,” is within us, in the very workings of the human mind, in thought trying to change behavior.

The concept of charity is important in some religions. Charity means, in Western theology or belief, “love for one’s fellow man.” This is a wonderful concept. It is benevolent, kind, and caring, or at least that is what it intends. Again, it is important to find out how this is carried out, so to speak. The key word is love. Love is affection or a feeling of tenderness for another, a feeling of goodwill towards other people. This is obvious, and we are definitely in need of more love in this way. However, love in this sense seems to be scarce today. What we have is narcissism: I love money; I love eating; I love traveling. Or it is romantic and lustful: I love your body; I love making love with you. Love is perhaps the most overused word.

We are speaking of charity or love in a religious sense. Here love means not only love of man for man but also “mankind’s devotion to and desire for God as the supreme good.” Many theologians would argue these meanings, citing this or that interpretation based on his or her understanding of the Bible, but we are not trying to cause an argument or spiritual debate. We are just interested in finding out if what we call “religious charity or love” does actually bring about goodwill among people.

Isn't religious love conditional? In other words, isn't it based on certain requirements and ideals? In Western theology, we have commandments and religious obligations: Thou shalt love! Love is a command, duty, and obligation – and, in so being, an ideal. I am not trying to be clever in saying that, or trying to convince another of an intellectual stance or conviction. We are just questioning whether what is called love is really love.

Can love be conditional, or is love always unconditional?

Does love come about through design or dictum, moral judgment and comparison, by measuring behavior with some ideal? Or does love come of its own, spontaneously, without effort or will?

Are we being conditioned to love through a system of punishments and rewards?

Is love of thought?

Can we attain love?

Perhaps it is more important to understand what prevents love than what brings love about, in the traditional religious sense.

Does belief prevent love? Does faith prevent love? Does hope prevent love? Does charity prevent love? Are these approaches to love based on thinking, on future attainment? Is love in the future?

Does conventional charity or love bring about harmony, wholeness, order? Or does it, by being based on belief, actually create disharmony, division, disorder, and, hence, conflict? Are we caught in a double bind, in the struggle between the commandment to love and the judgment of ourselves as unloving, sinful? Do we, because we are afraid to look at this dilemma, justify and romanticize this struggle as the battle of Good (or God) over Evil (or Devil)? In the name of goodness or God, are we destroying ourselves and others in this process.

Isn't love understanding? Understanding means to be aware of the essence, to perceive the nature or meaning of something. If we see the truth of this double bind of conventional religious love, isn't this understanding? Perhaps we have an image of what love is. Perhaps we view it as a romantic notion. Can we use the word love to mean something greater than personal romantic love? Can we use love synonymously with understanding, intelligence, perception, or truth? Then love has an actuality that goes beyond our isolated lives and touches that universal essence which infuses all things.

Then there is Devotion, making a solemn vow (to God) dedicating oneself to service or a way of life: a solemn promise of love. We are asked to give ourselves up to God or some ideal. One may be asked to take formal vows upon entering a religious establishment. Where is the intelligence in this? Where is the freedom? Is this total conditioning of the mind to act according to “right” behavior beneficial? Or does obligatory devotion produce fanaticism and violence? In blind obedience to “Love,” we have murdered people by the millions in the name of God. Are we acting out of confusion and the pressure generated by our fundamental psychic double bind?

What is our way out of violence? Religions have called us sinners and offer forgiveness. What is sin? Isn't sin transgression against the ideal set up by religious authorities? If this is so, then we are doomed to sin; there is no way out; there is nothing to do except to sin. This is because we can never live up to ideals! All ideals are future-oriented and necessitate that we eradicate the qualities that are in opposition to the ideals; that is, get rid of the bad in favor of the good. The "bad" is sin. The good is un sinful. However, as we have already seen, this process of attaining the good and eliminating the bad is itself destructive because it is based on conflict. So becoming good is, in the conventional sense, sinful.

Forgiveness means to absolve, to pardon, to pronounce free from guilt or blame. In essence, doesn't this mean to forget? Guilt means to remember and feel bad about something. We can see this in ourselves when we feel guilty. It is no great mystery; it is a straightforward function of thinking. Does religion play on guilt? Does religion encourage people to feel guilty so they will develop a conscience, a set of correct moral behaviors to act according to? Again, aren't we attempting to use thinking to solve a problem of a psychological nature? Is guilt the vehicle that motivates us to a quest for "the ideal life" and an all-forgiving God? Is forgiveness relief from the agony of guilt? In trying to change behavior psychologically, thinking has manifested itself outwardly into a sophisticated, codified system it calls Religion.

There is a familiar saying, “To forgive is to forget,” but are we ever allowed by religion to forget? How can we forget when we are caught up in an endless roundabout of conflict in thinking? One side of thinking says that we are bad and that evil must be eliminated. The other side says that we must attain goodness and overcome the bad within us. But what is this badness? It is who we are: It is us, isn’t it? The fact is that we are greedy or jealous or lustful. The judgment is that this is bad, and the pressure is towards the ideal. However, if we are going to attain what we are supposed to – that is, the ideal of perfection of goodness – then we are obliged to destroy, eliminate, get rid of the bad . . . which is us! In other words, we want to honor the concept of the ideal and kill the actual. So, what we would have to do, if we mean to take this to its “logical” end, is to either deny ourselves totally and become rigid, frightened fundamentalists adhering to a concept about life, or we would have to destroy ourselves and others because we would be identified as bad.

Religion, especially in the West, is based on suffering or sorrow. We can go to the churches and see all the symbolic reminders: the images of religious figures, bloody and scarred; the wailing of people for salvation; the confused moaning of lost souls. Is the very process of redemption and religious ritual a cause of suffering? Does religious practice paradoxically produce conflict?

There are many forms of suffering. Suffering and sorrow are felt in illness and disease, or when someone you love dies. However, much suffering, even physical, has its roots in psychological disease from being caught up in confusion and the tremendous pressure to be good, to succeed, and so on.

We can see economic disparity in the world causing starvation and suffering. Economists have written many books on their theories of how to create equality, but most are only theoretical and support inequality. Is equality a matter of economics? We know now that governments hoard and destroy food supplies; we have seen that there is enough food in the world to feed the starving. Organizations have tried to feed the hungry, and people have been generous and kind in giving, but this still hasn't solved the fundamental problem of inequality. What is the deeper issue here? What is the cause of this suffering?

Do we suffer because we are a divided human race, isolated from each other in beliefs and in primitive tribal associations formed around these beliefs? Isn't this the case, fundamentally? Then we must look at what divides us, to see what prevents wholeness. Trying to end suffering by bringing about wholeness is contradictory; that is, trying to attain an ideal is part of the reason why there is not wholeness. We cannot try to create wholeness by a process that prevents and destroys it.

Is suffering, fundamentally, man-made?

Is the process of trying to end suffering through religion, through idealistic thinking, actually creating and sustaining suffering? How will we find out what is true? By comparing our own thinking with “this thinking”? Will we ever get out of this vicious cycle?

If we have been using these observations as a mirror to watch the mind, then we will be able to see the truth or falseness of them. If they are true, because we have seen so through observing our own thoughts, then haven't we already stepped out of the confusion, removed ourselves from the vicious cycle?

Aren't religions based on worship: having reverence for, or devotion to, a Deity – and the religious service that accompanies this process? When we are in worship, what are we doing? We call upon our God(s), venerate religious figures, and pay homage to sacred buildings. We worship something outside us, or the Spirit of God within. We divide ourselves into one who worships and that which is worshipped: a projection of our desire, whether noble or crude, sophisticated or simple.

The word Deity, that which is to be worshipped, is the Divine. Being Divine is being godlike, or inspired by God. It is the supreme good, the perfect ideal, but a mere mortal cannot be God – or supremely good, at least not on earth. Since man is mortal and God immortal, man must strive all of his life to become like that supreme goodness to gain life eternal. People must worship, must continue to want that state of perfection, in order to attain it in the “next life” or in “Heaven.” One is reminded, in a crude analogy, of a horse with a carrot tied on a string dangling from a stick, attached to and protruding from the horse. As the horse moves forward to try to take a bite of the carrot, the carrot also moves forward, and so on, until the horse collapses in frustration and hunger.

In order to have a context for worship, religions have created the religious service. It is amazing how many different ways the mind has invented to carry on worship. There are endless chants, offerings, blessings, and prostrations that people subject themselves to in trying to attain that elusive good (God). They light candles, make arcane hand gestures, kneel, stand, jump up and down, sing, dance, shake, and convulse in order to get rid of the demon of evil, the bad which is themselves. (Another crude analogy might liken this demon exorcising to running away from one's own shadow.) People spout all sorts of words in languages they don't understand, and some "speak in tongues." And throughout the centuries, humans have killed animals and humans for their worship, drinking blood and cutting out hearts in sacrifice to God Almighty. We have had crusades, inquisitions, pogroms, all in the name of the Lord, and have unbelievably brutalized our own kind. It looks as if people were practicing Devil worship instead of God worship by these grotesque and horrifying acts!

Why do we seek the Divine? Isn't seeking the Divine really seeking our own projected wishes? Can the Divine, if there is such a thing, be sought through the creation of ideals, through thinking? Can we, who are "mortal," evoke that which is "immortal"? Can we mere humans attain that which is godlike, or are we doomed to endless frustration and conflict in trying to do so?

We are going over and over the same fundamental issue from every viewpoint, examining the conventions of established religious thinking and practice through its own structure. We are not analyzing religion, taking it apart step by step, in the hopes that we will come upon an irrefutable conclusion, to say that religious thinking is therefore destructive. We are, rather, observing the nature of our brains and how the structure of thinking is manifested in traditional religious practice. The reflection of our states of mind can be seen outwardly in the structures it creates. We can use these structures to mirror our own mental condition. This is what we are doing here: using the structures in society, in this case a book examining the conventions of religion, as a mirror to see who we are, what we are doing – fundamentally. Too often we get caught up in the reflection, the manifestation, and don't go beyond to the structure beneath that is creating and holding up the outward condition. At the base of religion is thinking, desire, wanting to be secure. Thought has created religion, although we fervently want to believe that religion came from God. When we look at the internal structure that supports the tremendous weight of the externalized manifestations – churches, mosques, temples, and all the entanglements of religious thinking – then that observation can cut through to the core of the situation and have a fundamental and immediate effect on the whole.

As a part of religious worship, some practices include confession. Isn't confession a process of relieving ourselves from the guilt and mental pressure of our sins by those who are appointed by God to do so? Isn't this, again, sustaining the problem of sin because we can never accomplish the ideal? So, we get caught up in an endless whirlpool of self-defeating activities. One is bad, so one is sinful. We ask forgiveness and try to be good, but goodness cannot be attained, so one is bad and sinful. So, one asks for forgiveness, and so on and on and on.

We pray and – depending upon our cultural conditioning – ask a particular “God” for help in solving the problems we’ve created. What is prayer? We speak to God, quietly in our own room, inside our own mind, or as a group in the house of God. We entreat God to help us, to save us from our sins. Some people even say that God speaks to them in prayer. Is this so? How can one approach another who says that this is true to find out? If someone says that God has told him/her to do something, how can we question that authority?

Anyone can say that God speaks to them, and anyone can justify their actions as coming from the will of God. We have had many despots and fanatical zealots proclaiming the authority of God. Only the few dare claim this special relationship, and the many believe and follow the few because the few are the ones who “know.” Therefore, we create the destructive relationship between the ones who know, the authorities, and the others who don’t, the followers.

Most people don't claim that God has spoken to them. They just find solace in praying quietly, in confessing their grief and suffering, in asking for forgiveness, or success, or comfort.

Are we simply talking to ourselves when we pray and our own voice answers us, like an echo in a mountain pass? Have we fundamentally fooled ourselves to the extent that we no longer see the connection?

Who are we asking help from? Can an idealized image help solve the problems that idealized images cause?

We are asked to give ourselves up to God in the name of some religious figure. What do we do when we “give ourselves up”? What is this “self” that we are supposed to give up? What purpose does this attain? Isn’t this a part of faith, of unquestioning belief? Aren’t we trying, by some mystical or magical means, to become godlike (but not God – that is blasphemy)? Giving ourselves up means that we have absolute faith and trust in God, that we believe God will take care of us. Some religions ask us to renounce our separate beings and accept their God within us. We become “reborn.” There is a great feeling of relief and joy in this giving up of the responsibility for one’s life, the terrible struggle we have had in our sinful ways. Now we have accepted their God in our lives. We weep and rejoice that we are saved. But what are we saved from? Is it not our own self, our individual psychological conflict and suffering? To what lengths will we go to make the process of attaining ideal behavior work? When will we wake up and take responsibility for our own self-created prisons?

We are motivated to do good by the fear of damnation (Hell) and the reward of salvation (Heaven). Some religions have had tremendous influence on people's psyches by preaching Hell and Damnation, the wrath of God. Early American religious history is full of fire and brimstone exhortations, but has this worked or has it only reinforced the pressure, the tension of the struggle between good and evil? Can goodness be motivated, coerced, or rewarded? Do threats or fear of punishment produce good behavior, or does goodness only come through understanding ourselves?

Why do we have such a brutal and savage approach to attaining goodness? This is exactly the point. It's the process of attaining goodness that we are questioning, enquiring into. It is natural to want to be good, which is what religion (at least in the West) is supposed to bring about – but does it? Does the conventional process of trying to be good actually create and sustain evil? One asks this question over and over to see the validity of it. The mind has become steeped in thought through years of religious thinking. It has been highly conditioned to think and act habitually. One asks the question again and again in order to arouse the brain from its conditioned state, to spark a light of interest, to find out what is true for oneself.

The brain has been dulled and put to sleep by the repetition of organized, habitual thinking. The routine of words and gestures, years of worship, the tremendous weight of the past, lies heavy on the brain. What can stir that enquiry? What words can point clearly enough that one wants to look, even for a minute, at their state of mind and, hence, the state of the world? So, one asks fundamental questions this way and that way, looking at the core of the problem, relating everything back to the source within the human psyche.

Do we want to live forever, perhaps in a chain of endless lives, or in an eternal life in Heaven (or some such wished-for place of rest and salvation) after life as we know it is over? Why would we want to live forever? Why do religions promise a life in the hereafter, free of sorrow and suffering? Is it because we don't know what to do with our problems now, that they have grown so immense and out of proportion that we are totally perplexed about what to do? Are we lost in a maze of confused thinking, each authority telling us what to do and not do, what and who to believe, and so on? Can we set all that aside and just look simply, step by step, at our lives – not at how they should or should not be, but at what our lives actually are each day? There have been others who have asked these questions, but have *we* looked or are we still waiting for someone or something to tell us the answers?

What is supposed to live forever? Who is going to live forever? This is not an esoteric or quasi-religious or philosophical question. We are enquiring into who or what the entity is that wishes to live forever. Is it possible to just observe our mind when that desire occurs? Can we see what happens when we haven't been aware of where that desire emanates from, what action we may take in life to have that wish fulfilled? Do we then go to church and pray with others for eternal life?

Is the eternal life of salvation our reward for living a good life?

What is death? How is death a part of religion? In what way do religions approach this? If something is complex, then one may need to approach it simply.

Does anyone know what it means to die physically?
There have been psychological studies done on people who
have been pronounced “clinically dead,” but have they
died? Why are we afraid to die?

Is death the unknown?

What are we afraid of? Is it the known that we fear, what we have been told death is, images of being nothing, endless sleep, total darkness, the void? What we fear is fear and our own images of death. Why does religion make so much out of a simple reality? Why does religion play on our fears? Is this just another way to control behavior, to make one follow the path of goodness lest one should die and be damned? Is death exploited by religious leaders so they can maintain their authority over us? We are not condemning or judging religious leaders or religion. We just want to put forward questions so we can find out for ourselves if something is true or not.

Can we take the questions of death, of how to live or not live, of our salvation, out of the hands of the authorities and look for ourselves? We are not advocating rebellion or revolution: That is only a reaction against the status quo. We are doing the only sane thing we can do. Even if the authority is right, how will we know? We can either accept that which he or she says as true and become a follower (which is what we have done in the past for the most part and, in so doing, have created tremendous havoc, misery, and suffering) or we can say, "Let me find out for myself if what you say is true. Let me try that out." If something is true, it is not personal. Being personal is opinion. Truth is truth and anyone can see it as such – or one can see the falseness of something, which is also truth! If someone says that God is an invention of the mind and someone else looks at this and sees the truth of it, whose truth is that? It is not anyone's. It is a fact: It is true. In order to see the truth or fact, one must put aside one's own educated or assumed opinions. To see the truth, one must put aside belief and see *now*, not from the past. Is what has just been said true – or false? How will you know?

Why do we take the young, impressionable child's mind and, through mesmerizing acts of religious ritual, frighten it into submission? Do we think that we are saving that child from sin? Some people believe that a child is born in "original sin," an idea with alarming implications. Is this the creation of a conditioned mind, a mind steeped in habit, torn apart in conflict, and therefore suffering? Most feel that they are subjecting the child to religion out of concern and love. Is it love that wants to condition a child's mind to be like ours, to suffer what we have suffered? Traditional religious education puts out the light of enquiry, of life. It puts children's minds to sleep, like ours, in a nightmare of confused thinking. Can we just let them alone or, better yet, can we explore together with them these urgent and vital questions of living, keeping alert to the pressures and influences of conditioning that exist everywhere? This is what a true religious education is – awakening one's intelligence and contact with life.

III

OBSERVATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS MIND

Can we now look at this question of religious education? It is our responsibility to raise children to be intelligent, capable, and sane. As long as we are not creating ideals to follow and are exploring the nature and structure of the human brain itself, the seat of the problem, then this is possible.

Can we talk intelligently with other adults and with our children (at their level) about these issues, about what religion is and how it creates conflict through ideals? Can we become aware of the many traps and pitfalls of conditioning, and the religious structures that work to convert us to a brand of fragmentary thinking?

Can we discuss these issues in our schools? Traditional public schools might not allow such dialogue, and many private schools are developed on the tenets of religious thinking. So, what can we do, those of us who see the necessity for such enquiry? We can talk with our children and friends at home, and we can also start schools where the fundamental intention is to explore these issues. However, the trap here is that such schools cannot be built around one or a few individuals. Each person must have some intention for themselves to enquire into these things. If one or two people act as leader(s), their views may be accepted and their position becomes that of authority. If their leadership is rejected, there is conflict and dissension.

Can we freely come together to discuss our lives? Are we really interested, or are we prevented from doing so because we think that only the authority knows the answers? The authority only knows knowledge. He/she may be able to talk eloquently, but that is just rhetoric. Again, we are talking about psychological authority, not technological or scientific expertise.

If we are interested in these issues and have been looking for ourselves up to this point, can we now enquire into these questions: What is a religious mind? What is a truly religious education? How do we find out what a religious mind is? What is the *process* of finding out? We must be extremely careful here because it is easy to fall into the trap of idealistic thinking by trying to *attain* a religious mind, which is what people have been trying to do in their quest to be good or godlike.

Education comes from the Latin “educare,” meaning to “draw out.” This does not mean to inculcate, to condition. It means to bring forth, to nurture. So, a true religious education would draw one out, evoking an intelligent response to vital questions.

What are the essential ingredients in religious education, in finding out what a religious mind is? Questioning is a most essential ingredient; doubt is another. We need to question conventional approaches to living and conditioned authoritative statements. We need to doubt what is being put forth in this book, or any book, on these issues. Do we see the truth of this or do we just accept that it's important to doubt, thus making this book (and the author) an authority?!

So, what is a religious mind? Perhaps this is not the best question. Might it not be better to ask, “What is *not* a religious mind? When we ask, “What *is* a religious mind?” what are we about to do? Aren’t we trying to find answers, a solution, and therefore some sort of ideal to follow?

When we look at the question in the negative, so to speak, we are asking ourselves what *prevents* the mind from being religious. This is simply a process of elimination, to clear away all that which is not religious. Can we take all the fundamental questions we have explored throughout this book and ask them in this context? For example, is a religious mind steeped in belief? Is a religious mind trying to attain the ideal life? Is the religious mind caught in routine, habitual behavior? Can we just look in this way? Have our minds been stimulated to enquiry beyond this book? What is this enquiry? What is this state of mind that is open to observe for itself, that has looked at all these questions and has not accepted or rejected them? Is this mind intelligent, alert, watchful of its own workings, because it sees the urgent necessity to do so? Is this mind the beginning of a religious mind? Is this mind, because it is not accepting or is rebelling against the established conventions of religious thinking, educating itself? Is this self-education, this moment-to-moment enquiry with oneself, the foundation of a truly religious education? How will we know? Who is there to tell us? Is there a sense of what religious education is by finding out what it is not, or are we just playing with words as so many books have done?

How will we find out?

About the Author

Terrence Webster-Doyle was Founder and Director of three independent schools and has taught at the secondary, community college, and university levels in Education, Psychology, and Philosophy. He has worked in Juvenile Delinquency Prevention and has developed counseling programs for teenagers. He has earned a Masters Degree in Psychology, and a doctorate degree in Health and Human Services. He also has been awarded a 6th degree black belt in Karate, and has studied and taught the martial arts for over 40 years. He has also produced numerous conferences and workshops on New Directions in Education. He was the Director of The Shuhari Institute, a Center for Transpersonal Studies, Director of the Atrium Society, and Co-director of the Atrium School whose intent is to explore psychological conditioning.

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

Atrium Society concerns itself with fundamental issues, which prevent understanding and cooperation in human affairs. Starting with the fact that our minds are conditioned by our origin of birth, education, and experiences, Atrium Society's intent is to bring this issue of conditioning to the forefront of our awareness. Observation of the fact of conditioning, becoming directly aware of the movement of thought and action, brings us face-to-face with the actuality of ourselves. Seeing who we actually are, not merely what we think we are, reveals the potential for a transformation of our ways of being and relating.

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