

The Fundamental Insight

Copyright © 2008 William Meacham. Permission to reproduce is granted provided the work is reproduced in its entirety, including this notice. Contact the author at <http://www.bmeacham.com>.

Contents

Theory: What God Is	1
Practice: What Is God?	2
Theory: What God Knows.....	3
Theory: What God Does	3
Practice: What Does God Do?	4
Theory: The Many Faces Of God.....	4
Theory: All Is God's Action	5
References.....	5
Revision History	5

This body is called the 'field' and he who knows it is the 'knower of the field.' ... I am the 'knower of the field' in every field [Zaehner, 1966, p. 303]

This body, Arjuna, is called the field. He who knows this is called the knower of the field. ... I am the knower in all the fields of my creation [Mascaro, p. 99]

– Bhagavad Gita XIII: 1, 2, in which Krishna, The God, speaks to Arjuna, a human.

Theory: What God Is

The God (al-Lah)¹ is that which is conscious in every being. Al-Lah is the subject of consciousness, the I. Al-Lah is that which experiences and from which activity emerges.

Generally a person is aware of only one field of consciousness. Each person is conscious of him- or herself from the inside.

Each of us is conscious of other people from the outside. That is, we see hair and skin and clothes and behaviors, etc., we hear voices, we smell bodies. We are conscious of the outside of other people.

Each of us is conscious of himself or herself from the inside. We experience bodily feelings, emotions, thoughts, etc. We can also be conscious of the outside of our self, as when we look in a mirror, but the primary mode of being conscious of oneself is from the inside. We experience the inside of our self, which is called our subjectivity.

¹ I hyphenate the word commonly written in English as “Allah” to emphasize that the literal meaning is The God, rather than a personal name.

When I speak of a human being emphasizing the view from the outside, I use the word “person.” When I speak of a human being emphasizing the view from the inside, I use the word “self.”

Imagine a being that could be conscious of more than one self from the inside. That would be a god. One can imagine small gods that could be conscious of a few selves, and larger gods that could be aware of more selves, even the selves of the smaller gods. All from the inside.

Picture an octopus with an eye on the end of each tentacle. Each eye corresponds to a self. Imagine being at the end of a tentacle, looking out of the eye. That is, figuratively speaking, the condition of a separate self, looking out at the world. Now imagine being in the center of the octopus, being able to see out of all the eyes. That is, figuratively speaking, the condition of one of these hypothetical gods. Note that “god” is not capitalized. What I mean by the term is simply a being like an individual human self but rather larger. I do not mean al-Lah, The God.

Al-Lah is that which is conscious of everything from the inside.

Al-Lah is conscious, from the inside, not only of every human self but of every self, human or otherwise. I assume that everything that exists, mineral, vegetable or animal, has an inside as well as an outside. Particles of sand, drops of water, plants, animals and humans all have an interiority, an experience of themselves from the inside. This is not hard to imagine in the case of animals. It is perhaps a little harder in the case of plants and very hard to imagine a rock having experience and having an interior. For the sake of a consistent metaphysics, I nevertheless assume that everything has an interior dimension, an aspect which can only be known from the inside. So al-Lah is that which is conscious of everything from the inside.

Imagine a super-octopus, which is composed of all the separate octopi. This super-octopus can see through all the eyes of all the octopi. Viewed from the outside, this super-octopus is the universe, the entirety of all that exists. Viewed from the inside, this super-octopus is The God.

I am using a visual metaphor. I could just as well use an auditory metaphor, in which the octopus has an ear on the end of each tentacle, or a tactile metaphor, in which the octopus has an organ of touch on the end, which is probably closer to the reality of an actual octopus. The point is, regardless of which metaphor one chooses, a self is conscious of the world (from the outside) and of itself (from the inside), and a god would be conscious of many selves from the inside. The God is that which is conscious of all selves from the inside.

Practice: What Is God?

I have said that al-Lah is that which is conscious of everything from the inside. The phrase “that which” is a noun phrase. It seems to imply that there is some thing which is conscious. To find out whether this is true, I recommend the following practice:

- 1) Observe your experience.

- 2) Find the self, that which constitutes you (or those elements which constitute you) as opposed to other people.
- 3) Find the Self, that which is conscious of all of the elements in your experience.

Theory: What God Knows

I assume that everything has an interior, no matter how dim or slow, that everything experiences, in some way, the world. In other words, everything is a self.

By direct observation each of us knows that we experience the world. Obviously animals do. They react to events and seem to anticipate events as well. Less obviously, plants do too. Observation shows that plants respond to changes in their environment. For the sake of consistency I assume that inanimate objects do as well. (The interior of a rock is probably very slow; imagine yourself as a rock, experiencing the world.)

I also assume that everything has an exterior, some way of being known to an observer external to itself. This assumption should not be controversial at all.

Al-Lah is that which “peers through the eyes,” so to speak, of every self: animal, vegetable or mineral. Each self sees (or hears, or feels, etc.) the inside of itself and the outside of things in its surroundings. Al-Lah, being the knower in every field, as the Bhagavad Gita says, experiences the inside of every self and the outside of everything of which each self is conscious. This constitutes the whole of reality. Therefore al-Lah knows (is conscious of) everything.

Theory: What God Does

I have said that al-Lah is that in every being which experiences. Mystical philosophy, such as that found in the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita as well as in some Sufi writings, has emphasized the conscious, knowing aspect of al-Lah. However, al-Lah is not only that which knows, but also that which acts, the source of activity in every being. Al-Lah is that in every being from which activity emerges.

Things in the world, quite evidently, are always moving, always in flux, always in activity, always changing. Some things change more rapidly than others, but no thing is unchanging.

(If al-Lah is no thing, then al-Lah is unchanging.)

Where does activity come from? From the outside it appears that activity is transmitted from thing to thing, as a moving billiard ball, when it hits another ball, causes the other ball to move. From the inside, we experience that some of our activities arise from within us, not as a result of something from the outside, but spontaneously, of our own doing. Some of our activities are things that we do, our actions.

(The term “activities” includes activities caused from outside of oneself and activities caused by oneself. I use the term “actions” to mean activities caused by oneself. “Actions” is a subset of “activities.”)

Al-Lah is the source of all actions, in every self. Al-Lah is that from which all actions arise. Since everything is a self, all activities come from a self (or from more than one self). Al-Lah is the Self in all selves. Therefore The God does everything.

Practice: What Does God Do?

- 1) Observe your experience.
- 2) Find the activities of the self, the activities of that which constitutes you (or of those elements which constitute you) as opposed to other people.
- 3) Find the actions of the self, that which you do, as opposed to the activities which are caused from outside of you.
- 4) Find the Self, that which is the source of all your actions.

Theory: The Many Faces Of God

How does the One appear to the Many? The Many cannot be conscious of the One directly, because the One is who is being conscious. The One appears to the many by indirection, in different guises, different Persons, as the Christians say, different faces, such as Wakan Tanka Tangashela, Shekhina, Ganesha. In that sense, as many devotees as there are, that is how many Gods there are. The so-called 99 Names of God are ways in which The God manifests itself to human beings.

We, from our limited point of view, experience certain aspects of reality, certain patterns, as having been caused by The God or as revealing The God. Certain archetypes, to use Jung’s terminology, have a profound effect on us, and we experience them as divine, as giving us messages, guidance and love.

The Christians make a big deal out of one God being three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the Trinity. In fact, God appears to humans as many persons: Ram, Sita, Ahura Mazda, Allah, Yahuwah, and on and on. That is the way what is essentially unknowable becomes known.

The Sufis speak of al-Lah as the Friend, as the Lover, as the Beloved. These are more faces of al-Lah. Different strokes, as the saying goes, are useful for different folks. Some prefer the Nameless Void of Buddhism or the Way of Taoism. Al-Lah is not limited by our conceptions or our religions or our theologies. Al-Lah, in its mercy, reveals itself to us in many ways. Even the experience of mercy is a way we experience al-Lah but is not the essence of al-Lah.

Theory: All Is God's Action

The God becomes known not through human activity but through revelation. We humans can do all sorts of spiritual practices, and they have their effects, but all they do is prepare a space for the presence of God. They do not cause The God to appear. The God appears as it wills, and that will is known to humans only through The God's activity, not through human activity. (This follows from the premise that all activity is The God's activity.)

The big mystery is this: if it is all the doing of The God, then what is the scope of human activity? It appears that we humans act and decide and do things. Where do the impulses to action come from? It is a paradox. Can one justifiably take pride in the fact that one has overcome obstacles and worked on oneself to the extent that one seems to be favored by God? In a sense, Yes. One oneself, a singular person, not someone else, did it. But where did the stubbornness and tenacity come from? From The God, from the source of all activity.

References

Mascaro, Juan, tr. *The Bhagavad Gita*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1962.

Wikipedia. *Allah*. On-line publication URL = <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allah> as of 2 December 2009.

Zaehner, R. C., Tr. *Hindu Scriptures*. London: Dent Everyman's Library, 1966.

Revision History

Version	Date	Author	Change
1.0	27 July 2008	Bill Meacham	First publication
1.1	2 December 2009	Bill Meacham	Add footnote on usage of "Al-Lah". Add references.