

ETERNAL QUESTIONS

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Black Eagle Stoic Monastery

“to explore the eternal metaphysical questions of our time”

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“Knowing God by Other Means, part 2”

This is part 2 of “Knowing God by Other Means.” If you have not read part 1, the first part of this story, then you will probably get very lost, very fast. Go back. It’s your only hope.

It’s 6:15 AM, Monday, the 29th of May, 2017, and I’m on the fourth level of Upper World. It’s been quite a while since I saw Jesus of Nazareth, and I thought he may no longer be my teacher. I had already looked around on each level and asked everyone I saw if they were my teacher, but I was ignored. I decided that even if Jesus was not going to continue as my teacher it would be more polite for me to go back and have him tell me so.

So, here I am, and there he is on level 4, almost as if he had been waiting. We met face-to-face, then walked side-by-side into the empty wasteland where he always meets me. Even with all this time together I’m still not sure what he looks like. Finally, I broke the silence.

“What is God,” I asked?

Jesus said nothing, so I started to fill the silence with more words, then decided to keep my thoughts and my mouth shut. Suddenly in that dark wasteland of rock, dust, and rubble an oasis appeared. It was a brilliant profusion of plants,

animals, and light. I don't know if he said it or I did, but the words came out, "God is life."

"So, the Stoics were right," I said.

"Yes," he said. "Everything we see in the cosmos are forms and parts used in the creation of life."

I decided not to say anything more and just enjoy the oasis. For the first time in Upper World, I found myself flying above his creation for a moment or two. Then, I returned to Jesus and asked if he was going to continue to be my teacher.

"I am," he said.

"But, I'm not worthy," I said.

"Yes, you are."

"Well, I can't imagine why."

"You will know eventually," he said.

I didn't want to press the issue, and I could tell it was time for me to go. As I was leaving, I remembered that I had not thanked him properly and vowed to apologize for the oversight next time.

What the Hell is Going on?

Jesus of Nazareth? As in Jesus Christ? The Son of God? Yes, that Jesus.

I KNOW! . . . I *know* what you must be thinking. Have I fallen down a rabbit hole? That's what I would be thinking if I were you. Do you think I asked for this? No. I did not. Do you think I wanted this? No. I did not. Do you think I believed any of this? Yes, I did. But don't forget, I'm a Stoic philosopher, and as such I'm allowed to investigate anything. And everything.

Let's back up a minute. In the last issue about knowing God by other means, I said that my wife handed me a book she thought I might like. I didn't expect to like it, but I was temporarily between reading material at the time and decided to give it a cursory glance. I didn't really want to read it, but I had the time, and I was surprised and intrigued by the author of such a ridiculous topic. Remember due diligence? As always, I did my due diligence to find out who wrote it.

The book my wife handed me was *The Spirit of Shamanism*, by Roger Walsh, who had both M.D. and Ph.D. Degrees from good universities. At the time this was written in 1990, Walsh was Professor of Psychiatry, Philosophy, and Anthropology at the University of California @ Irvine. He had also written over 100 scientific papers and ten books. But despite his rather sterling credentials I was reluctant to read a book about shamanism. Once I started reading, I couldn't put it down.

In his book, Professor Walsh made numerous references to another anthropologist, Dr. Michael Harner, whose work on shamanism he discussed at length and obviously respected. He also described the international organization Harner had created, the Foundation for Shamanic Studies, and discussed his workshops and their results.

I Googled Michael Harner and the Foundation and discovered there would be a "Core Shamanic Drumming" weekend workshop here in San Diego in about two weeks. I had never before taken what I thought would probably be some weird New Age workshop. As far as I was concerned they were overpriced, and I always assumed they were taken by flaky people I had no interest in getting to know. But, I had come into a few dollars recently, and I signed up. I took the workshop, finished it, and learned how to take a shamanic journey on my own. And, as is my usual custom in learning new subjects, I began to read. To summarize as briefly as possible, this is the backstory.

Shamanism is *at least* 30,000 years old, according to anthropologists' best guesstimates, and it has been practiced at one time or another in virtually every culture in the world. From Australia to Siberia the shaman (pronounced, *shaw-mon*) was the principle spiritual leader and healer of his or her community. Yes, the shaman was and is often a woman. Evidence of shamanic practice can be seen on rock paintings, ranging from crude hand outlines to sublime aesthetic genius in the caves of Altamira and Chauvet.

Even today, there are pockets of tribal people who preserve shamanic traditions, especially in the jungles of the Amazon. But, as we all know, the great majority of them were replaced by the dominant religions of the world. Christian missionaries, for one, were not about to allow shamans and their Satanic mumbo-jumbo access to the villagers' souls. Convert or die was their cry, and a lot of people died.

What I didn't know at the time but discovered later is that shamanic practices existed as recently as classical Greece. Plutarch, the first century Platonist philosopher and historian, wrote about a Greek shaman in his work on the *Daimonion of Socrates*. He said that Hermodorus's soul left his body like a shaman and was able to acquire knowledge of things happening at a great distance. Plutarch disagreed with the idea that a soul could separate from its body, but that his daimon was able to "roam far and wide and have a lot of tales to tell."

I rationalized my involvement with such strange activities by reasoning that if shamans were a part of every human culture for at least 30,000 years, then it was knowledge that was worthy of investigation. Direct investigation; not just book-learning. As William James once said, a doctor can tell you all about what

happens to the body when you're drunk, but it's not the same as being drunk. And, what better way to investigate than to actually journey. So, I did. For a period of about 14 months I journeyed alone and on my own at least four times per week.

Journeying is done while beating a drum, and that is what I did. I was in a quiet room, the room I call my monastery, using the same method shamans have used for thousands of years. I closed my eyes and drummed a single, fairly rapid beat for the duration of the journey. Most journeys last an average of about 15 minutes. If you are interested in more specific details on journeying, please see *A Monastery of One* on the Eternal Questions website. But for now, all you need to know is that for every journey I later recorded in my journal I was beating a drum with my eyes closed the entire time. I saw and heard everything as images and words *in my mind*.

Dr. Harner, who died a few years ago, had the best definition of a shaman I have seen. In his book, *The Way of the Shaman* (HarperCollins, 1990), he writes, "A shaman is a man or woman who enters an altered state of consciousness—at will—to contact and utilize an ordinarily hidden reality in order to acquire knowledge, power, and to help other persons. The shaman has at least one, and usually more 'spirits' in his personal service."

He goes on to say that the shaman's enlightenment is meant literally. That is, they bring light to the cosmic darkness that permeates much of our lives. Harner also suggests that the term *enlightenment* may have originated as a description of the wisdom of the shaman. It is also suggested that the word "seer" is a description of the shaman who "sees" what others cannot.

Shamanic practices differed from region to region, but there were certain universal themes. Anthropologists such as Roger Walsh, Michael Harner, and others, devoted their professional lives to identifying and confirming the most common themes. Chief among them is the shaman's journey to the spirit world. In fact, there are three separate worlds—when you include the one in which we currently live.

There is an Upper World, a spirit world with many levels; there is a Middle World, the material world in which we currently live and study subjects like God and shamanism; and, there is a Lower World, also a spirit world and also a place with more than one level. All three of these worlds—upper, middle, and lower—are linked by a central axis, an *axis mundi*.

I'm not going to take any more time talking about the three worlds. If you want to know more, I highly recommend the two books I have mentioned, *The Way of the Shaman*, by Michael Harner, and *The Spirit of Shamanism*, by Roger Walsh.

There are other references you can find on the Internet, but do your due diligence. I know from experience that there are a lot of really strange and misguided people out there who seriously distort and misrepresent the work of the real shaman. *Caveat emptor*, Let the buyer beware.

I could go on for hours about my experiences journeying, but I want to focus on the subject at hand. These are the God issues, remember, and I'm only going to include those *true* journeys I had where I discussed God. I also want to point out that after journeying *at least* once a day, 4 days a week for over a year I became quite good at knowing the difference between journeys of the imagination and "true" journeys to the spirit world. The chief difference is that in the latter the shaman "sees" what is unknown or unexpected. The journeys I'm including for you are about God. And, these contain information I did not already know.

I should also mention that although shamanism is especially active in healing practices I have never thought of myself as a healer. I took a shamanism workshop on healing, but by the middle of the workshop I knew without a doubt I was not meant to be there, and left. My only interest was in cosmology, the Eternal Questions, and that became my focus for as long as I studied and practiced shamanism.

Jesus and Genghis

The journeys I am about to discuss took place in Upper World. That's where a shaman goes to find a teacher living in the spirit world who is willing to answer important questions you may have. If they're living in the spirit world that means they are dead. But they also lived here in Middle World sometime in the past, so they know what Middle World, our material world, is like. When you journey to Upper World you look for anyone who will talk to you. When you see someone, you ask, "Are you my teacher?" If they ignore you, you keep asking others, "Are you my teacher? Are you my teacher?"

At first, I didn't have any preconceived ideas about who my teacher would be, but as soon as he appeared, I knew who I *did not* want it to be, Jesus of Nazareth. It took several journeys over several days and several appearances before I could accept the idea he would be my teacher.

I'm sure there must be about a billion Christians who would give a handsome offering to be able to actually see and talk to Jesus, but I was not one of them. I even told him that, in those very words, apologetically of course. But he stayed with me, and before long . . . Well, you have already heard one of our discussions at the beginning of this issue.

There's more, but first I want to remind you of the continuum of opposites that Heraclitus first conceived and Physicists confirm today. We talked about that earlier. Here's the point I'm making. I had at that time, two teachers in Upper World, and their lives in Middle World were polar opposites. I didn't really realize that fact until years later, and I was surprised. But I guess I shouldn't have been.

After a number of journeys with Jesus, as much as I appreciated his kindnesses, I wanted another teacher. I thought long and hard about it, considering one famous dead person after another. (They have to be dead at least 10 years before you should talk to them.) Anyway, the only one I really wanted to talk to was the man westerners call Genghis Khan, more properly pronounced Jenghis or Chinghus (hereafter, I will refer to him as Jenghis). I went to Upper World to see if he would talk to me and be my teacher.

For those of you are surprised that I would want to talk to such a monster—I mean, why not Adolph Hitler or Joseph Stalin? No. Jenghis was not the monster he was made out to be by the leaders of the western countries of the 12th century. They were deathly afraid of him and his Mongol hordes, the greatest cavalry warriors of the age. But Jenghis was not only the greatest conqueror who ever lived, far greater than Alexander the so-called Great, he was also a remarkably wise, tolerant, and just man.

For example, unlike all, ALL the Christian kings and princes of the time, he did not allow torture. After every conquered city he immediately lowered the taxes of every citizen by 50%, except for doctors and teachers who paid no taxes at all. Religious freedom of worship and tolerance between religions was required. AND, every citizen of his vast empire was *equal* under the law. Unlike the rest of the world of his day, Jenghis Khan's laws were the same for rich and poor.

Jesus of Nazareth

It's 6:15 AM, Thursday, the 1st of June, 2017, Upper World, Level 4: Jesus GRADUALLY appeared. My intention was to ask him something I knew absolutely nothing about: dark matter. (Dark matter (27%) combined with dark energy (68%) is most of the universe, while the visible universe we see is only about 5%. To abbreviate, I will refer to both dark matter and energy as dark matter.)

I thought Jesus might have some trouble discussing a subject even current physicist don't understand, so I told him that if dark matter was an area of knowledge that required another teacher, just for that question, then could he introduce me to that teacher? It seemed to me that an intelligent being as evolved as Jesus presumably is, or was, he would either know the answer or know someone who did.

Jesus said nothing but began walking into the wasteland. I followed after him and said that perhaps the question was related to his answer about God, because where there was life there was light and color and a bounty of organic life forms. He kept walking, and I followed. I thought maybe he was taking me to see another teacher, but he eventually stopped. We stood together silently, then suddenly a little fire appeared on a stone altar in front of him. He rubbed his hands together over the fire as if warming them.

"It's the Spirit World," Jesus said at last.

When he said it, my immediate reaction was, "Yes!" When he said that dark matter was the Spirit World the answer seemed so obvious that it was beyond doubt. These thoughts brought me to a follow up question:

"Then is dark matter the Empty Sky of my first mystical insight?"

"Yes," he said.

I got the impression he was not just IN the dark matter spirit world but that he was in some way made of it. However, on this possibility no words were spoken. Just a thought. Then, I remembered my earlier question about God.

"So, if God is life, then what is dark matter," I asked? "What you showed me with the oasis was a creation of the God of the visible world, the Middle World."

"In the Spirit World the question, what is God? is meaningless," Jesus said.

I'm not sure how, but my mind was guided to the understanding that *everything* was God. EVERYTHING. Following that thought, I remember a saying I learned in graduate school many years before, "If everything is art; nothing is art," but I didn't want to specifically address that in relation to the God.

I began to get restless. I felt I had heard as much as I could manage to process in my mind in one journey. But a couple of other thoughts came up.

"If the Spirit World is dark matter, then is this where we go when we die," I asked?

"Yes," he said.

So, astrophysicists studying the dark matter conundrum are trying to measure and investigate the Spirit World. Certainly most contemporary scientists, the Confessional Atheist types, those for whom science is a religion, would be horrified to even think such a thing.

"Is journeying the only way to gain access to the Spirit World while you're still alive," I asked?

"No, but it's a good one," he said.

I couldn't think of anything more to say, so I thanked him and returned to Middle World.

It's 5:57 AM, Tuesday, the 8th of August, 2017, Upper World, Level 4: I met Jesus without difficulty, and without preamble I asked this question:

"What is the purpose of life?"

"To ask such a question must account for our understanding that life is God," he answered. "We must know that there are many faces of God, figuratively speaking, and life in Middle World is just one of them. So, what is really being asked is what is the purpose of Middle World. The short answer is to know itself. Life is God knowing itself as corporeal existence. Thus, to 'Know thyself' as a human, is to know God from the perspective of a human, because we are all manifestations of God."

I continued drumming and thought about what Jesus said.

"Your explanation seems reasonable but not really original," I said. I wasn't trying to be difficult or critical, I just felt like there must be more. "Is there some deeper insight, something I wouldn't have thought up on my own," I continued?

"Listen to the drum," Jesus said. "Clear your mind and listen to the drum."

I did as I was told and felt myself go into deep meditation. Nothing. Just emptiness. Then, suddenly, the words came to me:

"Life is the heart of God."

My first reaction was, how can that be so? Whereupon my mind was flooded with the answer:

"All of the conditions of life in a dynamic continuum are felt through the heart—joy and sorrow, ecstasy and depression, fear and confidence, and so on. For reasoning creatures, such as humans and others, it begins as a feeling which is then rationalized by the mind. The feeling is felt, then named and categorized, because that's what reasoning creatures as God would do. As for birds and fish and plants, their feelings are experienced directly and responded to directly without the intervening rational process. It's all God."

I was so profoundly grateful for this information that I actually went down on my knees with my forehead on the ground at his feet. He laughed and picked me up, and the drum called me away. I waived as I left. Jesus smiled.

Jenghis Khan

It's 6:16 AM, Wednesday the 12th of July, 2017, Upper World, Level 5: I saw Jenghis as the sage sitting in the garden appearing as he did before. Without preamble I asked my question:

"What is love?"

"Look into my eyes," Jenghis said.

I looked into his eyes and saw the night sky with stars. I didn't understand. I looked again. Same thing. Three times I looked into his eyes, then I got it!

"Life. Love is life in both Spirit World and Middle World."

"Yes," he said.

I pressed further:

"So, how does love become life?"

"Attraction," Jenghis said. "It's a physical law that all things in the universe, organic and inorganic, are bound by a physical law of attraction."

"So, then, this attraction holds everything together similar to the Pneuma of the Stoics?"

"Yes."

"Is that the origin of the saying, 'God is love,' because God is life?"

"Yes."

"Well, that makes sense for Middle World, but what about Spirit World? Is there love in Spirit World," I asked?

"Yes."

At this point, I felt like I didn't quite get it; something was missing.

"Evolution," Jenghis said. "In both Spirit World and Middle World there is evolution, because part of the attracting power of love is attraction to the beauty of perfection. It is both attraction and striving, and because of these aspects of love all things evolve, including God, love, Plato's theory of forms, all of it."

"Without the original attraction of one part to another, the universe would not exist. Thus, love or whatever name you want to give it, was the origins and reason for the creation of the cosmos. That's how it began. That's how God came into being. From random parts, seen and unseen, some accidentally came together. These beginning combinations ran into other random parts and eventually the universe as you know it came into being. Whether these random parts of the universe were anything like we now know is unlikely, because what we see and conceive is highly evolved compared to the beginning."

At this point my mind was so full of information that I knew I must go so I could remember all of it when I wrote it down. I thanked him and left immediately.

It's 6:26 AM, Thursday the 19th of October, 2017, Upper World, Level 5: Jenghis is dressed in the leathers of a warlord. He and I are riding on The Steppes. Previously, I didn't know exactly what I was going to talk about to him until I was in the midst of my climb up to level 5:

"What is beauty. What does it come from and why does it exist," I asked?

"Evolution. Beauty is a force in nature similar to love's attraction. Love creates, recreates, and makes thing work through the great variety of attractions, such as hydrogen's attraction to oxygen that creates water.

"Beauty is an attraction to perfection. And, yes, it is in the 'eye of the beholder.' There's a kind of striving that comes with our attraction to beauty that causes evolution. When a man is attracted to the beauty of a car, a horse, a woman, he strives to be better, to be worthy. Both beauty and love involve a form of attraction. The same is true of the individual self as well as an entire culture. All existence is evolving, and all evolution is striving for perfection. That's the power of beauty as a force in Nature."

"Where does this force come from," I asked? "Why are we attracted to beauty and strive to evolve?" Jenghis and I continue riding together.

"God. That IS God. That is what God is and does. WE are God, and all parts of God evolve from a certain basic structure, foundation, framework that exists at the beginning. And, the Doctrine of Seminal Reasons starts the process of evolution. In short, love is a force of bonding, and beauty is a force of evolution. Both are energized by attraction."

I asked Genghis, "Is this why I tend to be 'unlucky' in making money, but invariably find myself attracted to subjects and ideas that tend towards cosmology and the Spirit World?"

"Yes. The individual's talents and life force can be compared to a chemical element. Some naturally bond, like H₂O, and some are strangers to one another, like H₂O and oil. If a person is water and another person or occupation is oil, then they will not get along. They may occupy the same space, or an adjoining space, but they will be strangers and never really understand each other. That's why the advice of so many sages to follow your heart is correct. Of course, if your heart values reason above all, then following your heart means following your head. Be who you are. Stoic philosophy will help you live with the consequences if you are a square peg stuck in a round hole."

^^^

And this is all I learned about God from journeying. I don't meditate to seek enlightenment these days. And I don't journey regularly or very often. Several times a year there are questions that I have that I cannot answer with my reasoning faculty. There is a temptation to journey for answers as soon as we uncover a new question or problem that comes into our lives, and they certainly will come, but there is a danger of becoming too dependent when we aren't using the reasoning faculty we Stoics treasure.

And I don't journey to learn the outcome of some fascinating matter in the world. For example, I don't journey to find out the end result of Putin's invasion of Ukraine. And I don't journey to find out about the day of my death. I don't follow the stock market or bet on football teams. I am not, nor will I be, a clairvoyant. I'm a Stoic philosopher, and I find EVERY subject is amazing in its own way. That's why I'm telling you what I have investigated and experienced.

I expect the dynamic continuum to be at work among our readers. That is, some of you will like what I have done; and some of you will not. That is in the nature of things. In our next issue, issue 11, we begin a new section focusing on the SOUL. The first part of the issue will be a brief summary of some of the important things we learned about God. Then we will have a brief introduction to all of the soul subjects we will study in the issues that follow.

OUTSIDE:

"The Joy of Silence"

My pomegranate tree leaves are badly yellowing. It could be that it's

- autumn's cold nights,
- getting too much water,
- not getting enough water,
- soil pH is off and needs fertilizer

If it could talk...Well, if it could speak English it could tell me what to do. In fact, if all of my plants could talk, I'm sure I would be a better gardener. On the other hand, maybe this is what I would hear:

"Hey, Gardener, and I use the term loosely, when was the last time you aerated my soil?" Natal Plum was speaking.

"Yeah, aerate over here too, please." All four Giant Bird of Paradise plants are yelling at once.

"You completely forgot to water me last week!" I don't know who said that, but they sounded really annoyed.

"Yeah, and you practically drowned me last week when you left the water running on half the night," That accusation was definitely from Cape Honeysuckle bush #17.

^^^

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"...the practical needs and experiences of religion seem to me sufficiently met by the belief that beyond each man and in a fashion continuous with him there exists a larger power which is friendly to him and to his ideals. All that the facts require is that the power should be both other and larger than our conscious selves. Anything larger will do..."¹

William James (1842-1910)

For the Readers

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<https://stoicmonastery.com>

If you have a question or comment for Brother Erikos go to the Contact page of the EQ website at <https://theEternalQuestions.org> Please state your name, email address, the issue number, and the nature of your question or comment in 200 words or less.

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¹ Excerpt from the "Postscript" of James' book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Any good publisher).