If one purges the Judaism of the Prophets and Christianity as Jesus Christ taught it of all subsequent additions, especially those of the priests, one is left with a teaching which is capable of curing all the social ills of humanity. **Einstein, Albert. The World as I See It**

...what all mystical [authentic] schools have in common is that they have the same purpose. They are built on the basis that we can understand what is divine and we can approach and realize the mystical union. **Oscar Ichazo: The Challenge to Change**

Let’s face it, these hidden laws [of mysticism] are hidden, but they are only hidden by [your] own ignorance. And the word mystical is just being arrived at through people’s ignorance. There’s nothing mystical about it, only that you’re ignorant of what that entails”— Netflix documentary - **George Harrison: Living in the Material World**
ROCKET SCIENTISTS’ GUIDE TO AUTHENTIC SPIRITUALITY

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Version 1.21 Final Draft
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Preface

This book is a book on authentic spirituality. This book attempts to distinguish authentic spirituality from inauthentic spirituality. This book is, further, an attempt to develop standards, guidelines, strategies, and the necessary foundations upon which we may a) decide what spiritual systems and practices count as authentic and which do not, b) research and study human spirituality, and c) build (or perhaps rebuild) authentic spiritual systems.

Obviously, the book starts from the premise that there is something real and authentic in human spiritual belief and practice—otherwise, why even bother with this exercise. We describe what that “real thing” is in this book and elsewhere, but it can be stated simply enough at the outset. Real spirituality, authentic spirituality, is spirituality that connects.¹ Connection is a technical term, even a neurological term,² used to identify the nature of authentic spiritual experience. When we connect, we connect our physical unit,³ and in particular our brain and bodily ego,⁴ to an ocean of higher Consciousness, a “non-local mind” as

¹ https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/Connection.
³ The term “physical unit” is the term I use to refer to the physical body. The physical unit is your physical body, including your brain/mind, or that part of your consciousness that emerges because of the neurology of the physical unit. It sounds antiseptic perhaps, but for me, it properly emphasizes the fact that your physical unit is like an automotive unit (i.e. a car). The physical unit is a thing, a vehicle, that your Consciousness enters into. For more see https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/Physical_Unit.
physician Dossey suggests, an “Old One” of vast intelligence, as Einstein said, or, as I prefer, a Fabric of Consciousness. This Fabric of Consciousness exists independently of the physical unit (the physical body), and indeed independently of the physical universe. It is as simple as that. Authentic spirituality is spirituality that helps us connect to a Fabric of Consciousness that exists independently of physical existence. Connecting to this non-local ocean-like Fabric of Consciousness is the seed of authentic spirituality and core of the human “mystical” experience of connection. This book teaches us to distinguish between those spiritual systems and practices that help us connect to the Fabric and are therefore authentic, and those that do not.

I intend this book for a general audience and for a scientific and science student audience as well. We aim this book at a) those whose spirituality is recently piqued, b) those who are dissatisfied with what traditional religions

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4The bodily ego is your body’s ego, which is the ego associated with your physical brain. Neurologically, it is the Default Mode Network of the human brain. See Mike Sosteric, “The Science of Ascension: A Neurologically Grounded Theory of Mystical/Spiritual Experience” (2017).


6For more, see BOLIGHT

and spirituality can offer, and who are thus looking for something new, and c) those with an interest in developing logical, grounded, and scientific standards and research programs for assessing/developing spiritual systems. This book aims to expand understanding, elevate discourse, and raise the bar about what counts as adequate spiritual dialogue. Hopefully, after completing this book, the reader will feel better prepared to engage in intelligent, sensible, critical, and open spiritual discussions.

Ultimately, the goal of this book is to provide concepts and ideas that help put us, collectively, on a solid spiritual and scientific footing. The goal is to remove blind faith and spiritual authority (i.e., listening to gurus\(^8\) and priests) from the equation, to put aside scientific prejudice, and to make authentic human spirituality the subject of open personal, and rigorous scientific inquiry. Overall, we hope to accomplish this goal by showing, in an accessible way, that spirituality is a real thing, a powerful thing, and something we, as humans and as scientists, really do not know that much about, despite our sometimes pretensions. Given the rapidly deteriorating state of the world, and given some of the hopeful pearls discovered in our two-decade exploration into healing and authentic human spirituality, embracing the reality of human spirituality, and wrapping our personal and scientific heads around it by engaging in open inquiry, courageous exploration, and rigorous scientific analysis, \textbf{is the only thing that is going to save this planet}. Religious traditions are not helping much (if they ever did, really), and science by itself has failed as

\(^8\)The word “guru” is the Sanskrit word for teacher.
well. In fact, if anything, our current science, which is empty of human spirituality, but innovating technologically and medically at staggering and exponential rates, is pushing us faster towards the abyss. If we want to halt the inevitable plunge off the precipice, the only thing left for us to do is to put science and spirituality back together again into some kind of authentic, human whole. We have to do it now and we have to do it fast. Why? Because science and spirituality united is, in my humble opinion, the recipe for global salvation. Failure to immediately unite them will lead to the realization of our impending doom.

A bit overly dramatic? Maybe a couple of years ago, but now, with one million species on the verge of extinction, and human health and long-term survival at stake, only an ignorant or blind (blind in the sense of ignorant beliefs or naivete) person could deny the entire world is in a dire straight. Old ways will lead to mass human suffering and eventual human extinction. Nothing we have done in the past will save us. We need a radical global shift and we need it right now. This shift starts, in our humble view, when, as mothers, fathers, children,

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teachers, workers, rulers, scientists, etc., that we all embrace *authentic* spirituality and start practicing *authentic* spiritual connection. Only by doing that will we be able to heal, awaken, activate, ascend, and transform ourselves and the planet as fast as we need to, and as safely and surely as possible.

Mike Sosteric  and Gina Ratkovic

May 18, 2019
Part One: 
We Need Standards

Greetings and welcome to this Rocket Scientists’ Guide to Authentic Spirituality. In this book, we are going to define authentic spirituality and examine the difference between authentic spiritualities, which are spiritualities grounded in psychological and emotional truths, workable techniques of connection, and the physical and spiritual realities of the cosmos, and those that are not.

Before we get to that, however, and if you will allow me, we would like to ask you, the reader, a simple question and that question is, “Have you ever driven over a bridge?” Have you ever pointed your car at some steel and concrete megalith and used that megalith to get you from point A to point B over some dangerous canyon, chasm, or sea? If so, or even if not, have you ever stopped to consider the engineering, labour, time, and expense that goes into the design and construction of something as wondrous, astounding, and complex like a bridge?

12 Words in bold usually indicate LP terminology which you need to know if you are going to understand the text. The convention is to put the word in bold the first time you encounter it in a specific book, to draw your attention to it, but to leave it in regular font thereafter. Usually, the first time you encounter a term, it is defined in the text or footnote, and a link to the SpiritWiki definition is provided. Sometimes, if the concept is considered “basic at this level,” a simple link to the SpiritWiki definition is provided, like this.

http://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/Connection.
If you have considered this, or even if you have not, you will not be surprised to learn that there are literally millions of hours of direct labour and indirect labour involved in the construction of bridges. The direct labour is obvious. The engineers who design the bridge and calculate material tolerances, the suppliers who supply the materials, and the workers who sometimes risk their lives to get it built, are all examples of direct labour.

Of course, there is more to building a bridge than direct labour; there is also indirect labour. The amount of direct labour involved in bridge building is dwarfed by the amount of indirect labour involved. The engineers who built the bridge, for example, had to go to school to learn their profession. Consider the time and energy that went not only into getting an education but also into building the university and its buildings where the professors teach and the students learn. Consider the millions of hours of research effort, course construction, and teaching time that goes into the learning. Consider all the hours put in by all the people involved and you will see that the indirect contribution to the bridge that keeps you safe is far larger than the direct contribution. In fact, it is incalculable; and this is only to consider the labour and support that goes into making an engineer! When you consider the direct and indirect labour involved in supplying the materials and machinery, in distribution and delivery of said materials, and in training and supporting the workers and engineers who put it all together, sure you will agree that building a bridge is a truly marvellous and mind-boggling tapestry of modern human achievement.

Yay teamwork!
But you know, as marvellous as all that is, it does not even come close to the marvel that, despite all the millions of hours of direct and indirect labour that goes into the construction of the modern bridge, we still manage to get it right most of the time. This is an amazing achievement, especially when you consider all the opportunity for error that exists in all those millions of hours of direct and indirect labour. Total disaster lies within an easy slip of the wrist, a misplaced decimal point, a weak beam, or a faulty bolt. Despite all this opportunity for error, however, we still get it right most of the time. From conception to design, from design to manufacture, from manufacture to construction, we (and by “we” we mean the people involved in all aspects of bridge building) manage to create a bridge that not only gets the job done, but that we can all trust will remain safe and secure for a very long time. This is a miraculous achievement. To bring all that expertise together and build something as wonderful as a safe bridge is a truly spectacular accomplishment, and one that we do not stop and appreciate nearly enough. We take it for granted, but we should not. It is an amazing achievement and we should honour that achievement whenever we can.

Of course, once we do stop and appreciate the achievement, questions are immediately raised, and one of the most important questions is, how the heck is something as complicated and grand as a bridge accomplished? How do we pull all that diverse labour and expertise together to create a safe bridge? If you ask me, it all comes down to expectation. We, and by “we” we mean the people who use the bridges, have an expectation that the people who teach the engineers and train the workers,
and the people who build the bridges and make them safe, know what they are doing and take their job seriously enough to get everything absolutely right. We expect them to do it, and they do.

It is true, is it not? We the people who drive our cars over the bridges do not take a casual attitude toward the safety of our bridges because when our lives are involved, there is no margin for error. We don’t say, “build that bridge and we’ll pray that it works.” We say, “Build that bridge and make it safe,” period. Furthermore, if someone does not build a safe bridge, if an engineer builds a bridge and it collapses, we do not take it lying down. We research, investigate, and we figure out why. We hold ourselves accountable and we do everything in our power to make sure it does not happen again. We get better over time, and the bridges we build do as well. It is a magnificent manifestation of human potential and a testament to the power of expectation. From kindergarten to the most advanced PhD degrees, from working in the garden to building bridges that millions pass over, all of our marvellous modern success comes down to our increasingly high expectations.

This is a good thing. It makes sense to have high expectations, especially when it comes to the lives of our children and families. When it comes to our lives, we would neither expect nor allow a careless attitude of “anything-goes.” We do not say, “Just build the bridge however you want, and we will pray it works out in the end.” When it comes to building bridges, we demand the truth and nothing but, and nothing else will do. When it comes to bridges, we demand the engineers, administrators, and
construction workers get it right *all the time*. In this, we have no tolerance for error. When it comes to building bridges (and indeed, when it comes to many other areas of our lives), we know how to lay expectations and we know how to see these expectations through to successful manifestation. There is no profound, esoteric, or Earth-shattering wisdom here. We do not fret about it; we do not moralize about it; we lay down expectations and we get the job done.

**Spiritual Expectations**

Unfortunately, although we have no problem assigning standards and expectations to our engineers and bridge builders, we do not seem to have the same high expectations for our priests, spiritual gurus, and religious institutions. Look around you. Certain religious institutions continue to exist despite the fact that they breed paedophilic predators!\(^\text{13}\) Look at those who claim to don the *Mantle of Spiritual Authority*.\(^\text{14}\) Look at the people who don the *Mantle of Spiritual Authority*.\(^\text{14}\)

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\(^{14}\)When I say that someone is donning the Mantle of Spiritual Authority, I am saying that this person is presuming to speak with knowledge and authority on spiritual topics. I am donning the mantle of spiritual authority when I write this book because I am presuming that I know enough about human spirituality that I can talk with authority about it.

Donning the mantle of spiritual authority is what your typical priest does when he puts on his colourful robes before Sunday mass. He is putting on a symbol that signals to his congregation that he is the expert and that they should listen to him. Similarly, telling people you are channelling the “Great White Brotherhood, assuming some
to know God, Spirit, and Consciousness. What do you see? When we look, we see some authentic purveyors of truth and connection, but we also see a hodgepodge of more or less confused, more or less authentic, more or less deceptive, and more or less predatorial, priests, prophets (or is that profits?), gurus, ideologues, existential depressives, spiritual children, creeps, snake-oil salesmen, and ego junkies who have no problem saying just about anything they want, no matter how outrageous it may be, just to get your attention, adoration, and money.

If you ask me, it is bloody ridiculous.

From the bizarre and inflated ego of Osho, with his misuse of **Connection Supplements**, specifically nitrous spiritual sounding name (like Das Ram), telling the world you are the reincarnation of Edgar Cayce, telling people you are an “old soul,” creating a website with a lot of religious symbols, sitting in a lotus position and prognosticating about consciousness, etc., are all things you can do to tell the world you are a spiritual authority. When you do these things, you are donning the mantle of spiritual authority. You should understand, “donning the mantle” does not necessarily mean you deserve it. Anybody can change their name to something mystical sounding, alter the sound of their voice, modify their use of language, and claim to channel the Pleiadian collective, or whatever. They may be valid and authentic, but then again, they may not. Having a single spiritual experience or two, and immediately donning the mantle of spiritual authority, does not automatically make them real and authentic. If you are going to be a wise consumer of spiritual information, whenever you see someone “don the mantle,” be on your guard. Do not allow yourself to be led astray or bamboozled. Do not be shy. Be discerning. Ask the tough questions.

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15 A Connection Supplement is a dietary supplement (like Cannabis, Psilocybin, Peyote) or substance (like DMT, LSD, Ketamine, MDMA, etc.) that forces a stronger Connection to Consciousness. Scholars have recognized the “spiritual” importance of connection.


18As regards the Catholic Church, it boggles the mind that despite revelation after revelation that suggests that the cloistered, hierarchical, and secretive structures of organized Catholic religion provide the perfect breeding grounds for greed, paedophilia, and abuse, that the churches of this Earth still stand. What exactly is going through the minds of people, I wonder, when they hear the latest allegations, yet still drive to their church and hand over their dollars to an institution that rapes children and then covers it up. It is going to be a joyful day when the right to exist is taken from all those institutions that support, in one way or another, the oppression, exploitation, rape, and abuse of life.

allegedly perpetrated by PhD anthropologist Carlos Castenada,\textsuperscript{20} to schizophrenic and subtly racist talk of shape-shifting lizards amongst us,\textsuperscript{21} they talk and we listen, without much expectation or discernment at all. We let these people, these “spiritual authorities,” say (and often do) just about anything they want. Qualifications are apparently quite low; a single mystical experience or two seems to be all that is required,\textsuperscript{22} and suddenly you are on Oprah, asked to speak at a TED Talk, or discussing the “power of now.” We do not seem to think it matters who teaches us these things, and even if we do try to hold our spiritual authorities to higher standards and expectations, we do not seem to have any globally acceptable criteria by which we can assess the truth, value, safety, or even professionalism of their spiritual statements.

The irony is deep. We say, “Build us a bridge,” and we demand the best. But we let just about anybody, regardless of education, training, background, and mental health tell us nonsense when it comes to religion and spirituality! When it comes to religion and spirituality, we lack even basic standards and expectations, and that is a bad thing because building a bridge to pure Consciousness,\textsuperscript{23} G-d,


\textsuperscript{22}And sometimes, not even that!

Allah, Brahman, non-local Mind, or whatever you want to call it, is, if you ask me, much, much more important than building a bridge across water. Therefore, when it comes to building spiritual bridges, connection bridges if you like, our expectations should be just as high, preferably even higher.

When it comes to not having high expectations for our spiritual bridges, and for sometimes being gullible and easily led astray, we would not want to cast diffuse blame. When it comes to building spiritual bridges, the primary problem is not that we cannot have, nor is it that we do not want, high expectations. Who does not want to answer all the big questions? Who does not want to connect with the “higher” realities of this cosmos? Who does not want to self actualize their full human and spiritual potential? Who does not want a safe and effective spiritual bridge? The answer is, nobody. The problem is not that we do not want or cannot have high expectations. The problem is we do not know what appropriate expectations might look like.

**Outcome Measures**

Our lack of expectations is a problem, but we can easily change that because coming up with appropriate spiritual expectations is not that hard, once you put your mind to it. When it comes to a physical bridge over an expanse of water, we know exactly what to expect. We know what the bridge is supposed to do (i.e., get us safely across some chasm) and we can easily tag a successful

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24Dossey, “Nonlocal Mind: A (Fairly) Brief History of the Term.”

25BOL
outcome. (i.e., to cross the bridge safely). When it comes to building a bridge over water, we might say that we have clearly specified outcome measures\textsuperscript{26} that tell us exactly what to expect. We can define outcome measures as tests of success that we all agree on.

Outcome measures are easy to wrap your head around. We can all agree that if a bridge gets us safely from point A to point B, the outcome is successful. Thus, we can all agree that an important outcome measure for built bridges is safe passage. We can also agree that in addition to a bridge not collapsing, a bridge should be aesthetically pleasing. It should look pretty and add to its surrounding environment. A bridge should not exist as a blight on the landscape. A pleasing aesthetic is thus an outcome measure for building bridges.

You can apply outcome measures to any human endeavour from sex to baking. If the sex was good and both partners had a powerful orgasm, then you have a successful outcome. If the chocolate cake you baked is yummy and everybody gobbles it up, then you have a successful outcome. There is no rocket science to coming up with outcome measures. Whatever you feel, whatever we feel, is important becomes an outcome measure. Do you care if your cake looks good? Then that is an outcome measure. Do you think it is important for bridges not to fall down in an earthquake? Then that is an outcome measure. Outcome measures are whatever you (whatever we) decide to define as a criteria of success.

\textsuperscript{26}https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/index.php/Outcome_Measure
Understand, outcome measures are important. Without outcome measures, we cannot have expectations and without expectations, we cannot have safe bridges, or anything nice really. Having outcome measures for a specific human endeavour allows us to have high expectations. Having high expectations, in turn, drives us to create professional and sophisticated products, like safe bridges, or authentic spiritualities.

I suppose this all seems sensible enough. We all know what outcome measures are (even if we have never named them as such), and we all embrace these measures as signs of quality work. Nobody would argue that we should not look to strong bridge foundations or yummy cake as appropriate outcome measures. It should be the same for religion and human spirituality. As a species, when it comes to human spirituality and connection, we should be able to say we have high spiritual standards, high expectations, and meaningful outcome measures.

Unfortunately, we cannot say that. When it comes to religion and spiritual teachings, we do not embrace outcome measures and high standards with the same openness and clarity as we do the outcome measures of bridge building. Who amongst you can specify with certainty and confidence what a successful spiritual experience is? Who can show measures of good religion versus bad religion? The truth is, when it comes to our religions and spiritualities, we do not have outcome measures at all. It is really an anything goes affair.

When it comes to spirituality, no matter who we are, we have a rather uninformed, uncritical attitude. We either accept everything on faith, or reject everything on science.
Either we believe, in which case we tend not to think too critically about our spiritual choices, or we do not believe, in which case we reject without much thought. Scholars also, for the most part, refuse to develop outcomes measures and assess issues pertaining to spirituality. Even those who do take a serious and rigorous interest in human spirituality tend to remain spiritually agnostic. On this planet, no scholar or scientist says, “This is a good religion” or “This is a bad religion.” On this planet, no scholar says, “This religion meets expectations” or “This religion does not.” On this planet, no scholar sets out expectations or outcome measures when it comes to religion and spirituality,27 though it seems like scholars, at least, should try. But they don’t. In fact, for reasons we will look at next, many people, even spiritual ones, will actively resist the setting of expectations and the invocation of outcome measures when it comes to spirituality. Why do people

27 Well, that is not quite true. Some people do say and some people do expect. Some people do say, “Believe this, don’t believe that”, but their statements usually come with threats like “you’ll burn in hell if you don’t” or “God won’t love you.” Threats are, however, not the same as having outcome measures. These people are not thinking and analyzing. They are not being critical and aware. They are not saying, “Believe this but don’t believe that because of these good reasons.” They are saying “Believe this or else!” People who do this have expectations, but they do not attach those expectations to analysis or outcome measures, they attach them to threats and control. People who say “believe this or else” are trying to control how you think by scaring you into absorbing the ideas/archetypes they offer. Sadly, and despite much protestation over the years, this sort of thing still goes on. My advice to you is, do not waste your time. You can safely tune out and ignore anybody who uses threats or fear in an argument for or against a spirituality or religion.
resist setting outcome measures? There are a few reasons for that.

**It is Risky**

The first reason that we tend to avoid outcome measures when it comes to human spirituality is the fact that it is risky to try and discuss and develop them, and we are often afraid to do so. Talking about religion and spirituality can be a challenge, even dangerous, depending on where you live in the world. People can have strong opinions about things and they can respond aggressively, even violently, to open or critical discussion and challenge. I’ve personally been called a “space cadet” and not a “serious” scholar just for broaching discussion of human spirituality, and I’m not the only scholar to face this. Abraham Maslow and William James, both psychologists interested in mystical experience, have reported “collegial” resistance and censure. And verbal abuse is not the only assault we can experience. Over the course of our human history, some people have taken it upon themselves to claim that they are the only ones who have the truth. They say, “Only this God is the right God,” “Only this way is the right way,” or “Only this path is the right path.” Over the centuries, these people have sometimes backed up their claims to exclusive truth with various forms of religious violence. As a result, many people have suffered and died horrific deaths over the centuries at the hands of people imposing their particular standards and beliefs on others.

Whether it is drama at home or at church, professional ridicule or censure, or actual physical violence
and death, these negative experiences of shaming and violence make people skittish about religious claims to truth, and fearful about discussing things too deeply, or asserting claims and expectations. Out of fear for our lives, our jobs, or just because we want to avoid drama, violence, and the open disrespect from others, we stay away from spiritual and religious discussions. We avoid talking about it and since we are not talking about it, we avoid developing outcome measures.

Who can blame people for not wanting to talk about it too much? Who can blame people for not wanting to even broach the topic of spiritual standards and outcome measures? In the context of a world hostile to open discussions of human spirituality, it just makes sense to avoid standards, shy away from big claims, stay away from expectations of truth, and throw up our hands and say, “Believe whatever you want.” It is simply safer this way.

**Nomenclature Confusion**

Fear of reactionary, superstitious, and closed-minded backlash is not the only reason we fail to develop spiritual expectations and standards. The second reason why we seem to lack common and accepted standards for authentic spirituality is that coming up with the standards is hard to do because of the **nomenclature confusion**²⁸ that exists.

Coming up with common standards and outcome measures is easy with bridge building. If the bridge does not fall down, you are set. However, with spirituality, it is not so easy. Ask anybody the question “what works” or

²⁸https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/Nomenclature_Confusion

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“what is a positive outcome for spirituality” and you will get any number of different answers depending on the person’s background and spiritual experience. Some might say that authentic spirituality “saves the soul.” Others might say that authentic spirituality gets you into heaven. Still, others might suggest it is all about a life of service, or that authentic spirituality makes you wise, or gives you Cosmic Consciousness. Some even claim non-attachment, attainment of nirvana, satori, or “living in the now” as a successful spiritual outcome. I keep a running tab of all the different types of connection outcomes mentioned by mystics and scholars on a page entitled “Connection Outcomes” and that list, which as of this writing contains dozens of different outcomes, and keeps growing, is a literal Tower of Babel, with absolutely no consistency at all.

So, which is it? Which outcome measures should we pick to set our expectations? Which outcome measures define authentic spirituality? All of them? One of them? Some of them? You can see the problem. Unlike bridge building where everybody can agree on the outcome measures (if it does not collapse, it is a good bridge), with spirituality it is hard to come up with common standards because it is a confused and confusing hodgepodge. With no commonly accepted outcome measures, with the absence of analytic precision, and with a reluctance to openly discuss, we find it hard to suggest what is real and what is not, or evaluate what works and what does not. Yet, if we are going to evaluate spirituality and decide what is

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29 http://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/Connection_Outcome
authentic or not, if we are going to build a safe connection bridge, we need to figure this out.

I should note, we are not the first ones to note this nomenclature confusion. It has been an ongoing problem for a very long time. Evelyn Underhill, a well-known and respected commentator on connection experience (which she, of course, called “mystical experience”), writes about the confusion we face when we inquire about connection experience, and the fact that despite many “lectures, sermons, tea-parties, and talks,” we still don’t know what it is:

...the genuine inquirer will find before long a number of self-appointed apostles who are eager to answer his question in many strange and inconsistent ways, calculated to increase rather than resolve the obscurity of his mind. He will learn that mysticism is a philosophy, an illusion, a kind of religion, a disease; that it means having visions, performing conjuring tricks, leading an idle, dreamy, and selfish life, neglecting one’s business, wallowing in vague spiritual emotions, and being “in tune with the infinite.” He will discover that it emancipates him from all dogmas--sometimes from all morality--and at the same time that it is very superstitious. One expert tells him that it is simply “Catholic piety,” another that Walt Whitman was a
typical mystic; a third assures him that all mysticism comes from the East, and supports his statement by an appeal to the mango trick. At the end of a prolonged course of lectures, sermons, tea-parties, and talks with earnest persons, the inquirer is still heard saying--too often in tones of exasperation--“What is mysticism?”

Underhill was writing a hundred years ago, but the confusion she points to still persists. This confusion makes it hard to think clearly, hard to talk in a sensible way about the phenomenon, hard to develop reasonable outcome measures, and hard to move forward.

Perhaps it sounds unreasonable or even pretentious to suggest that we are surrounded by spiritual confusion, but consider this example. Many people might agree with the statement that authentic religions lead to enlightenment. This seems reasonable, even clear. Authentic spirituality leads to enlightenment. Everybody can agree with that. However, even when there is apparent agreement, confusion reigns. When we ask the question, “What is enlightenment?” nobody seems to really know. Recently, I read a book edited by a well-known researcher in the field entitled “What is enlightenment?” When I search for the phrase “What is enlightenment,” the answers I find are a mishmash of

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sometimes contradictory, sometimes senseless, sometimes ridiculous quotes. When I survey quotes from the book, I find that “enlightenment is for everyone,” and that “enlightenment is the core truth of them all.” One author says that enlightenment is “the essence of life—the goal of all growth, development, evolution. It is the discovery of what we ultimately are...” and the “core truth of all sacred traditions.” Another says enlightenment is “the realization of the truth of Being.” It is “understanding the perfect poise of begin-amid-becoming” and “comprehending the unity of all dualities.” Still another author says enlightenment is “any experience of expanding our consciousness beyond its present limits.” It is, says one, “realization we have no limits at all.” Another says it is “never casting anyone out of your heart.”

Ironically, despite all the words devoted to defining enlightenment in this book on enlightenment, another pundit says we should deny the possibility of definition, saying that “Enlightenment is ineffable—beyond words, images and concepts” and that enlightenment “cannot be grasped by the intellect, logic, analysis, or aspect of our egoic-rational mental being....” Another defines enlightenment as a psychological process, saying enlightenment is “simply surrendering yourself to what is already the case.” But it is also the opposite of surrender, which is “liberation freedom” from the world of delusions, as it is. Just read the the following quotes gleaned from one single book and you’ll see just how confused people really are.

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32White.
“Enlightenment is none other than your everyday mind, but realized as such.”

“Enlightenment is instant perception of truth.”

“Enlightenment is...waking up from the dream of conventional life...”

“Enlightenment is an expression of...ecstatic release from all boundaries of consciousness...”

Enlightenment is “true innocence.”

Enlightenment is “a process of flowering...”

Enlightenment is “...various seasonal changes.”

Enlightenment is “Riding the Ox Home.”

Enlightenment is “to be restored to the Divine humor...”

Enlightenment is “transcendental.”

Enlightenment is “an endless process.”

In the same book, Swami Sivananda Radha says “We can see that to *discuss* enlightenment is difficult,” and wow, is he correct about that. You can understand why skeptics get so angry and hostile with people who talk about this stuff. A lot of people are talking, but none of them seem to know what it is they are talking about. And it is not just academics who struggle with this area. I used to hang out
on some online spiritual forums and there used to be a
thread on the forums asking the question “What is
enlightenment?” I used to watch people try to answer the
question and let me tell you, it was quite the show.
Everything from trite and meaningless aphorisms to
paragraphs and paragraphs of verbiage were offered up as
answers. There were almost as many answers to the
question as there were people doing the answering. People
were talking, but nobody was communicating, and if they
were communicating, the stuff they were communicating
had nothing to do with authentic spirituality. What was
most frustrating about the whole thing was that some
people on the forum defended the confusion and disarray
as “healthy debate.” However, I did not see healthy debate
and discussion. I saw argumentative confusion and
disjointed disarray. To say that confusion and disarray is a
sign of healthy discourse is patently absurd. As a teacher, if
none of my students can agree on a simple definition, like
“What is Religion,” and if they all end up arguing and
disagreeing about simple and basic concepts, I am not
doing my job, and they are not learning anything. There
needs to be consistency and general agreement of
definitions. Otherwise, discussion cannot progress.

Let us be clear. Semantic and lexical confusion, and
the inability to agree on basic definitions is not a sign of
healthy debate or a mature field of study, it is a sign of
unhealthy confusion. Obviously, in a field characterized by
nomenclature confusion, coming up with outcome
measures can be a difficult challenge, because you cannot
get past the din of the babbling pundit princes and
princesses.
Anti-standards

So far, we have noted that fear and anxiety and a complicated and confused view of spirituality prevents people from looking at spirituality and developing authentic standards and outcome measures. A third reason that we don’t see much progress here is that sometimes we adopt anti-standards. Anti-standards are standards that, at first glance, look like they might offer you valid outcomes measures, but that actually divert and refocus your attention in a way that prevents you from applying critical thought to human spirituality. Anti-standards look good on the surface and may be accepted by billions of people on Earth, but underneath they are diversionary and rotten to the core. When we adopt anti-standards, we are fooled into thinking we have actual standards and measures, even when we do not. If we already believe we have authentic standards, we are not motivated to look any further.

One type of anti-standard that religions, gurus, and priests use is what we might call Death Tests.\textsuperscript{33} Death tests are outcome measures that manifest only after you are dead. For example, many religions will tell you that their religion works because it gets you into heaven or gets you a higher birth in your next life. This death test pushes the outcome measure into the next life and says “believe me because I promise if you do, when you die, you will see.” This might seem like a valid outcome measure, especially if you grew up in a religion promising heaven, nirvana, release, or whatever, but it is not because in reality, there is no way to evaluate its truth. It is like saying you will know a

\footnote{https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/index.php/Death_Tests}
doctor is helping you after you die of the disease s/he is trying to cure. If this sounds absurd, it is because it is. It makes absolutely no sense at all.

Death tests are a particularly pernicious problem, especially amongst traditional spiritualities. Adopting a death test prevents you from seeing and seeking a real outcome measure because it makes you think you have a valid test, even when you do not. If you focus on the next life, you will not care how bad your life is in the “here and now,” or how horrible and ineffective the spiritual teachings you follow really are. If you are focused on the next life, your current life could be a total disaster, and your current beliefs totally absurd, and you would accept it with gratitude and a smile, all the while having faith that, after you die, things will get better.

Death tests are not the only anti-standards humans adopt. In addition to death tests that divert your attention from developing real-world outcome measures, we also have what we might call Life Tests. Like death tests, life tests are contrived tests of authenticity that divert your attention from inauthentic spiritual practices by focusing your attention elsewhere, in this case, directly back on you. Life tests are what happens when a religion, priest, guru, or prophet says that life is a series of tests and that you have to accept the tests so you can grow, graduate, and move on. The general message should be familiar to everyone. If things happen (bad or good), if you get cancer, if you get run over by a car, if your family breaks up, if you are confused, if you are filled with existential angst, if you are

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depressed, if you are injured, if you die, it is not a problem, it is a test, and probably part of God’s plan as well. Instead of complaining, instead of using outcome measures to assess your spirituality, your life, etc., you accept the failure and look for the unseen lessons and hidden silver lining.

An example will help make the notion of a life test, and the problems associated with it, clear. Imagine that a bridge collapses. Imagine that thousands die in the collapse. Now imagine that instead of blaming the contractor, the engineer, or the city (maybe for failing maintenance), we “look for the silver lining” and “find the lesson” in it all. It was not because the bridge builder was incompetent, or the materials were faulty, or the design poorly conceived, it was because “God works in mysterious ways”, life is a “test”, we are here to learn. What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger. It was God who “called” the victims home. It is God’s will that is on display in the disaster. Don’t question. Don’t evaluate. Just accept.

Hopefully, you can see the problem. Life tests make all events in life, even the very bad ones, successful outcome measures. A life test can even, perversely, make a disastrous bridge collapse a positive affirmation of the value of the bridge, because the collapsing bridge taught you a lesson. A life test can even make existential depression a thing of value because with a life test, it is all one big cosmic lesson. If you have experienced some form of violence, oppression, or injustice, don’t worry, be happy because this is God’s will; this is Allah’s plan. If everything is a test or a lesson for you, then anything, even death, can count as a positive outcome measure. A religion or spirituality does not have to make you happy, clear your depression, make you
peaceful, make you healthier, deal with injustice, fight against oppression, or get you connected. Using a life test, we can construe even an incompetent engineering firm or a corrupt and violent religion or spiritual paradigm as a part of God’s Divine life-testing plan.

Of course, life tests are just plain crazy. Any engineering firm that explains the failure of their bridge as an “act of God” or says that the pain and suffering of the victims is a “life lesson” is avoiding responsibility by contriving positive benefit from an otherwise disastrous outcome. Everybody is going to see that as absurd. The same is true of other areas of human endeavour as well. If somebody builds a house, we do not expect that house to fall down because of poor construction, and if it does we do not write it off as part of God’s plan. We hold the builder accountable and develop better building codes.

Unfortunately, even though we can see that life tests are absurd when it comes to bridges, buildings, and other areas of endeavour, we often do not see how absurd they are when it comes to assessing our spirituality. When it comes to religion and spirituality, we accept life tests as outcome measures of authentic spirituality without question. When something bad happens to us, we immediately see it as confirmation of whatever spiritual tradition we happen to be a part of. Hindus see karma, Catholics see “God’s plan,” and so on. In all cases, making life lessons an outcome measure is a diversion. Life tests, like death tests, are anti-standards. If you adopt them, you are diverted from developing real ones.

At this point, it shouldn’t be too difficult to see the absurdity of life tests and death tests as outcome measures
for our human spirituality. Indeed, at this point, life tests and death tests should look like obvious diversions. But, if that is true, if it is so obvious, a question becomes, why haven’t we seen it before? The answer is simple. We do not see the absurdity of life tests and death tests because we learn these ideas as children. As children, we are emotionally and intellectually malleable, and we trust the adults in our life. As children, we absorb like sponges. As children, we’ll believe anything we are told. If you tell a child the sky is blue because it contains water behind a glass dome, the child will believe it. It is only later, as adolescents and young adults, that we develop the capacity to question and disbelieve. The truth is, if you start early enough, you can teach children all sorts of political, economic, and spiritual nonsense.

Having said all this, note that this shouldn’t be considered a slam against parents and teachers, Hollywood writers, producers, actors, or even priests or gurus. Just like you, just like me, they absorbed the stories and lies in childhood when they couldn’t think for themselves. They just aped what they learned in the past, without consideration or the skills to critically analyze. The point here isn’t to blame any one person; the point is to simply say, life-tests and death-tests don’t provide a good way to evaluate human spirituality. If we want to develop outcome measures and standards for authentic spirituality, we have to pry open the box of our indoctrination and move beyond the spiritual tropes of childhood.
Summary

To summarize, in this chapter, we have looked at spiritual standards, outcome measures, and some of the reasons why we do not have them. As we have attempted to make clear, not having standards and outcome measures is a problem. Just like we need outcome measures to ensure bridge building safety, when it comes to human spirituality, we need outcome measures to make sure that what we’re dealing with works. Having absolutely no standards and no way to evaluate the truth or authenticity of the path you are on or the phenomenon you are studying is about as sensible as driving on a bridge that was cobbled together by hacks. Maybe you’ll get to your destination, but more than likely, you won’t. If you want to make progress forward, scientifically, spiritually, or whatever, it just makes sense to include standards and expectations when exploring, thinking, debating the subject of spirituality. You do not trust your safety needs to just any bridge-building chump. You want a qualified engineer who knows how to build a safe bridge. Likewise, you should not trust your mind and body to just any spiritual authority or spiritual system. You should have the same high standards for your priests, prophets, and gurus as you do for your bridge builders, doctors, and other professionals.

The million-dollar question now is, how do you come up with high standards and expectations? How, when it comes to human religion and human spirituality, do you discern truth from fiction, or reality from fantasy? How do you come up with outcome measures? In other words, how
do you winnow the spiritual wheat from the proverbial chaff?

I have to admit, it is a challenge. However, meeting the challenge and answering that question is not as difficult as you might at first think. The first step towards coming up with standards and outcome measures is to acknowledge that we need to have standards and outcome measures, even in the realm of religion and spirituality. At this point we have taken that first step. The second step towards developing spiritual standards and outcome measures is to distinguish between authentic spirituality and inauthentic spirituality. Finally, the third step towards developing outcome measures and standards is to actually set some out for discussion.

In the next chapter, we take the second and third step forward by a) defining what an authentic spirituality is and b) attempting to set out some outcome measures which can be used to assess the authenticity of a particular belief system. Before stepping forward, let us be clear, what follows next are discussion steps. We do not suggest that the definition of authentic spirituality we provide, or the outcomes measure we suggest we use to evaluate the spiritual authenticity of traditions and practices, are final in any way. They are intended to clarify understanding and contribute discussion, but they are only steps along the way, not the final destination. We should never look back at words, no matter who said them or what anybody says about their nature, sacred or not, as if they are eternally relevant. How can they be? What someone said centuries or even years ago was said in a lived context, just as we are saying now is a product of our lived context. No matter
how “wise” words from the past may appear, life is organic, and so is human knowledge. If you are stuck in the past and relying on ossified concepts and ideas, you will never be able to understand, much less enter, into the future. Always forward, never back.
Part Two: What is Authentic Spirituality?

As noted in the last chapter, we need to develop spiritual standards and outcome measures to help us determine the difference between spirituality that is authentic and spirituality that is not. As noted, the first step towards developing standards of professional spirituality is to recognize that we need them and, if necessary, overcome our anxieties, fears, confusions, and emotional issues long enough so we can begin to develop the necessary standards. The second step is to understand that, just like there is a difference between a good bridge and a bad bridge, there is also a difference between good spirituality and bad spirituality. As you may have gathered, we call good spirituality **authentic spirituality** and bad spirituality inauthentic spirituality. The question now becomes, what is authentic spirituality?

In our view, at root, authentic spirituality is spirituality that connects you. What does authentic spirituality connect you to? We can start by saying that authentic spirituality connects you to “something more” than your normal, daily consciousness and experience. We can say this because, as mystics, gurus, monks, nuns, and even scholars the world over note, the experience of connection is always felt and conveyed as “something more” than ordinary experience. As Naulty and Naulty note, “there [is] something wonderful and powerful about them [connection experiences] which places them
beyond ordinary experience.” We certainly agree with this. Connection experiences are always “more than” my normal, day-to-day consciousness. If you asked this simple question, everybody who has made a “connection” will agree that it felt like “something more,” sometimes something lots more, than their normal everyday self and experience. Saying authentic spirituality helps us connect with “something more” has strong phenomenological validity, so that is what we will say. Authentic spirituality is spirituality that connects you with “something more.”

If you accept, at this early stage, that authentic spirituality connects you to “something more,” the next question becomes, what is this “something more” that authentic spirituality connects you to? Personally, I would say that the “something more” that authentic spirituality connects you to is the Fabric of Consciousness that exists independently of the physical universe, but you can call it whatever you want. Some examples you can find in the literature are Buddha Mind, non-local Mind, Mind at Large, Wakan Tanka, Oversoul, Ineffable Light, higher

37Dossey, “Nonlocal Mind: A (Fairly) Brief History of the Term.”
Self, God, and so on. However you name and conceptualize it, the experience of it is the same. It is always felt and experienced as connection to something more.

If you are uncomfortable with this talk of Oversouls, Buddha Minds, and Fabrics of Consciousness, you can keep it in the material realm by conceptualizing the “something more” that we connect to biologically, as Abraham Maslow did, or neurologically, as is common these days. In the case of neurology, we are connecting to some aspect of our brain’s functionality not normally active during normal consciousness. Whether you say it is connection to Consciousness or connection to deeper aspects of your neurological self doesn’t matter. Materialist or Deist, we can all agree that the connection experience is a connection to something more. To answer the question

42 Yen, Chan and Enlightenment.
“what is authentic spirituality” then, we can say that authentic spirituality is spirituality that teaches us how to connect to something more.

If you accept the fact that authentic spirituality is about connection to “something more,” the question now becomes, how can you tell if a spirituality is authentic or not? How can you tell if a spirituality connects you to something more?

Connection Experiences

To make a long argument short, we can tell if a spirituality is authentic if it leads to two things, connection experiences and connection outcomes. Let us look at each of these in turn, starting with connection experience.

What is a connection experience? Quite simply, a connection experience is the phenomenological experience of connection to “something more” than your normal daily consciousness. When an individual makes a connection, they always have an experience that provides evidence a connection occurs. It is like sticking your finger into a light socket. The shock that you get from connecting with the electrical grid is the connection experience that proves to you that you have made a connection. If you do not get a shock, no connection has been made. Similarly, if you have made a connection to “something more,” that is, if you have made a connection to the Fabric of Consciousness, you’ll probably get a shock, and you’ll certainly feel like you have connected with something more.

The term “connection experience” is a catch-all term, and there are lots of different types of connection
experiences recorded in the scholarly and spiritual literature of this planet. People have flow experiences which are experiences where one loses oneself in an activity45 There are also unity experiences where one feels connected to all life, and even the entire universe46 Psychologists Abraham Maslow studied peak experiences47 which were experiences where one connects with and actualizes one’s inner Self. We also find healing experiences where one experiences sudden, even miraculous, psychological and emotional healing48 and even expansive experiences of cosmic consciousness.49 All of these various connection experiences are characterized by the feeling that we have connected to “something more,” and so if an authentic spirituality or authentic spiritual practice is leading you or someone you know to have these sorts of


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experiences, then that is one line of evidence that the spirituality is, in fact, authentic.

**Connection Outcomes**

In addition to the empirically verifiable phenomenological experience of connection to “something more,” we can also tell a spirituality is authentic if connection leads to **connection outcomes**. Connection outcomes are real and verifiable changes that occur in an individual as a consequence of their connection experience(s). Many connection outcomes are, in fact, identified in the spiritual and scientific literature and range in intensity and impact from mild expansion of meaning and insight through enhanced intellectual power (i.e., you get smarter after you have an experience), all the way up to mind-blowing epiphanies, revelations, and blistering religious ecstasy. There are even some rather radical suggestions of the development of special powers, like telepathy,

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awareness of past lives, remote viewing, precognition, and so on. The ability to teleport has even been suggested, as for example this extract from the *Book of the Great Decease* which suggests that the Buddha, an individual whom we may presume achieved consistent and persistent connection, was able to teleport his body at will.

But the Blessed One went on to the river. And at that time the river Ganges was brimful and overflowing; and wishing to cross to the opposite bank, some began to seek for boats, some for rafts of wood, while some made rafts of basket-work. Then the Blessed One as instantaneously as a strong man would stretch forth his arm, or draw it back again when he had stretched it forth, vanished from this side of the river, and stood on the further bank with the company of the brethren.

Many of the connection outcomes are well documented in the scholarly literature, but some of the identified outcomes, like walking on water, or the purported ability of the Buddha to teleport, strain credulity.

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Here we will concern ourselves only with scientifically documented connection outcomes.

Identifying connection experiences and connection outcomes is a good way to assess the presence of connection and the presence of authentic spiritual practices. If a spiritual practice or tradition leads to connection experiences and connection outcomes, it is reasonable to suggest it may be an authentic practice.

To say that authentic spirituality is spirituality that leads to connection experience and connection outcomes seems sensible and logical enough. However, a challenge does exist in the sheer number and variety of connection experiences and connection outcomes. The issue, besides the nomenclature confusion already noted, is that not all the outcomes occur with each connection experience. Some people have healing experiences, some don’t. Some have peak experiences, others don’t. Some have Christian style conversion experiences, others, not so much. Some experience enlightenment, others emphasize unity. No individual experiences all types of connection experiences or manifests all types of connection outcomes, at least in the same event. Having a connection experience is like walking into the Louvre in Paris and trying to take it all in, in an instant. There’s just way too much to see.

In the interests of parsimony, we are going to parse the various connection experiences and connection outcomes into four general categories of experience, these being healing experiences, awakening experiences, activation experiences, and ascension experiences. These individual experiences can lead to healing outcomes, awakening outcomes, activation outcomes, and ascension outcomes.
Before going into the details, allow me to say that, as a rule, all four of these experience/outcome types should be present, though not necessarily in the same event, or within the same person, if we are to consider a spiritual system or practice as being authentic. Note also that there shouldn’t be much delay in manifestation. That is, these outcome measures are not things that should take forever to materialize. Like successfully crossing a bridge, these outcome measures are the things that should immediately happen to anyone when following an authentic spiritual path that encourages authentic spiritual experience.

Of course, saying these things should happen doesn’t mean they will happen automatically, and without some adjustment. Many spiritual teachers provide advice on creating psychological, emotional, and physical conditions conducive to strong and positive connection experience, which we summarize simply as Right Action, Right Environment, and Right Thought.

In brief, right thought, right action, and right environment are actions, thoughts, and environments which support connection. By contrast, Wrong Action, Wrong Environment, and Wrong Thought are actions, thoughts and environments which facilitate disconnection.

Just like an athlete makes nutritional changes to support their athletic prowess, so should a spiritual seeker make personal and life changes to support their spiritual aspiration to connection. Even so, it still should not take forever to experience simple connection experiences. If you are following a spiritual path and you are not having these experiences, or worse, if you are following a spiritual
path and it is not leading to any connection outcomes, consider another path.

With that said, let us turn to an examination of connection outcomes, starting with the connection outcome of healing.

**Healing**

Although this is not always noted in scholarly discussions of mystical experience, which tend to focus on the “mystical” side of the experiences to the exclusion of other aspects, healing is definitely a thing within authentic spirituality. To be clear, healing is a consequence of authentic connection and the expansion of consciousness that ensues as a result.\(^5^6\) This isn’t a radical suggestion, and in fact should be quite obvious. All authentic spiritual traditions from all over the world have a healing component. Healing is a central focus in Indigenous spiritualities, for example. Traditional Sioux spirituality has a strong healing component,\(^5^7\) as does traditional Seneca spirituality. A Seneca profit by the name of Handsome Lake had connection experiences (visions) which cured him of his alcoholism. From these experiences, he gained knowledge which he subsequently wrote down in the “Code of Handsome Lake.”\(^5^8\) The Code, which is sometimes

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\(^5^8\) Arthur Caswell, “The Code of Handsome Lake, The Seneca Prophet,” *University of the State of New York Education Department*
incorrectly classified as mere prophecy, was very much a healing document aimed at alleviating the toxic effects of centuries of violent European colonization on his people. In *The Code*, Lake provides all sorts of psychological, emotional, and social advice aimed at repairing his damaged culture.

Of course, it is not just Indigenous or even shamanic spiritualities where we find a healing emphasis. Jesus Christ, so the Bible says, spent a considerable amount of his time walking around the Mediterranean countryside healing the sick and the suffering. We find the same emphasis on healing in Islam, particularly in its mystical component, Sufism. It was the same with Buddha, who opens his first sermon with a statement on the core healing aspect of his worldly mission: “I teach one thing and one thing only: suffering and the end of suffering....” After making this clear statement about the importance of healing, Buddha then goes on to teach the *Four Noble Truths*, which states that life is suffering, that suffering is caused by desire and craving (my partner and I would say

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61 The Sanskrit word used to identify the cause of suffering is “tṛṣṇa” (तृण) which means “strong desire or craving,” and not attachment.
addiction\textsuperscript{62}) and that the way to end suffering is to cure your addictions and move beyond them towards connection. Buddha even emphasized the importance of care and healing amongst his disciples by saying that all true Buddhists should be concerned with healing and care of others.”

One day the Buddha visited a monastery. While he was there he came across a chamber where a monk lay in great pain caused by a loathsome disease. Although there were many other monks at the monastery, not one of them was concerned about their sick brother. The Buddha, beholding this woeful situation, began to look after the suffering man. He called Ananda and together they bathed the monk, changed his dirty bed and\textsuperscript{63} eased his pain. Then the Buddha admonished the monks of the monastery for their neglect and encouraged them to nurse the sick and care for the suffering. He concluded by saying, “Whosoever serves the sick and suffering, serves me.”

Illness, suffering, and healing are a central component of traditional spirituality, as we can see, but does authentic spirituality and connection experience lead to healing

\textsuperscript{62}For more on addiction and healing in the context of authentic spirituality see Mike Sosteric and Gina Ratkovic, \textit{Lightning Path Workbook Two - Healing}, vol. 2, Lightning Path Workbook Series (St. Albert, Alberta: Lightning Path Press, 2017).

\textsuperscript{63}Rahman, “Spiritual Healing and Sufi Practices.”
outcomes? The answer to that is yes. We already noted the example of Handsome Lake, and that’s only one among many. Bill Wilson (founder of Alcoholics Anonymous), like Handsome Lake, was also instantly cured of his alcoholism by a connection experience.\(^{64}\) It is not just anecdote, either. In the scholarly literature, authentic healing as a consequence of connection is observed by medical doctors, nurses, and other practitioners. In this literature, we find healing experiences, conceptualized as Caring Moments,\(^ {65} \) Healing Moments,\(^ {66} \) or Transformation Experiences.\(^ {67} \) All of these “moments” and “experiences” feature “healing modalities” that emphasize transpersonal connection and “transcendent aspects of being...” \(^ {68} \) In other words, connection.

How does the healing that comes from connection occur? Examining that goes beyond the scope of this little book, but note, it is not necessarily in a mystical or magical way. In fact, the healing outcomes of authentic spirituality may have a lot to do with the empirically verifiable power of the human mind and, as Bobbi Parish suggests, the


\(^{66}\) Rahtz et al., “Transformational Changes in Health Status: A Qualitative Exploration of Healing Moments.”

\(^{67}\) Hanes, “Unusual Phenomena Associated With a Transcendent Human Experience: A Case Study.”

\(^{68}\) Watson, “Intentionality and Caring-Healing Consciousness: A Practice of Transpersonal Nursing,” 16.
“spiritual discoveries... and... self-esteem”\textsuperscript{69} gained from Connection Practice.\textsuperscript{70} In other words, a connection experience a) focuses the power of your mind, b) provides you with clear insight into the root causes of your illness and c) improves your self-esteem and self-efficacy to the point where you can make the life changes necessary to heal yourself.

As far as focussing the power of your mind, you do find examples of rather miraculous healing linked directly to the power of the human mind. Physician Dossey reports the remarkable case of a terminally ill patient being cured by a spiritual ritual that did nothing more than shift the patient’s mental perspective on their illness. What was most notable about this case was that there was nothing physically wrong with the person to begin with. The individual was dying because of his belief he was cursed. The doctors involved fully expected the patient to die, murdered by his own mind. Dr. Dossey treated the mental illness with a spiritual ritual. This ritual shifted the individual’s perspective. Once the perspective was shifted, the patient healed on his own.\textsuperscript{71}

The idea that the human mind, properly focussed, can heal, or kill, shouldn’t come as too much of a stretch. The


\textsuperscript{70}A Connection_Practice is any technique, such as meditation, writing, etc., that helps on strengthen and purify connection. Contrast this with connection techniques which are techniques, like breathing, intent, etc., that help an individual open a connection. https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/Connection_Practice

\textsuperscript{71}Larry Dossey, \textit{Space, Time, and Medicine}, vol. 11 (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1982), https://amzn.to/2Vs6nBL.
western medical establishment has long understood the power of the human mind to impact the physical well being of the body. This is why placebos are always a part of human experimentation, especially in pharmaceutical research. When a company is testing a new drug, the researchers always split their subjects up into two groups, one which is given the new drug, and one which is given the placebo, basically a sugar pill which has no medicinal effect. They do this because they have found that a person’s belief impacts the outcome of the experiment. If a person believes they are getting a pill with medicine, that belief can have a significant impact on their actual illness. Researchers call this the placebo effect and it is direct evidence of the power of the human mind. Though perhaps it should be called the Consciousness Effect instead. Given the well-established consciousness effect, it should come as no surprise that a connection experience, which is basically a connection to Consciousness, helps refocus the human mind and aim it towards better physical and mental health.

As noted above, focusing the mind is not the only aspect of connection that is important. Connection also improves insight and self-esteem. If you have a connection experience, if after that connection experience you suddenly understand things better and you suddenly feel better about yourself and your position in the world, you are thus empowered to change. When you understand what is causing your illness, and when you feel confident about your self and your position in the world, you are naturally

empowered to make changes needed to initiate and enhance a healing process. This is exactly the experience of Handsome Lake, the Seneca native already mentioned. His connection experiences lead to insight and empowerment which allowed him to not only heal his own addictions and illness, but also motivated him to help his people heal the trauma of their colonial experience. This is also the experience of Bill Wilson, founder of A.A., who had a single connection experience which healed him and which motivated him to found A.A. to help other alcoholics heal through connection experience.

Interestingly, Parish’s comments about insight and self-esteem, and the biographies of Handsome Lake and Bill Wilson, all point to three additional outcome measures which we find closely associated with authentic spirituality, which we will conceptualize here as awakening, activation, and ascension. When we have a connection experience, not only do we heal, we also awaken, activate, and ascend. Let us look at each of these outcome measures in turn, starting with awakening.

**Awakening**

Connection leads to healing and concern with healing others, as we have seen. Connection also leads to awakening. What is awakening? Awakening is basically expanding awareness of reality and expanding apprehension of truth, that is all. When you connect, you awaken. When you awaken, you become more aware of reality and truth in its various forms.
A good way to think about the awakening that arises from connection is like when you wake up in the morning. When you are sleeping at night, you are not aware of many things in your room. In fact, when you are sleeping, you are oblivious to most things. You snooze, you snore, and the world goes on around you. You are, in short, unaware of reality. This changes when you wake up. When you wake up in the morning, you slowly become aware of the environment around you. Of course, at first your thinking may be fuzzy and cloudy; however, as you shake off the fuzziness of sleep your thinking improves, your vision begins to clear, and you begin to see. The first things you may see as you wake up are the blankets on your bed and the walls of the room. However, as you awaken, as Consciousness slowly filters back into your body, you will slowly become aware of more. As you awaken, you will see and remember that you are in your room, in your house, in your neighbourhood, in a country, and on a planet. The increased awareness and the increased understanding of the room, the world around you, and your place in it that you experience when you wake up in the morning is rock solid evidence that you are, in fact, waking up. Increased awareness of reality is an essential feature of waking up in the morning. If you are not becoming more aware, you’re probably still asleep in your bed.

Awakening means becoming more aware. Increased awareness, it should be noted, is not necessarily an easy thing to go through. If you happen to be one of the fortunate ones with a healthy body, good job, awesome home, wonderful spaces around you, and good relationships, then waking up to reality in the morning is a
good thing and you will probably welcome it, because waking up means fun and happy times for you. However, if you are not so lucky, if you exist in poverty, if you live with an abusive marriage partner, if your parents abused you when you were a child and you are dealing with emotional trauma, if your skin is too dark for the racist world we live in, if you are a female waking up to the deeply embedded patriarchy of this world, if your job sucks, or if you do not have a job but need one, then waking up to reality probably is not going to be such a great experience. In fact, if your reality is filled with dissatisfaction, abuse, psychological trauma, poverty, and toxic negativity, waking up will at best be a chore and at worst a positively depressing nightmare. But, positive or negative, the fact that you are becoming more aware of your reality, even if that reality sucks, and even if you, later on in the day, dampen your awareness with drugs, alcohol, or antidepressants just to survive, means that you have “woke up” in the morning.

As you can see, “awakening” is not rocket science. Awakening is a process of expanding awareness and understanding. Awakening in the morning, awakening to your life as it is, can be experienced as positive or negative based on the circumstances you are in.

It is exactly as simple as this with awakening as a consequence of connection—spiritual awakening, we might call it. When you are spiritually sleeping, you are unaware of who you really are and you are unaware of all the physical, energetic, and spiritual things going on around you. However, when you step onto an authentic path of spirituality and start to connect, that changes. As you connect, more Consciousness flows into your body and you
awaken, just like in the morning, only more so. As you awaken, your thinking clears, your vision improves, your understanding grows, and you gradually become aware of a deeper and more wide-ranging reality. When that happens, when you begin to wake up to deeper and wider realities, you know you are waking up, in a spiritual sense.

Just like waking up in the morning, waking up spiritually can be a good experience or a bad experience. If you are waking up in a good reality, then the spiritual awakening process will be pleasant. If the reality you wake up into is positive, and if you have lots of good support for that awakening, you will have positive peak, transcendent, satori type experiences, which we collectively call Zenith Experiences. You do not have to go very far into the literature to find numerous examples of these positive awakening experiences, though it can be difficult to sort it out and recognize their prevalence because awakening goes by many different names. Thus we have illuminations, enlightenments, epiphanies, revelations, Satori

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73 https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/Zenith_Experience.
75 Bucke, Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind.
Experiences, peak experiences, noesis experiences, Pure Conscious Events, and even intimation of expanded awareness so profound they are referred to as Cosmic Consciousness.

Why so many different names for the same underlying experience of awakening? There are a couple of different reasons for that. For one, the culture and religious tradition of a person influences how they understand and name the experience. A Catholic will understand a connection experience as “contemplation” while a Buddhist will understand it as satori. The name we come up with also depends on the intensity and duration of the experience. A weak awakening experience may be understood as a peak experience or flow experience while a powerful connection experience may be conceived as cosmic consciousness.

Positive, zenith awakening experiences (i.e. peak experiences, cosmic consciousness, etc.) are common and great; however, it needs to be noted that not all awakening experiences are positive. As Cortright notes,

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78D.T. Suzuki, An Introduction to Zen Buddhism (Grove Press, 1994), https://amzn.to/2Tp6gWG.
80Hanes, “Unusual Phenomena Associated With a Transcendent Human Experience: A Case Study.”
Most people think of spiritual growth as safe. The spiritual path may not be easy, but it is usually not considered dangerous. However, the world’s spiritual traditions all warn about different dangers along the way, the ‘perils of the path.’ New and expanded states of consciousness can overwhelm the ego. An infusion of powerful spiritual energies can flood the body and mind, fragmenting the structures of the self and temporarily incapacitating the person until they can be assimilated.

I call the bad experiences caused by spiritual experiences that occur in negative environments Nadir Experiences. Nadir experiences, unlike zenith experiences, are unpleasant moments of stress, anxiety, anger, confusion, fear, and paranoia that can lead to spiritual emergency and even spiritual psychosis. Nadir experiences (which when very powerful can pitch one into


For more on spiritual emergency, see http://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/Spiritual_Emergency
a proverbial “**Dark Night of the Soul**” experiences) invoke paranoia, confusion, and ugly feelings of guilt, shame, anguish, and despair.

What causes a nadir experience? Nadir experiences are caused when connection and expanding awareness occurs in negative environments, when the individual is not suitably prepared, when the bodily ego is damaged, and when the individual has experienced trauma and psychological damage as a consequence of **Toxic Socialization**. If you are waking up in a bad reality, if you have experienced trauma, psychological damage, and even indoctrination, then your awakening process will likely be less pleasant. You may still have peak experiences and nature moments, but these moments will be less frequent and less intense. It sucks to say, but in negative environments filled with anger, hatred, violence, inequality, injustice, despair, suppression, oppression, drama, and death, spiritual awakening is more likely to lead to anxiety, confusion, fear, depression, anger, and even hatred, especially if that awakening is occurring without good guidance and support, or under the guidance of reactionary actors.

How common are nadir experiences compared to zenith experiences? It is hard to answer that question because the people who do have them are unlikely to share them for fear of what others might say. For example, as a teenager and young adult I had several nadir experiences which to this day, thirty years later, I still will not talk about. At the time they happened I was too traumatized

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and confused by the experience to say anything to anybody. Later on, after the trauma wore off, I never mentioned them to anyone ever again. I never mention them for the same reason that others I have spoken to over the years who have had nadir experiences never mention them. Folks don’t speak about these experiences because they are afraid, often with good reason, that if they do tell to family, friends, and even “professionals,” they will be shut down because of the negative, judgmental response of social networks and a psychiatric establishment ill equipped to understand connection experience.

And note, it is not only that people are afraid to talk that we don’t know much about these. The few researchers who look at this kind of thing are not asking, either. There are many psychological questionnaires that try to capture zenith experiences. These make statements like “I have had an experience in which the deepest truths of creation were revealed to me,” or, “I have had an experience that made me more aware, compassionate, and understanding towards my fellow humanity,” but none of the standard measures capture the negative, sometimes even paranoid “bad trips” that come up when we have a connection experience. Typically, academics looking at these simply discount them as neurosis, psychosis, or even schizophrenia, reject them as inauthentic, and dismiss them from further consideration. Not exactly sensible, given that this rejection just shuts people up about them, but what can you do?
It should be noted that nadir experiences need not be wholly negative. Nadir experiences can lead to positive change, even “profound psychological transformation.” My own spiritual journey started with a powerful nadir experience that, when processed correctly, led to a fundamental, powerful, and positive life shift. At the same time, handled and processed incorrectly, nadir experiences can traumatize and damage an individual’s self-esteem, undermine their willingness to pursue authentic spiritual practices in the future, and even lead to mental illness. The consequence of nadir experiences are real. It goes without saying that scholars should be taking a closer look.

Nadir experiences are uncomfortable and traumatic experiences for sure, but it is important to be aware, they still indicate awakening, and consequently they indicate connection and spiritual authenticity. If you wake up in a bad reality, you become aware of the bad reality. If there are ugly truths you have to face, you will come face-to-face with those ugly truths. If your (internal and external) reality is negative, then some of your spiritual awakening experiences will be negative as well. That is to be expected. You should not discount as evidence negative experiences and negative emotions caused by increasing awareness just because they are negative. Positive zenith or negative nadir, both may indicate spiritual awakening and authentic spirituality.

Also note, nadir experiences, while they do represent an outcome of authentic spirituality, are not a necessary feature of awakening or activation. Nadir experiences exist only because our societies and our socialization processes are toxic and filled with violence, greed, poverty, pain, and anguish. Nadir experiences happen because we wake up indoctrinated and traumatized, in negative and toxic spaces, surrounded by abusive parents and teachers, sexual predators, war, hatred, violence, and despair, and not because we are waking up per se. Nadir experiences arise because of unresolved childhood trauma, current violence, abuse, toxicity, ideological deception, and indoctrination. If there were no toxicity, ideology, or pain from childhood, if the social worlds we lived in were beautiful, welcoming, and healthy, all connection experiences would zenith experiences of joy, wonder and power. Obviously, it should go without saying, creating right environments where connection leads to nothing but zenith experiences should be a priority for all.

Interestingly, the danger of nadir experiences may be why spiritual teachers like St. Teresa of Avila place so much emphasis on creating calm, quiet, and drama free environments, what we call right environments, or why Buddhist monks go live in temples, isolated from the chaos and drama of the “normal” world, why cocooning is such a trend these days, and why establishing safe environments


is so important. They understand, as my partner and I do,\(^9\) that a healthy environment is a precursor to positive awakening experiences.

**Activation**

That people can have nadir experiences when they are pursuing an authentic spirituality makes sense. It is easier to live in a toxic environment if you are repressed and unaware. The more aware you are in general, the more aware you are of pain and suffering, and the more likely your experiences will be negative. It is like someone poking your body with a needle while you are sleeping, and poking your body with a needle when you are wide awake. When you are sleeping, you are not aware of the pain caused by the needle. When you are awake, you feel and (more importantly) see who and what is causing the pain. Makes sense, right?

What also makes sense is that once you become aware of the poking, or whatever, you will take action to stop it right away. It does not require rocket science to discern the series of events that follow upon awakening. Number one, you will probably get angry. Number two, your hands will probably dart out automatically. Number three, you will stand up and try and push the poker away. This natural and automatic reaction to stopping whatever it is that is bothering you is the third outcome measure of authentic

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spirituality, which we refer to as activation. Activation is basically the natural reaction that is caused by growing awareness of the reality that surrounds you. As you wake up, as you get out of bed, as you spiritually awaken, you become aware of reality and you naturally respond and take action. Obvious, right?

It is important to understand that the nature of your activation will be will depend entirely on the reality that surrounds you when you wake up. Your reaction to someone poking you with a needle will be different than your reaction to a house on fire, or a dog licking your face.

The activation that occurs in the morning when you wake up is also the activation that occurs with authentic spirituality and authentic spiritual practices. When you practice an authentic spirituality, it causes you to connect. This connection leads to awakening and this awakening inevitably and automatically leads to activation, through which you change the world around you.

As with spiritual awakening, you do not have to go very far into the literature on religion, spirituality, and connection experience to find examples of activation as a consequence of the awakening that arises from connection. Bartolome de las Casas, for example, was a brutal Spanish colonizer who tortured and murdered the natives of Hispaniola. Fiske\(^93\) offers a scathing condemnation of de las Casas whom he called the worst of the worst. There was no limit to horrors he would commit. As Fiske notes of the repressive practices of the colonizers:

Indians were slaughtered by the hundreds, burned alive, impaled on sharp stakes, torn to pieces by blood-hounds. In retaliation for the murder of a Spaniard, it was thought proper to call up fifty or sixty Indians and chop off their hands. Little children were flung into the water to drown with less concern than if they had been puppies. In the mingling of sacred ideas with the sheerest devilry, there was a grotesqueness fit for the pencil of Dore. Once, “in honour and reverence of Christ and his twelve Apostles,” they hanged thirteen Indians in a row at such a height that their toes could just touch the ground and then pricked them to death with their sword-points, taking care not to kill them quickly. At another time, when some old reprobate was broiling half a dozen Hideout Indians in a kind of cradle suspended over a slow fire, their shrieks awoke the Spanish captain who, in a neighboring hut, was taking his afternoon nap and he called out testily to the man to despatch those wretches at once and stop their noise. But this demon, determined not to be baulked of his enjoyment, only gagged the poor creatures.\textsuperscript{94}

Las Casas, like all other nobility of the time, was part of this horror; but then, something remarkable happened.

\textsuperscript{94}Fiske, 3:256–66.
One day while in Cuba, Las Casas read from Ecclesiasticus (Sira 34: 21-23) the following words:

The Most High is not pleased with the offerings of the wicked: neither is he pacified for sin by the multitude of sacrifices. The bread of the needy is their life; he that defraudeth him thereof is a man of blood. He that taketh away his neighbors’ living slayeth him; and he that defraudeth the laborer of his hire is a shedder of blood.

Upon reading these words, Las Casas has a brief, but classic, connection experience which was followed by an instantaneous transformation in his view of slavery and a subsequent shift in his political work. Fiske provides an account of what happened:

As he read these words, a light from heaven seemed to shine upon Las Casas. The scales fell from his eyes. He saw that the system of slavery was wrong in principle. The question whether you treated your slaves harshly or kindly did not go to the root of the matter. As soon as you took from the laborer his wages, the deadly sin was committed; the monstrous evil was inaugurated. There must be a stop put to this, said Las Casas. We have started wrong. Here, are vast countries which the Holy Church has given to the Spaniards in trust, that the heathen may be civilized and brought into the fold of Christ; and we have begun by making Hispaniola a hell. This thing must not be suffered to grow with the growth of Spanish conquest. There was but one
remedy. The axe must be put to the root of the tree. Slavery must be abolished. 95.

Following his connection experience, after he became suddenly aware of just how unaligned-with-his-higher-self his actions really were, Las Casas activated. He gave up his slaves and preached against the practice. He also sold his worldly goods, became politically active, and was a key figure and major influence not only in advocating against slavery, but in advocating for the idea that the slaves were human and had souls. 96 Eventually, he went on to write a rather disturbing book on Spanish treatment of slaves where he provides a first-hand account of a horrific genocide that left Hispaniola a ruinous and desolate waste (Casas 1552). 97 This is a far cry from the colonizing demon that initially stepped foot on Cuban soil, with the point here being that de las Casas was clearly awakened and activated by a brief connection experience. 98

Medieval Spanish colonizers are not the only people to be activated by connection experiences. It often happens that a connection experience triggers an activation. For example, Bill Wilson, who we have already met, was an unrepentant atheist and materialist who vehemently rejected belief in God and anything supernatural. He was

95 Fiske, 3:273–74.
97 If you are interested in Las Casas first-hand account and condemnation, you can read the book. It is available from Project Gutenberg at http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/20321
also a chronic alcoholic who, despite his best efforts, was unable to give up the drink. After listening to his doctor tell his wife that he was risking brain damage and death, he became desperate. One day, at “a point of total, utter deflation ... with neither faith nor hope, he cried, ‘If there be a God, let Him show Himself!’” It was at that point he had his one and only connection experience.

Suddenly, my room blazed with an indescribably white light. I was seized with an ecstasy beyond description. Every joy I had known was pale by comparison. The light, the ecstasy — I was conscious of nothing else for a time. “Then, seen in the mind’s eye, there was a mountain. I stood upon its summit, where a great wind blew. A wind, not of air, but of spirit. In great, clean strength, it blew right through me. Then came the blazing thought ‘You are a free man.’ I know not at all how long I remained in this state, but finally the light and the ecstasy subsided. I again saw the wall of my room. As I became more quiet, a great peace stole over me, and this was accompanied by a sensation difficult to describe. I became acutely conscious of a Presence which seemed like a veritable sea of living spirit. I lay on the shores of a new world. ‘This,’ I thought, ‘must be the great reality. The God of the preachers.’
As already noted, this experience instantly cured Bill of his alcoholism. It healed him and awakened him and he never touched another drop. As a consequence of this single, powerful experience, he also became activated. He went on to co-found Alcoholics Anonymous which, in its early years fostered connection experience, but which later on succumbed to a secularization push that removed this important, and previously quite effective spiritual component.

Activation was also a thing that happened to Handsome Lake. Like Bill Wilson, he was also a chronic alcoholic on the verge of death. His connection experience not only healed him, it awakened him to the horrific impacts of colonialism on his people, and it activated him as a cultural and spiritual warrior of his people. As already noted, based on a series of connection experiences, he wrote a healing and Connection Manual entitled The Code of Handsome Lake intended to help his people recover.

It is not just famous people where you find evidence of activation as a consequence of connection. In the psychological literature, there is a concept, Quantum

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100A connection manual is a manual that provides instruction on how to connect. https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/Connection_Manual

Quantum or Transformational Change. Quantum or transformational change is the rapid personal transformation that occurs as a consequence of a connection experience. This transformation is a consequence of the awakening and activation caused by connection experiences. When an individual has connection experience, they awaken (they realize the truth of their life) and they become empowered (they activate) to make changes as required.

Interestingly, activation is something that is outlined by Andrew Harvey as a significant feature of authentic Christianity. Harvey is a religious scholar, mystic, and founder of what he calls the Sacred Activism movement. Harvey notes, correctly, that Christianity in its original and authentic form was all about activation. His comments on the nature of Christ’s work are apropos our discussion.

Christ came not to found a new religion or to inaugurate a new set of dogmas but to open up a fierce and shattering new path of love-in-action, a path that seems now, with the hindsight of history, the one that could have saved—and still could save— humanity from its course of suicidal self-destruction.

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103White, “Transformational Change: A Historical Review.”


105Harvey.
He continues

To a society arranged at every level into oppressive hierarchies—sexual, religious, racial, and political—he presented in his own life, a vision of a radical and all-embracing egalitarianism designed to end forever those dogmas and institutions that keep women enslaved, the poor starving, and the rich rotting in a prison of selfish luxury....Again and again, Christ, in his teachings and by his example, made it clear that the only authentic sign of spiritual wisdom is a progress in the kind of ego-annihilating humility that longs to express itself in the ever-greater and richer service of all beings.

Harvey’s assessment of the nature of Christ’s work is confirmed by a careful reading of the New Testament Gospels which do not show a passive shepherd of people, but an active and politically engaged Christ figure.106

In his book, Teachings of the Christian Mystics, Harvey is speaking of original Christian teachings, and Christian mystical traditions, but the same movement to radical compassion, hunger for justice, and action in the world (i.e., activation) can be observed in other traditions as well. Harvey finds the same activation, the same emphasis on action and transformation of the world, in the Hindu mystical traditions. He writes:

Lord Krishna’s teaching in the Bhagavad Gita also suggests another holy secret that has inspired some of the greatest mystics of the Hindu tradition. Simply stated, the human being only achieves union with God in all of His aspects through a fusion of contemplation and action. God is after all both Eternal Being and Eternal Becoming; in contemplative knowledge of our eternal identity with Brahma, we rest in God’s Being, like a drop of water in the all-surrounding ocean; in enacting the divine will selflessly, we participate in the transforming activity of God, in what a great mystic of another tradition, Rumi, called “God’s perpetual massive resurrection.”

As with Christ’s example, in this Hindu tradition of active political engagement we find Gandhi’s highly influential passive resistance to British colonial rule, inspired by both the Bhagavad Gita, which glorifies action in the world, but also the Sermon on the Mount, and by Tolstoy’s interpretation of a non-violent, but politically active, Christian core.

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External Resistance

It should be noted that like awakening, the activation that comes from participating in an authentic spirituality that connects (really any activity that connects, whether labelled “spiritual” or not) is generally a positive thing. However, negative experiences of activation are possible as well. These negative experiences typically revolve around the experience of resistance to activation. It is like waking up in the morning to somebody poking you with a needle, and who refuses to stop even though you are awake and actively trying to stop them. You wake up. You activate. You push back. You try and get them to stop. If they stop, then your experience of activation is positive and empowering. If they do not stop, if they just keep poking you anyway no matter how hard you activate against them, worse yet, if they lash out even harder against you, your experience of activation will be negative.

The idea of waking up to pokes, and then not being able to stop them because the other person just continues the assault, is a good illustration of what’s involved in a negative experience of activation, but real-world examples will make this a little clearer. For example, think of a female waking up in a patriarchal household and then activating to end that patriarchy. A female who has a connection experience, however weak, and activates against an oppressive patriarchy, at home, at work, or in the general society, will experience resistance and push back. A single

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female activating in a patriarchal environment, a single female standing up and claiming power and authority in a patriarchal social and economic world, may be beaten down verbally, emotionally, psychologically, and even physically as a direct consequence of her activation. In some societies still heavily dominated by male power and privilege, activating females can even be burned to death, as was the case with nineteen-year-old Nusrat Jahan Rafi who was lit on fire after reporting sexual harassment in her school.\textsuperscript{111} The patriarchal men and women that surround an awakening and activating female will, within the limits of social and legal conventions, attack to preempt the activation and push back down.

It is not just women who experience resistance as a consequence of activation. You can also see resistance to activation when young people, naturally, or as a consequence of exposure to Connection Supplements, awaken, activate, and begin to question and rebel against parental and teacher oppression. Teenagers that are connecting, even if this connection is confused and misinformed, awaken, activate, and challenge oppressive parental, teacher, and even governmental authorities. When they do, they are often met with psychological, emotional, and even physical aggression and assault. In other words, resistance.

Interestingly, adolescent and young adult awakening and activation as a result of exposure to connection supplements was a major problem for authorities in the

1960s and 70s when young people, workers, the lower classes, etc., were exposed to Cannabis, LSD, and other connection supplements, began to awaken, activate, and shift away from the stultifying sexuality, brutal racism, and exploitative “manifest destiny” of their “square” and disconnected parents.\textsuperscript{112} The connection supplements of the 1960s and 70s activated a generation and fuelled a counter-cultural revolution that pushed major industrial nations to the political left and fundamentally altered the power structure. These sixties hippies experienced considerable resistance from parents, teachers, and a society that simply did not understand and was not properly prepared for what was occurring to the children. Resistance was personal, in the form of family repression and oppression, and political. On the personal level, parents would belittle and assault their “hippy” children in a backfiring attempt to make them conform. There was also political resistance, as was the case with the Kent State Massacre of May 4, 1970, where four university students were murdered by Ohio National Guardsman.\textsuperscript{113} In the end, the only thing that shut the global activation down was a conservative “war on drugs” that made access to connection supplements illegal.\textsuperscript{114} In this context, Nancy and Ronald Reagan’s “war on drugs” was really a war on connection and connection supplements designed to


\textsuperscript{113}https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kent_State_shootings

discourage the use of connection supplements that were, because of easy access, awakening and activating the children. 115

The conflict and resistance individuals experience when they awaken and activate might be called **External Resistance** 116 because it arises from external sources. We can define external resistance as resistance to awakening and activation that comes from outside the awakening individual, specifically from friends, family, priests, corporations such as Facebook and Google, the paramilitary state, etc. External resistance comes from people who are threatened, either consciously or unconsciously, by the individual and collective activation and empowerment that comes from authentic spiritual practice. External resistance is designed to either a) suppress awakening and activation outright, or b) divert your aspirations into channels acceptable to The System. Whether it is outright suppression or counterintelligence diversion, in both cases, external resistance exists and is readily observable.

The resistance individuals may experience as a consequence of awakening and activation is noted by

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115 With the current global push to legalize cannabis, it seems like this war is finally won (or lost, depending on your perspective). However if there is one thing that we know, those who fear connection for its awakening and activation powers never give up. It will be interesting to see how the current global push to legalize cannabis and other connection supplements will shake out in the next ten years or so, and whether corporate purveyors of these substances will be able to alter the substances in cannabis in some way so as to remove the critical properties.

others. Andrew Harvey says of Christianity, that “Many forces...within the ‘Christian’ world, block” the “glorious liberty” (i.e., revolutionary activations) that occur as a consequence of authentic spiritual practice. This appears to be true. Marie-Florine Bruneu notes that women mystics during the 12th through 17th centuries always had a desire to “ally mystical union with service to others” (i.e., they wanted to be active and uplifting in the community) but that they were “repeatedly barred from imitating Christ in his apostolic life,” meaning “Their... attempts... had repeatedly been circumvented by the church...” The Church, in other words, actively suppressed the activation component of authentic spirituality. The Church appears to have used three strategies to suppress this activation. They 1) pruned the mystic’s teachings of heterodoxy, 2) imposed clausura (Spanish for cloister), and 3) threatened mystics with violence at the hands of the inquisition.

For your information, heterodoxy is, according to Merriam-Webster, the holding of “unorthodox opinions or doctrines,” in this case opinions and doctrines against the established Church. Pruning the teachings of heterodoxy means trimming thoughts and ideas that deviate from and challenge church orthodoxy. Imposing cloister means forcing the mystic into a nunnery, or monastery. Cloister,

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removed the mystic and her potentially threatening (to the status-quo) teachings by enclosing and containing them in a monastic environment. Finally, the threat of inquisition brings the final outliers to heal. As Bruneu notes “the watchfulness of the clergy, the tendency to force female mystics to enter convents, and the threat of the Inquisition or of the stake remained constant throughout the history of female mysticism.”

Interestingly, you can find external resistance to authentic spirituality even in the secular, scientific world. A branch of psychology known as Humanistic Psychology used to exist in a much stronger form than it does today. This branch of psychology was sympathetic and open to research on forms of connection experience. Humanistic psychologists were even developing forms of therapy that were rooted in an understanding an openness to forms of connection, like peak experience or transcendence. In other words, humanistic psychology incorporated authentic spiritual practices as research topics and were in the process of developing highly effective therapeutic tools which could not only promote personal growth and self-

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119 Bruneau, Women Mystics Confront the Modern World, 19.
121 Maslow, “Lessons from the Peak-Experiences.”
actualization,¹²³ but connection experiences as well.¹²⁴ The problem for the establishment was that these “authentic therapies” were quite effective at healing, awakening, and activating people. As Carl Rogers, the creator of the encounter group, points out:

> Encounter groups lead to more personal independence, fewer hidden feelings, more willingness to innovate, more opposition to institutional rigidities. Hence, if a person is fearful of change in any form, he is rightly fearful of encounter groups. They breed constructive change. . . . Hence, all those opposed to change will be stoutly or even violently opposed to the intensive group experience.¹²⁵

As Elkins¹²⁶ notes, humanistic psychology was, in an attempt to undermine its powerful and progressive potential, “murdered” by a conservative status quo intent on suppressing the political challenges that healing and activation ultimately brought. Elkin’s conclusions are crystal clear.


¹²⁵Rogers, 13.

... humanistic psychology lost its power and influence, in large measure, because it is inherently incompatible with the basic assumptions and values of contemporary mainstream psychology and with the conservative ideologies that have increasingly gained power in American culture since the 1960s.\textsuperscript{127}

At this point, you can understand why connection and authentic spirituality would lead to resistance. Awakening and activation lead to a status quo challenge. This challenge can occur in the family patriarchy, in the class relations of society, and even in the hallowed halls of academia. Women activating in a patriarchy challenge the patriarchal status quo. A worker awakening and activating in a factory challenges the capitalist status quo. A teenager awakening and activating during adolescence challenges parental and school authority. A client activating in an authentic therapeutic environment brings challenge and change throughout their life. Activation brings pressure to change and those who fear change, or who are attempting to preserve the economic, political, or familial status quo, resist and suppress activation.

There is a lot more we could say, and a lot more research that has to be done, concerning the activation that attends authentic spiritual practice, and the resistance and suppression of awakening and activation that occurs around these positive outcomes of authentic spiritual connection. Indeed, with the idea of resistance in mind,

\textsuperscript{127}Elkins, 267.
everything from the use of “fire water” to decimate and disconnect the formerly healthy and connected Indigenous cultures of the Americas,\textsuperscript{128} to the creation of spiritual propaganda in the form of innocent looking Tarot cards,\textsuperscript{129} to the Catholic Church’s editing of the Christian Bible to establish a sanitized and disempowering orthodoxy,\textsuperscript{130} becomes a subject of scholarly interest. At this time, however, we leave aside an examination of external resistance to awakening and turn our attention to another way activation experience can be negative experiences and that is when we experience internal resistance to activation.

**Internal Resistance**

What is internal resistance to activation? As the name suggests, *Internal Resistance*\textsuperscript{131} to activation is resistance that arises internally, from inside you. Internal resistance is the personal self-doubt, fear, anxiety, guilt, shame, self-deprecation, and even paranoid terror that can sometimes accompany authentic activation. People who experience internal resistance struggle with activation and awakening because they doubt the veracity of the experience, doubt their own authenticity, doubt their ability to handle it, or have deep-seated fears that their awakening and activation will lead to negative consequences, like punishment,


\textsuperscript{129}Sosteric, “A Sociology of Tarot.”


\textsuperscript{131}https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/Internal_Resistance.
assault, and so on. You can often observe an individual’s activation by the presence of this internal resistance and struggle.

Why does this internal resistance occur? That’s a complicated story. Part of it is the result of the way we are socialized. For many people, socialization is about learning how to accept their “sinful” nature, submit to authority, and follow the rules without challenge. Socialization, or rather Toxic Socialization, is about being moulded and plugged into The System.\textsuperscript{132} Within the toxic socialization that characterizes most families and societies, children learn to do what they are told, at home and at school, and they are “punished” (really, they are assaulted) when they do not. At home, “punishment” can range anywhere from psychological and emotional torture (shaming, name-calling, yelling) to outright physical assault (i.e., spanking and beatings). Schools also use psychological and emotional torture, like shaming and public ridicule,\textsuperscript{133} and in some locales physical abuse (straps, caning, etc.), to control behaviour and obtain submission. The same at work.

It is important to understand, those who experience severe forms of “punishment” can develop PTSD symptoms,\textsuperscript{134} like fear, anxiety, self-blame, etc., which can


\textsuperscript{133}Mike Sosteric, “The Emotional Abuse of Our Children: Teachers, Schools, and the Sanctioned Violence of Our Modern Institutions.,” \textit{The Socjournal} March (October 2013).

\textsuperscript{134}Darius Cikanavicius, “Toxic, Chronic Shame: What It's Like to Live with It,” Psych Central.com, 2019,
get triggered when they experience connection and the activation that often occurs. It would be like if I met you and, after you said hello, I started screaming and calling you names. Even though this is only one encounter, the trauma of this single encounter will cause psychological and emotional damage. Specifically, it will change your behaviour. The next time you meet me you would experience a residual trauma. You would doubt your self, doubt whether you should speak up, and perhaps take steps to avoid coming into contact with me. If you did come into contact with you, you would be more careful about what you say. This damage would occur even after only a single experience. For people who have experienced chronic abuse and trauma as children and adolescents, the damage is more severe. Even the thought of “speaking out” or standing up in opposition to authorities, whether abusive or not, can trigger all sorts of psychological and emotional conflict and panic. When you couple PTSD caused by the so-called “punishment” we heap on our children with the activation caused by connection, spiritual panic and, in the most severe cases, even spiritual emergency can result.

When individuals are assaulted for not submitting to the rules, whether as children, adolescents, or adults, we call this oppression.\(^\text{135}\) Oppression is a form of action designed to neutralize activation and disempower individuals by instilling fear. Oppression and the

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\(^{135}\)https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/Oppression
psychological trauma that goes along with that are two key sources of internal resistance. If you are afraid of standing up and speaking out because of what your parents did to you as a child, what your teachers and “friends” did to you at school, or what your bosses do to you at work, you are oppressed and less likely to experience an empowering, positive, and trouble-free activation.

It should be noted that physical, psychological and emotional oppression are not the only source of internal resistance to activation. Internal resistance can also arise as a consequence of the ideas and ideology we have incorporated into our thinking process. Ideas and ideology taught to us as children and adolescents dis-empower us and work against activation in sometimes overt, sometimes subtle, but always very powerful ways. These ideologies are most obvious in Christian instructions that teach you will be forever damned for not following the authority, rules, and commandments of God, and also in Vedic notions of Karma, which also suggest punishment (i.e. a lower birth) for not following the rules. However, ancient Christian notions of hell and damnation and Vedic notions of karma and rebirth are not the only punishment based ideas that impact activation. These ideas also exist in the New age movement where we are told that we are stupid, fallen, weak, worthless, primitive, unworthy, and sinful rejects who are incarnated here on Earth to learn spiritual “lessons” so we can graduate and evolve to the next level. These messages also exist in science where we are told that we are biologically rooted to a violent, “survival of the fittest” ape past.
I call ideological messages that we are sinful, rotten, bad actors that need punishment and correction, **Less Than Messages (LTM’s)**. Less than messages are the constant and ubiquitous aspersions cast upon us by a culture designed to beat prevent awakening and activation. Less than messages undermine self-esteem and self-efficacy and confuse purpose. Less than messages form the foundation of internal conflict and struggle which can be triggered during the activation that sometimes follows upon awakening. We absorb all these less than messages growing up, and as a consequence, when we activate, sometimes even when we awaken, we feel “unworthy,” “incapable,” “sinful,” and so on. These thoughts and emotions can undermine and even reverse what could otherwise be a productive and positive awakening and activation experience.

As with our examination of external resistance, a lot more could be said about internal resistance and the ideas and ideology which fuel that resistance. We will examine the ideological underpinning of internal resistance at a later date when we explore the “old energy” archetypal fabric of this planet. Also like our examination of external resistance, the phenomenon of internal resistance to connection also needs research attention. As a general statement, anybody who has had a connection experience will be likely attest to both the awakening and activation components of the connection experience, as well as the zenith and nadir experiences, and the internal and external

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135https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/Less_Than_Messages
resistance one may experience. It is up to researchers to quit dismissing negative aspects of connection experience.

As for the personal experiences themselves, if you do have a nadir experience, or if you experience resistance, either external or internal, pay attention and, if necessary, get appropriate help. If you are experiencing external resistance, find an appropriate support group, for example. For people in abusive relationships, this would be a relationship support group. For adolescents experiencing trauma and violence at home or at school, this may be a professional support worker, a gay-straight alliance, or some other type of professionally guided peer support group. Similarly, if you experience internal resistance, seek psychological assistance. Seeking psychological help is particularly important if the activation is triggering acute PTSD like symptoms (i.e. anxiety, distress, sleep disruption, toxic and negative ideations), neurosis, or even psychosis (confusion, paranoia, etc.).

If you do experience internal resistance, interrogate your spiritual ideology to see where negative, self-limiting, and paranoia-inducing thoughts are coming from. Interrogating your spirituality means examining your thought processes and looking for ideas that you don’t want to think, like “less than messages” that undermine your self-esteem and self-efficacy, and that make awakening and activation difficult. When you find those ideas, engage in a process of mental purification, or just purification for short, to clear them up. Purification is simply the identification and extraction of thoughts and concepts that disempower and disconnect.
Mental purification is a complicated process, but it basically comes down to being mindful of your thoughts and feelings, being attentive to the thoughts that affect your feelings in a negative way, and being active in trying to replace those thoughts that diminish you. If you have an awakening experience and then a couple days later you are feeling slightly depressed, or are dealing with thoughts of self-doubt, pay attention to what you are thinking. Write your thoughts down. Once you have identified self-limiting, negative thoughts and images, you can work to clear the self-limiting ideas and archetypes with more empowering and expansive ones. It is a big process, a challenging one, and I’ll go into more detail at a later date. For now, just get started with mindfulness training, and get used to noting the ideas and feelings you have. This work will help you overcome some of the internal resistance you may experience if you happen to have an authentic connection experience.

As a final note to this section on activation, the idea that you might have to interrogate your thoughts, emotions, and ideas, i.e. that you have to work to establish right thought, may sound a little strange, but it actually has ancient precedent in the sacred and spiritual literature of this planet. Esteemed Vedic teacher Sankaracharya speaks of the purification of one’s thoughts\(^{137}\) as a necessary step on an authentic spiritual path. The Buddhist **Noble Eightfold Path** also contains

strong guidance on the importance of “Right Thought,” “Right Understanding,” “Right Concentration,” and “Right Mindfulness,” all of which speak to the importance of mental purification and mental discipline. Similar advice has been given to Christian mystics down through the ages as well. For example, John Climacus, a 6th-century Christian monk, tell us to excise “evil,” “polluted” and “profane” thoughts so that we can make pure connections with Consciousness. Similarly, St. Teresa of Avila spends considerable time teaching detachment, the avoidance of stress and negativity, and mental discipline as requisite achievements on the path to powerful contemplation (i.e. connection).

Ascension

As the reader will by now be well aware, this book is a book on authentic spirituality, which as you now know is a spirituality that teaches and supports building a bridge of connection to “something more” than our normal, daily, self and consciousness. This is also a book about how to identify connection and how to determine when a spirituality is authentic or not. As we have seen, one way to determine the authenticity of a spirituality or spiritual practice is to look for connection outcomes. Three connection outcomes identified so far are healing, awakening, and activation. As we have seen, there is lots of

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140 St. Teresa of Avila, The Way of Perfection.
evidence in the literature to suggest that healing, awakening, and activation are basic features of authentic spirituality, and so when we are evaluating an authentic spirituality or spiritual practice, we need to look for examples of each.

Healing, awakening, and activation are important connection outcomes, but that is not the end of the story. A fourth and final outcome measure we are going to examine here is the outcome measure of ascension. What is ascension? Recall our earlier definition of authentic spirituality. Authentic spirituality connects you to “something more” than your normal consciousness. This connection is highly significant and can lead to insights, dramatic realizations, enlightenments, epiphanies, expansion of consciousness, and finally union (more or less) with this “something more.” The process of expansion, healing, awakening, epiphany, enlightenment, and challenge that leads, if pursued persistently and consistently, to “union” with this “something more” is the process of ascension. Defining the term ascension we would say that ascension is the process of pursuing union with whatever the “something more” is that one is connecting to.

Why do we use the word ascension? For one, it fits linguistically, even poetically, with awakening and activation. For two, and more importantly, it fits phenomenologically with the experience. That is, to the people undergoing the process, it actually feels like an ascension. Indeed, mystics who write about the process often speak in terms of ascent towards union, like one is moving towards something bigger, higher, and more grand than normal. John Climacus, a Medieval monk, wrote a
book entitled *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* and in that book he describes not only the ascent, but how to lubricate the process and make the ascent easier.\textsuperscript{141} It is fairly straightforward. When the ascent is completed, one achieves union with something more.\textsuperscript{142}

As already noted, there are spiritual and material ways to conceptualize connection. You can conceptualize it biologically, neurologically, or spiritually. Similarly, there are material and spiritual ways to conceptualize the process of ascension. We conceptualize the connection that occurs as connection to something we call the Fabric of Consciousness. To refine that, we would further suggest that the connection that occurs is, first and foremost, a connection between your bodily ego, which is the neurological ego of your physical body, and the spiritual ego, which is the ego that exists independently of the material world, as part of the Fabric of Consciousness.\textsuperscript{143} When you make a connection, you bring your bodily ego and your spiritual ego together for a short period of time.

\textsuperscript{141} Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*.

\textsuperscript{142} As a side note, sometimes this process is perceived as a descent, as in the descent of the Holy Spirit, or the descent of Consciousness, into the physical body. Thus we have “Then all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove” (Like 3: 21-22). Here, the “something more” we are connecting to is the Holy Spirit, and the process is described as this spirit descending into the body.

The more you do that, the more you engage in **Connection Practice**, the more you work on bringing to two together, the more you merge your bodily ego with your spiritual ego, the more you ascend towards union.

Why does connection lead to an ascension process? Because nobody achieves perfect union the first time they have a connection experience. People have **Union Experiences** all the time, but unless a connection is forced open by a long acting connection supplement like LSD, in which case one can experience union for hours, union experiences are usually only a few seconds. Typically, a union experience is just a brief connection that feels like a deeper union. It is like turning a super bright line on in a dark room for a second or two, getting a *glimpse* of what’s inside that room, and then covering your eyes and turning the light back off because it’s just too bright to keep on. To get to the point where you can “keep the light on,” so to speak, you have to work to get your eyes adjusted.

The reason nobody achieve perfect union the first time, or even the tenth time, is because, among other things, the spiritual ego is much bigger than the bodily ego. If you think of your bodily ego as a small candle flame and your spiritual ego like the blazing light of the sun, you’ll get a sense of the issue and the magnitude. Making a deep connection is like standing in a dark room and suddenly turning to face a million watt light bulb. Even under ideal circumstances, it takes time to adjust to the light. This process of “adjustment” is the process of ascension. Once you have adjusted to the bright light of The Fabric of Consciousness, then a more permanent and consistent “union” can occur.
Note that it is not just the brightness of the light of the spiritual ego/Fabric that is the problem. The bodily ego itself might be a problem as well. This is the case if, for example, the bodily ego has been heavily damaged by toxic socialization. For reasons we cannot explore in too much detail here, when the bodily ego is damaged and indoctrinated by toxic socialization, connection and the process of union can be difficult. When the bodily ego is damaged, the process is not just about adjusting to the light, it is also about healing damage to the self-esteem and self-concept, and clearing the wrong thought of indoctrination. It should be noted that the healing component is extremely important. As we will see in the next section on the Seven Pillar of Authentic Spirituality, anybody can have a connection experience, even the mentally ill. As we will see in the next unit, when people with mental illness experience connection, things can go horribly wrong. To be sure, mental illness can be a serious and deadly factor in the spiritual awakening process.

Anyway, you see the issue. Anybody can have a connection experience, but the thing we are connecting too is so bright, that it takes work to make that connection longer and more permanent. The work involved in making a connection longer and more permanent is the work of ascension. It is important work and, sadly, not too many people go on to do it, not because they can’t, and not because they won’t, but because pundits don’t always make the requirement clear, either because they themselves don’t know, or because they have based their expertise on only a connection experience or two and thus think that that’s all there really is to it. Those who do the work can see through
the pretensions of religious and spiritual “leaders” who do not do the work, or whose goal is oppress, and maintain status quo agendas, and or are sick people who think they know what it is they are trying to convey; but, that’s another story.\textsuperscript{144}

Is ascension, this process of union and merging, a thing in the spiritual and scientific literature of the planet? It definitely is. In fact, ascension is often defined as the \textit{sine qua non} of spiritual practice, and the quintessential sought after connection outcome. Zaehnar\textsuperscript{145} provides an excellent, if quite general, definition of “mysticism,” which is really a description of the process of ascension. As he says, mysticism (read ascension) is “the realization of a union or a unity with or in [or of] something that is enormously, if not infinitely, greater than the empirical self.”\textsuperscript{146} And of course, Zaehnar is not the only one. The concept of a process of ascension appears everywhere and in every time period, over and over again. It appears in Orphic literature where the “ultimate goal is reunion with the divine.”\textsuperscript{147} The

\textsuperscript{144}RSDISC

\textsuperscript{145}\textit{Hindu and Muslim Mysticism} (New York: Shocken Books, 1969), 5, https://amzn.to/2IK1A7R.

\textsuperscript{146}Zaehnar’s definition is a definition of mysticism, which is the word most people use when they think about what we are calling authentic spirituality. Zaehnar’s definition is OK so long as we recognize that a) it doesn’t include other important outcome measure of connection, like awakening and activation, b) it defines mysticism (i.e., authentic spirituality) by reference to one of its outcomes. Defining This is a common error in the literature.

Sanskrit word “yoga” actually means “union,” and Yoga, in its pure non-Westernized form,\(^{148}\) and is all about achieving union with this higher Light/higher Self.\(^{149}\) Likewise, Zen Buddhism shares the same goal. Chan speaks of the practice of Zen and how it is aimed at clearing the mind to facilitate union with Self.\(^{150}\) Aldous Huxley points out that the Vedic “though art that” is a perfect representation of the underlying unity of reality, and the experience we may have of this unity when we have a connection experience.\(^{151}\)

You also find the concept of ascension and union in Islamic spirituality, particularly the mystical Sufi variety. For example, the “Mi’rāj of Abu Yazīd” (the “Ascension of Abu Yazīd”) is, despite its unfortunate patriarchy, all about Abu Yazīd’s experience of union with God.\(^{152}\) Not surprisingly, you also finds the concept of union and ascension in Christianity, particularly the mystical monastic variety, where ascension and final union is portrayed as either actual union with God,\(^{153}\) or as “betrothal?” and “Divine/Spiritual Marriage.”\(^{154}\) As Xolani Kacela writes, “As the Holy Spirit descends upon us, ordinary experience is

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\(^{148}\) As for example found in the Yoga Sutras (i.e. union stitches) of Patanjali,


\(^{150}\) Yen, *Chan and Enlightenment*.

\(^{151}\) Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (Canada: Random House Canada, 2014), https://amzn.to/2XGmQyM.

\(^{152}\) You can find a copy of this poem in Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*.

\(^{153}\) Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*.

\(^{154}\) St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*. 

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transformed into mystical experience, and we become one with the Spirit.”  

There’s more!

Evelyn Underhill, an Anglican mystic and pacifist writer, wrote a highly successful book on mysticism entitled *Mysticism* where she defines mysticism as “...the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment.” Underhill goes on:

Broadly speaking, I understand it to be the expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with the transcendental order; whatever be the theological formula under which that order is understood. This tendency, in great mystics, gradually captures the whole field of consciousness; it dominates their life and, in the experience called ”mystic union,” attains its end. Whether that end be called the God of Christianity, the World-soul of Pantheism, the Absolute of Philosophy, the desire to attain it and the movement towards it--so long as this is a genuine life process and not an intellectual speculation--is the proper subject of mysticism. I believe this movement to represent the true line of

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development of the highest form of human consciousness.\textsuperscript{157}

Finally, the notion of union with a higher Reality or Divine source is even represented in the secular world. Science Fiction Writer Arthur C. Clarke’s book \textit{Childhood’s End}\textsuperscript{158} is all about the transcendental evolution of humanity and its eventual connection/union with a higher source, or Overmind as it is portrayed in the book.

As you can see, the idea of ascension and the gradual union that occurs as the process unwinds is a big topic of authentic spirituality. From the Yoga of the East to the monastic practices of the West, a lot of space is given over in the spiritual literature of this planet to outlining authentic spiritual practices that encourage connection and perfection of union. And note, it is not just theoretical discussion. Indeed, the spiritual literature of this planet is filled with \textbf{connection manuals} (manuals that teach how to connect), \textbf{ascension manuals} (manuals that provide guidance on the process of ascension and union), \textbf{alignment manuals} (manuals that teach one how to act properly), and so on. Sankaracharya’s \textit{Crest-Jewel of Wisdom}, for example, is a classic of Vedic spirituality. It offers extended guidance on how to prepare one’s self for connection.\textsuperscript{159} Similarly, the Buddhist Eight Fold Path\textsuperscript{160} is a

\begin{multicols}{2}
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\textsuperscript{157}Underhill.  
\textsuperscript{158}Arthur C. Clarke, \textit{Childhood’s End} (New York: Del Rey, 1987).
\textsuperscript{160}Rahula, “The Noble Eightfold Path.”
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shorthand manual on the establishment of right thoughts, right actions, and the right environments conducive towards connection and union.

As with awakening and activation, the process of ascension and union can be experienced in both positive/zenith and negative/nadir ways. People can experience and even integrate bliss and joy, cosmic wonder, and deep revelation, but they can also experience flooding, ego explosion, existential terrors, and other nadir-type connection experiences that are difficult to integrate. Flooding, for example, can occur when an individual’s thought process during connection are so overwhelming that the individual loses control and becomes “flooded” by thoughts and emotions so big, and moving so fast, that the bodily ego is simply incapable of processing “in the moment.” Recall Cortright here:

New and expanded states of consciousness [caused by connection] can overwhelm the ego. An infusion of powerful spiritual energies can flood the body and mind, fragmenting the structures of the self and temporarily incapacitating the person until they can be assimilated.161

What do you do if you are overwhelmed during an ascension experience? Deep breathing, a cold shower, a calm nature walk, and even rocking in a fetal position can help get you through the negative experience, but beyond

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these “trauma” measures, dealing with it will require psychological and emotional processing, spiritual re-education, sophisticated spiritually focussed therapy, and, in rare cases, even mental health assistance. Providing extended this guidance is beyond the scope of this work, and there isn’t much “out there” in the way of authentic and meaningful help, especially when dealing with the neurosis and psychosis that may result; but some work has been done on the issue. If you wish to explore more, Grof’s “Spiritual Emergency”\textsuperscript{162} may help. In the meantime, be proactive and work to establish right thought, right action, and right environment conducive and supportive of connection and union.

Conclusion

A lot more could be said, and a lot more research has to be done, on the four outcome measures of healing, awakening, activation, and ascension, in particular how to overcome resistance, how to facilitate positive connection experience, how to deal with nadir experiences, and how to approach and understand connection pathology. Pieces of relevant research in neurology, psychology, sociology, and even medicine are now beginning to appear, but scientists are really just at the start (more accurately restart) of inquiry. Hopefully at this point however you get a general sense of what authentic spirituality might mean, and a general notion how we might approach understanding and investigating the area.

\textsuperscript{162}Grof and Grof, \textit{Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes a Crises}. 
With the ideas of authentic spirituality, connection, and connection outcomes under your belt, you have enough to be able to assess the authenticity of a spiritual path or practice, to a point. If a spirituality, religion, or practice leads you to connection experiences, and if these connection experiences lead to connection outcomes, then the spirituality or practice is likely authentic. However, just looking for connection experiences and connection outcomes is not enough. As I point out in an article entitled “Everyone Has a Connection Experience,” connection experiences are not rare and they are not difficult to induce.\textsuperscript{163} In fact, chances are that when you resolve nomenclature confusion and include nadir experiences in the mix, just about everybody is going to have had at least one of these experiences at some point in their life, probably more. The ease at which these experiences may be triggered means that coming up with practices that induce connection is probably not that hard, and it can probably happen just about anywhere, and under the influence of just about anyone with a basic understanding of the process. From Churches to nature resorts, from Osho led ashrams to Masonic lodges and “satanic” temples, the best-kept secret of connection is that it is very easy to accomplish.

Of course, the question that arises at this point is simple. Is an experience triggered by the teaching of a selfish satanic priest in a black ritual, an egoistic new age guru in an ashram surrounded by Rolls Royce limousines, or an exclusive invite-to-the-rich-only Masonic Lodge, the

\textsuperscript{163}Sosteric, “Everybody Has a Connection Experience: Prevalence, Confusions, Interference, and Redefinition.”
same as a connection experience led by a teacher like Christ, Suzuki, Eckhart, or Muhammad? Intuitively the answer would be no. Scientifically, there is minimal, if any, research which distinguishes between the types of connection experiences induced in a Masonic Lodge versus the types of connection experiences induced in a monastery devoted to human service, or a retreat devoted to yogic union, but there are likely major differences. As we saw briefly under the connection outcome of activation, most mystics emphasize ethical and moral action, service to the poor, ministering to the sick, or other self-less actions as prerequisites of authentic connection. A connection experience arrived at in that sort of context is probably very different than connection experience arrived at in a Mason’s lodge surrounded by business people.

Anyway...

Given that there are likely differences between the types of connection experiences and outcomes induced in Masonic lodges versus the types induced in temples led by selfless teachers, it seems reasonable to suggest that there is more to authentic spirituality than merely having a connection experience. The question before us now is, what is that more?

In the final section of this book, we are going to look at additional factors which we would argue should be present in a spirituality if it is to be considered authentic. We call these factors the Seven Pillars of Authentic Spirituality. These pillars are high standards, strict

\[164\] Christ’s Sermon on the Mount is the classic example here. https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+5-7&version=NIV
standards, and they must be present in any spirituality or spiritual practice in order for it to stake the claim that it is authentic. If the pillars of authentic spirituality are not present, the spiritual system and the person pimping the system are not authentic, period, end of sentence, closing paragraph, new chapter. If these pillars are not reflected in the actions of the gurus and the teachings of the masters of the path, my advice would be to avoid the teachings, avoid the teachers, and find a different path home. Until you are comfortable with connection and can manage it on your own, best to be critical and discerning, and best to avoid those practices and teachers that do not perfectly reflect the Seven Pillars as outlined next.
Part Three:
Seven Pillars of Authentic Spirituality

As noted in the previous unit of this book, healing, awakening, activation, and ascension are outcome measures you can use to assess whether the connection experiences you have, and the spiritual path you are following, is authentic or not. Most of the time, these experiences are positive; however, sometimes they can be negative, or have negative elements. Whether zenith or nadir, experiences of healing, awakening, activation, and ascension towards union are significant connection outcomes and should be present if a spirituality is to be counted as authentic.

Connection, connection experiences, and connection outcomes are important indicators of authentic spirituality, but by themselves, they are not enough to guarantee a path is authentic. This is because, despite propaganda to the contrary, connection experiences are not that hard to come by. Indeed, as pointed out in an article entitled “Everybody has a connection experience,”165 people often have them spontaneously. Not only that, but connection experiences are easy to induce. Various Connection Techniques have been developed over the centuries that work to facilitate connection. In addition, individuals can use powerful

165Sosteric, “Everybody Has a Connection Experience: Prevalence, Confusions, Interference, and Redefinition.”
Connection Supplements\textsuperscript{166} to induce connection experience, either on their own or in “Shamanic” settings.

FYI, a connection supplement is a natural or artificial supplement like Cannabis, Psilocybin, Ahuahsca, LSD, and so on, that forces a connection between spiritual ego and bodily ego. As Bennet notes, connection supplements like cannabis have been used to facilitate connection for thousands of years.

Whether connection happens spontaneously or is induced by techniques or supplements is beside the point here, however. The point here is, connection is easy to come by and many people, even mentally ill people, can have them at least once.

It is important to understand, connection experiences can be powerful and transformative, but they represent only brief hints of what is really possible when we persistently and consistently pursue union through connection practice. In other words, union between spiritual ego and bodily ego is not a binary “now you’ve done it” sort of thing. It is a process of continual improvement of connection. It requires more than just a single “nirvana” experience or two, no matter how powerful and enlightening that single experience may be. As evidenced by the copious spiritual corpus of this planet, authentic progress on an authentic spiritual path requires good schools, good teachers, and lots of practice. Indeed, perfect union requires ongoing healing and connection practice, and ongoing effort to merge and unite. It requires

\textsuperscript{166} Chris Bennett, Liber 420: Cannabis, Magickal Herbs and the Occult (Walterville, OR: Trine Day, 2018).

http://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/Connection_Supplements
spiritual, psychological, education, mental, emotional healing and training, as well as appropriate and supportive environments, and accurate and authentic Connection Frameworks.\textsuperscript{167}

A connection framework is an organized training system designed to teach you how to connect. Every culture has its own established connection framework, which is more or less effective. Some examples that come to mind here are Zen Buddhism, Sufism (the “mystical” side of Islam), and Monastic Christianity (the mystical side of the Catholic Church). In addition, new connection frameworks pop up from time to time, like the Arica School of Oscar Ichazo,\textsuperscript{168} as do “special interest” connection frameworks, like the connection framework provided by Freemasonry.

Do you really need a connection framework to help you connect? To be sure, you can go about it on your own. You can learn how to open, control, and ground a connection without the help of a teacher or a connection framework. Zen Buddhists have a name for someone like that. They call it Jiriki (self-power), which is seeking enlightenment (read connection) through one’s own effort and practice, without outside assistance. However, sorting it all out on your own is a lot of work, it can take a long time, and, for reasons I’ll go into at a later date, the process is prone to bias and error. You can make faster progress if you find good resources. But then, the question is, what is a

\textsuperscript{167}https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/Connection_Framework

good resource? How do you find an authentic spiritual teacher and/or an authentic connection framework. Whose books do you read? Whose videos do you watch? Whose churches and temples do you attend? It sounds like an easy decision. Just walk into some spiritually inclined book store and pick up a book, go to a local established church, enter an esoteric temple, or select the guru with the most convincing connection account,¹⁶⁹ and follow along from there.

Unfortunately, it is not that easy. For one, even though connection and connection outcomes are important tests of authenticity, they are insufficient to guarantee spiritual sophistication and spiritual authenticity. Despite what we might think, just because somebody has had a powerful connection experience or two doesn’t make them suddenly liberated and enlightened. As noted in the previous section, connection outcomes are relatively easy to accomplish. What is more noteworthy, even those with serious mental illness can experience connection.¹⁷⁰ Not only that,

¹⁶⁹A connection account is somebody’s account of their own connection experience. Connection accounts are peppered throughout the spiritual literature of this planet. Connection accounts always include an actual description of connection, and they usually include some indication of the connection outcomes that resulted. Sometime, they may even indicate the connection supplement or connection practice that induced the connection experience. Connection outcomes are often taken as signs of spiritual legitimacy and spiritual wisdom, though of course they can be easily falsified.

connection experiences can be hard to interpret and easy to misunderstand, especially when filtered through unexamined bias. Just because an individual has a connection experience, doesn’t mean this person is instantly enlightened, liberated, emancipated, and capable of teaching others. Similarly, just because a connection framework purports to provide you with authentic spirituality, doesn’t mean it does. Judging a spiritual teacher or framework by the presence or purported presence of a connection experience and a connection outcome or two is insufficient.

Corrupted Connection Frameworks

We can add substance to these statements by considering some extant connection frameworks which have been corrupted. There are examples down through the centuries of authentic connection frameworks being co-opted and corrupted by special interest groups with no real interest in authentic spiritual. One example that comes to mind here are the teachings of Zoroaster. Zoroaster was an ancient Persian mystic whose connection experiences, and the wisdom they purportedly proffered, were transmitted by word of mouth for several centuries before they were finally co-opted from the word of mouth record and written down by elite priests in ancient Sasanian courts, during the third century A.D. Why did the elite write the teachings down? As pointed out in an article entitled “From Zoroaster to Star Wars, Jesus to Marx; The Science and

Technology of Mass Human Behaviour,” it was not because they wanted people to connect and empower. After all, an empowered citizenry might overthrow lordly elites. Instead, the ancient priests used the Zoroastrian faith as a foundation upon which they created a spiritual ideology of submission and control that allowed them to suppress, manipulate, and incite the masses to violence and attack. This spiritual ideology was organized around what we would call ideological nodes.

The ideological nodes developed by Sasanian priests are identified in the article, and we will not rehearse them here. However, as an example here, one of the more powerful nodes provided by Zoroastrianism is the notion of a cosmic fight between good and evil. The Zoroastrian faith purports a battle between cosmic forces of good and evil, personified as Ahura Mazda and Agra Mainu. This battle is a battle in which humans must pick a side. Humans pick a side and then fight the evil ones on the other side, sometimes to the death. Of course, it is always the other side that is evil. The ideology always encourages people to ignore their own vile behaviours, and focus on the perpetrator. Thus a crusading Knight or Jihadist is fighting for “good,” even though the might massacre women and children in the process.

Elites use this ideology, and in particular the “good versus evil” node, to incite their populations to violence. All an elite agent has to do is convince their people that some “other” population in another city-state or country is

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172 See Sosteric, “From Zoroaster to Star Wars, Jesus to Marx: The Science and Technology of Mass Human Behaviour.”

173 https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/Ideological_Node
“evil,” and their people will be primed for attack. You can see how these nodes would be useful not only for defense, but also for imperialist attack. If you can convince “your” people that “their” people are vile, evil, communist, atheist, rapist, satanic hordes, you can get your armies to attack. You can also see these nodes being used in contemporary global politics. Donald Trump, 45th president of the United States, is a master as using these nodes to weaponize individuals and groups and turn them against his enemies, like the press, or the liberal elite.

As you can see, this node, which is active even to do this day not only in exoteric religion, but also in Hollywood productions like Star Wars and every Marvel movie ever made, is particularly useful for any ruler, democratic or otherwise, who wants to get their hands on the resources of other beings and needs to use the people as a weapon of attack.

To be perfectly honest, since we don’t have a record of the word of mouth teachings of Zoroaster, and since our only record of these teachings is what the Sasanian priests wrote down in the Gathas, we’ll never know what Zoroaster actually had to say about things, so we’ll never be able to argue with certainty that the Persian elites co-opted a Zoroastrian connection framework to create an ideological frame for the manipulation of the masses; but, the fact that “good versus evil” is still used by world leaders today to justify imperialism and murder is a pretty strong argument that these nodes are in fact elite tools. There is less doubt

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about elite interference, however, when it comes to Christ and Catholicism, because there are written records (the Gospels) of Christ’s activities, and we know these records were co-opted and edited by elite agents. As we discover when we actually read the New Testament, as I did while researching an article entitled “Rock and Roll Jesus,” Christ was a populist revolutionary leader who was anti-hate and anti-establishment. He came out against hypocrisy and corruption and was wildly popular as a result. Because of his rapidly growing popularity, and because of his progressive message, he was a clear threat to the elites of the time. In the hopes of curtailing the impact of his teachings, the elites of the time had him assassinated. As outline in the article, that didn’t work. His assassination martyred him and ignited a connection wildfire. People were talking about it, writing about it, and organically spreading the word far and wide. To stop the revolution from spreading, the elites had to do more than simply assassinate the leader.

Their solution, in addition to persecution, was to co-opt the original teachings. The watershed moment came at the Synod of Hippo when then emperor Constantine got together with a bunch of elite Catholic bishops and handpicked what we may presume to be the twenty-seven least radical, most conservative, “safest” Christian texts that were around at the time. The elite Bishops put these twenty-seven safe (for them) texts together into what they called the New Testament Bible. Then, they tossed the rest away and presented this elite-approved canon to

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175 Sosteric, “Rock and Roll Jesus: The Catholic Church and the Containment of Global Revolution.”
hungry Christians as the only written accounts that they could read. In this way, elites controlled what future generations would know about the personality and activities of Christ.

Now, the faithful might like to think, perhaps because it preserves their spiritual investment and saves them some face, that the activities of the emperor and his cadre of elite bishops were benign. However, subsequent actions of the Church highlight their true motivation, which was to suppress the revolutionary texts.

One thing that the elites in the Catholic did, in addition to their purge of the written record, was hide even the cannon they had chosen away. To be clear, they hid the Bible that they created away in monasteries, kept it in a language few people at the time could read, and wouldn’t let peasants read it. As Bernard Starr notes, “the Church actually discouraged the populace from reading the Bible

176 Although note that some of the “Lost Gospels” have been rediscovered. These are presented in the Nag Hamadi library. James M. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library: The Definitive New Translation of the Gnostic Scriptures*, Third (San Francisco: Harper, 1988).


178 Starr uses the word “discouraged,” but as he himself points out, the Church actually executed people for spreading the word. This is a level above mere “discouragement.” It is active suppression of
on their own — a policy that intensified through the Middle Ages.” ¹⁷⁹ They prohibited the “laity” from having access to the New Testament, they burned any copies that existed outside the Church, they even burned people at the stake who tried to distribute and/or translate the Bible! In 1536, William Tyndale was strangled and burned by the Catholic Church for having the unmitigated, revolutionary, heretical gall of having the Latin bible translated and printed in English so that the people could read it directly.⁻¹⁸⁰

Another thing the elites did that speaks to their true motivation, in addition to purging the literature and hiding the remaining away, was mercilessly edit it once it was in their control. The truth is, the bible you read today is not the bible that was created at the council of Hippo. The bible of today is a heavily edited version of the original New Testament. Even conservative Christian scholars admit the spiritual teachings. Bernard Starr, Jesus Uncensored: Restoring the Authentic Jew (OmniHouse Publishing, 2013).

¹⁷⁹ Bernard Starr, “Why Christians Were Denied Access to Their Bible for 1,000 Years.” Also check out this web page http://www.aloha.net/~mikesch/banned.htm. It lists documentary evidence of a centuries long attempt by members of the elite to prevent the public from accessing the bible.

bible has been edited thousands of times,\(^\text{181}\) and this is not insignificant. Even if one could argue that the edits were mostly grammar and punctuation edits, this is enough to seriously call into question the activities of the elite church. Even a single punctuation mark can dramatically change the meaning of a sentence! Consider the following example:

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\begin{align*}
\text{A woman without her man is nothing} \\
\text{A woman: without her, man is nothing.}
\end{align*}
\]

Only two punctuation marks are changed, yet the meaning of the sentence is reversed. One of the above statements is empowering to women, and the other beats her down. When you remember the Bible has been edited thousands of times by the Church, this is shocking. If even a colon and a comma can change the meaning of a sentence, you can imagine the modifications that become possible when you have hundreds of years to privately edit “the Word.”

At this point, a couple of questions may be lingering. The first question that may linger is, if the teachings of Christ were such a threat, why not simply erase the books altogether? The answer is simply that it was too late. By the time the elites got around to co-opting the corpus, his teaching had already spread far enough that any attempt to

simply erase them would likely have led to a violent uprising.\textsuperscript{182} Assassination hadn’t stopped the revolutionary message from spreading, it just made it worse; trying to burn all the accounts wouldn’t do it either. It would probably just make it worse.

Another question that may linger at this point is about the actual power of the Christ’s life, and his teachings. Was his life and work really a threat? Did the elites really put in centuries of effort trying to suppress the Gospels for fear of the revolution they might insight? It sounds like magical thinking, as I’m sure Richard Dawkins would agree, but consider the story of Spanish conquistador Bartolome de las Casas. Bartolome de las Casas was a member of the 16th century Spanish elite. He was directly involved in the colonization of Hispaniola and Cuba. As Fiske notes of the repressive practices of the colonizers:

 Indians were slaughtered by the hundreds, burned alive, impaled on sharp stakes, torn to pieces by blood-hounds. In retaliation for the murder of a Spaniard, it was thought proper to call up fifty or sixty Indians and chop off their hands. Little children were flung into the water to drown with less concern than if they had been puppies. In the mingling of sacred ideas with the sheerest devilry, there was a grotesqueness fit for the pencil of Dore. Once, “in honour and reverence of Christ and his twelve Apostles,” they hanged thirteen Indians in a row at such a height that their toes could just touch

\textsuperscript{182}Sosteric, “Rock and Roll Jesus: The Catholic Church and the Containment of Global Revolution.”
the ground and then pricked them to death with their sword-points, taking care not to kill them quickly. At another time, when some old reprobate was broiling half a dozen Hideout Indians in a kind of cradle suspended over a slow fire, their shrieks awoke the Spanish captain who, in a neighboring hut, was taking his afternoon nap and he called out testily to the man to despatch those wretches at once and stop their noise. But this demon, determined not to be baulked of his enjoyment, only gagged the poor creatures.\(^\text{183}\)

Las Casas was considered one of the worst of the worst, a monster by any account, until one day while in Cuba, while reading from a Church pulpit, he read the following words from the bible:

>The Most High is not pleased with the offerings of the wicked: neither is he pacified for sin by the multitude of sacrifices. The bread of the needy is their life; he that defraudeth him thereof is a man of blood. He that taketh away his neighbors’ living slayeth him; and he that defraudeth the laborer of his hire is a shedder of blood (Sira 34: 21-23).

Upon reading these words, Las Casas had a classic connection experience, and was instantly transformed by it. Fiske provides an account of the dramatic awakening.\(^\text{184}\)


\(^{184}\) Fiske, *The Historical Writings of John Fiske: The Discovery of America*. 114
As he read these words, a light from heaven seemed to shine upon Las Casas. The scales fell from his eyes. He saw that the system of slavery was wrong in principle. The question whether you treated your slaves harshly or kindly did not go to the root of the matter. As soon as you took from the laborer his wages, the deadly sin was committed; the monstrous evil was inaugurated. There must be a stop put to this, said Las Casas. We have started wrong. Here, are vast countries which the Holy Church has given to the Spaniards in trust, that the heathen may be civilized and brought into the fold of Christ; and we have begun by making Hispaniola a hell. This thing must not be suffered to grow with the growth of Spanish conquest. There was but one remedy. The axe must be put to the root of the tree. Slavery must be abolished.

Following his transformative experience, Las Casas gave up his slaves, went into the pulpit, and preached against the practice. He sold his worldly goods and went to visit the King of Spain, the Bishop Fonesca, and others. He became politically active and was a key figure and major influence not only in advocating against slavery, but in advocating for the idea that the slaves were human and had souls. Eventually, he went on to write a rather disturbing book on Spanish treatment of slaves where he provides a first-hand account of a horrific genocide that left Hispaniola a ruinous and desolate waste.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ If you are interested in Las Casas first-hand account and condemnation, you can read the book. It is available from Project
You can see the threat represented by even the watered down bible the elites provided. It was so powerful, even a top member of the one percent could be instantly transformed by simply reading the words. No wonder the Catholic patriarchs did not want the masses reading it. No wonder some people were willing to risk persecution and immolation (e.g., William Tyndale) just to get the bible into the hands of the people.

As we know, the efforts of the Church to suppress even the watered down and edited accounts of Christ’s life eventually, with the creation of the printing press, collapsed. After that, it was no longer possible to keep the bible out of the hands of the masses. This didn’t mean the Church gave up, however. In an ongoing effort to control access to the bible, they organized Christian worship into Sunday masses and required the faithful to listen to a Catholic functionary (a priest) read and interpret out-of-context snippets of the bible for them. I know of no sociological research comparing what the priests say in their Sunday services, with what is actually in the bible; however, as a child, I did attend church regularly and I know a) the priests never talked about connection or connection experience and b) they never spoke of the revolutionary content of Christ’s teachings, or his revolutionary example. Taking quotes out of context, they spun the teachings and took both connection and revolution out. Instead, they portrayed Christ as a meek and passive Sheppard of sheeple, giving deference to a patriarchal and “godly” authority.

If you recall from the previous section of this book, awakening and activation are common connection outcomes. If you understand the exoteric Church represents world elites and not the interests of the people, you can understand why the Church would suppress, sanitize, and spin accounts of Christ’s life into their opposite. You can also understand the problem spiritual seekers have. The Church will no doubt claim to provide an authentic avenue for human spiritual experience and practice, but does it really? For all the reasons outlined so far, at least when it comes to exoteric and non-monastic aspects of Christianity, the answer is no; but you can decide for yourself.

When it comes to assessing the authenticity of exoteric spirituality, in my view, we can stop on the absence of a concern with connection experience. However, there are others aspects of Christianity that arguably retain concern with connection experience. There is a place in the Christian fabric for spiritual experience. Monk and nuns in the Christian mystical tradition monastic traditions of Christianity speak of connection experience (which they call union with God, or a divine marriage) and even provide advice on how to attain it. The book *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*\(^{186}\) by 6th century Christian mystic John Climacus is an example in this regard, as are the works of St. Teresa of Avila.\(^{187}\) And, as pointed out earlier, activation is a

\(^{186}\) Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*.

component of Christian mystical tradition.\textsuperscript{188} There are also aspects of Christianity that retain the revolutionary character of the original teachings, for example, Liberation Theology. Finally, there are Christian “esoteric” traditions\textsuperscript{189} that do overtly claim, at least to their members, that they provide an authentic connection framework. Freemasonry is one example of that. Freemasonry is definitely a connection framework, since Freemasons use words and images that clearly indicate a concern with connection and union. Just do an online image search for “Masonic tracing board” and you will see ladders of ascent to starry realms of higher awareness and consciousness. As one Mason says, “...we must climb the steps to achieve a type of gnosis which comes with the achievement of...an inseparable union.”\textsuperscript{190} This is classic connection talk.

Do Christian monastic traditions, Liberation Theology, Freemasonry, and so on, qualify as authentic connection frameworks? If our only measure was whether or not these frameworks provided a path towards connection experience, the answer would be yes and we

\textsuperscript{188}Harvey, \textit{Teachings of the Christian Mystics}.

\textsuperscript{189}An esoteric tradition is an institutionalized, but “secret,” spiritual tradition. Esoteric traditions provide spiritual knowledge outside of and hidden from the mainstream. Esoteric traditions are generally exclusive, often male-only, invite-only affairs open only to a “chosen few.” You have to be invited into the fold to be a Freemason, for example. Members are treated to “secret” knowledge available only to membership.

\textsuperscript{190}Gregory B. Stewart, \textit{Fellow of the Craft; A Treatise on the Second Degree of Freemasonry} (FMI Publishing, 2015), 40.
could stop right here. However, it is likely more complicated than that. In my view, Christian monastic traditions represent a containment of connection experience. Monastic traditions are not open traditions. Their members are cloistered, confined, and subject to Clerical authority. For example, in *The Way of Perfection*, St. Teresa of Avila repeatedly appeals to and confirms her submission to the authority of the Church Bishops.\(^{191}\) It is an open question how much authenticity is retained within an institutional fabric (i.e. Christianity) that is hostile to certain connection outcomes.

As for Freemasonry, as discussed in the article “The Sociology of Tarot,” these are elite organizations with elite agendas.\(^{192}\) They use the cover of esoteric spirituality to bend and twist human spirituality in the service of their economic and political interests. The clear affiliation of Freemasonry with economic elites and their creation of spiritual propaganda in the form of the Western Tarot deck belie any claims they might make concerning the authenticity of their tradition.

**Uneducated, Biased and Mentally Ill Gurus**

If Christian monastic traditions represent a sanitized and contained mysticism, and if Freemasonry and other esoteric organizations represent elite manipulation of human spirituality, then it is doubtful you can rely on the presence of connection experience and connection outcome to assess authenticity.

\(^{191}\)St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*.

\(^{192}\)Sosteric, “A Sociology of Tarot.”

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Unfortunately, the problem of assessing the authenticity of a spirituality goes beyond the institutional component of human spirituality. Even if you do find a relatively pure representation of spiritual truths about connection, for example, in a tradition like Zen Buddhism, there is still the issue of who teaches the framework. If you follow a connection framework, your interface with that framework is always at least partially mediated by another human being who has written a book or who teaches in an ashram, monastery, or whatever. Teachers who teach spiritual traditions are human and can introduce biases, confusions, and other problems which can corrupt and skew even a relatively pure connection framework.

One problem we often find is simply naive and confused teachers. The problem is that when it comes to “mystical” experience, people can claim to be experienced sojourners, spiritual teachers, and gurus despite having had little or no training or connection experience. Often all that is required for a person to don the Mantle of Spiritual Authority is that a person have a single spiritual experience or two and *boom*, suddenly they believe themselves to be a fully qualified spiritual teacher capable of proselytizing about the deepest mystical (read connection) issues. This would be kind of like a skier without medical training successfully relocating a dislocated shoulder, and then presuming that this makes them a fully trained doctor. They may have latent skill, but that’s as far as it goes.

This tendency for **naive initiates** to instantly turn on as fully qualified spiritual teachers despite the fact they’ve only had a single experience is a problem that occurs frequently enough. Just scan the YouTube airways. It
happens because connection experiences are intoxicating. They come quite easily, they can be quite powerful, and even a single experience can leave you with a deep sense of gnosis and enlightenment. Unfortunately, the powerful experience can fool an individual into thinking they have already reached their goal and that they are qualified to proselytize, even when they are merely naive, have only started their journey, or are deeply confused.\textsuperscript{193} It is well-known in the psychological literature on mystical experience that people struggle with their “ineffable” “noetic” initial experiences. They struggle to understand. Even when they themselves understand, they still struggle to put their experiences into words. Not that you need to be an Arhat Buddha\textsuperscript{194} just to talk about and research connection, but you do have to be aware, people struggle to understand and explain, and they are not always aware of their own struggle. In fact, sometimes, like the lucky skier who successfully set a bone, they project experience and wisdom even when they are still quite naive.

The tendency for naive initiates to adopt a mantle of authority is more common than you might think. For example, Canadian medical doctor Richard Bucke wrote a classic text on connection experience entitled \textit{Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind},\textsuperscript{195} despite the fact that he only ever had one connection

\textsuperscript{193}This is a problem noted in by Sufi ‘Ala’ al-Dawla Simnan in the book \textit{The Clarification of the Virtue of People of Divine Knowledge} (d. 1336), in Carl W. Ernst, \textit{Teachings of Sufism} (Boston: Shambhala, 1999).

\textsuperscript{194}In Theravada Buddhism, an Arhat is an individual who has achieved “nirvana,” or someone who can maintain connection on a relatively permanent bases.
experience, and not a very impressive one at that. The book is not without merit. At the same time, however, it was written by a naive initiate with only one connection experience. A more sophisticated, critical, and informed reading may ultimately reveal it lacks breadth and depth.

Obviously, looking directly at a solar eclipse doesn’t instantly make you a nuclear physicist. Similarly, a single “cosmic” experience doesn’t make you a trained and healthy Bodhisattva, capable of teaching the world. In fact, a single experience, even a dozen, cannot guarantee clarity of vision, purity of intent, pedagogical sophistication, or even mental health. The truth is, people can have a connection experience, or even ten, and still be confused, greedy, power hungry, and even mentally ill.

A good example of confusion is the case of Carlos Castaneda. Castaneda was a mystical anthropologist who claimed to have shamanic style connection experiences and who published several successful books touting the “Yaqui

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196 It takes a lot to develop authentic spirituality to the point where it can be presented to the world and it takes more than just knowledge to be able to teach it properly. Additional skill and training goes into writing and teaching connection. The extra effort that goes into being a “connection” teacher is probably why traditional spiritualties reserve their highest status positions to teachers who come to teach the masses, like “saviours,” “prophets,” “buddhi,” “brahmani,” and so on. There is a discussion of this by ‘Ala’ al-Dawla Simnani where he attempts to distinguish an experience teacher from one without the necessary depth of knowledge and virtue. See *The Clarification of the Virtue of People of Divine Knowledge.* ‘Ala’ al-Dawla Simnani (d. 1336), excerpted in Ernst, *Teachings of Sufism.*
Way of Knowledge.” As it turns out, however, he made most of his stuff up. He may have had authentic connection experiences, in fact he probably did, but for whatever reason (mental health, ego, laziness, the need to feel special, his own confusion, etc.), he stepped out of bounds, failed to represent them in an authentic and rigorous fashion, and may have in fact made a large portion of his “teachings” up. Castaneda sounds authentic and real, to someone who doesn’t know better. However, anybody who thinks Castaneda’s Yaqui teachings are authentic will waste time on spiritual vapour, will be confused by the meaningless conceptualizations, and will be frustrated in their attempts to find authentic spirituality and authentic connection. Sadly and unfortunately, the publisher of his works, Simon and Schuster, continues to misrepresent the corpus as non-fiction, and people continue to go to Carlos Castaneda seeking authentic spiritual knowledge. Shockingly, I even had a senior academic colleague recommend me to Carlos Castaneda once.

Confusion and misrepresentation are not the only “sins” of the initiatory naive. Money and power play a big role as well. There are well-known instances of “spiritual” teachers motivated by little more than a venal desire to line their pockets and dominate others. Being a spiritual teacher, especially one who claims to have had connection

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198 Marshall, “The Dark Legacy of Carlos Castaneda.”

199 Perhaps because profit is more important than truth, or perhaps because they are participating in the confusion and misdirection.
experiences, carries with it a certain amount of “mystical” status and prestige, and this status and prestige can easily be translated into respect, book sales, subscription fees, and so on. Of course, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with money, power, status, and respect, but if these things become the primary motivations for teaching an authentic spirituality, the authenticity can be jeopardized. The basic problem is this: someone who is motivated by money and power will, even if they truly understand the scholarship and experience of connection, shape and distort their teachings in a way that supports their enrichment and empowerment at the expense of authentic teaching. They will lock seekers into complicated hierarchies, engage in manipulative and unethical practices, and charge hundreds of thousand of dollars to unlock advanced content.\textsuperscript{200} Each new level of “attainment,” each impotent step towards spiritual enlightenment (and it must be impotent because if you successfully connect someone, there is no reason for them to keep handing over their money) brings additional and sometimes obscene expense, which goes on to fund boats and Rolls Royces, but which ultimately only the rich, or those willing to sell their homes and possessions, can afford. Regardless of how authentic the original source of a teaching may be, when money, status, and power are the goal, money, status, and power become the focus, and all

manner of manipulative and unethical practices may be engaged in, in order to reach the venal goal.\textsuperscript{201}

Losing your money and all your possessions to some questionable spiritual hack is unfortunate, but it is hardly the most significant loss you can face, especially when mental illness is involved. Consider Jonestown in Guyana in 1978 where 918 otherwise intelligent, progressive, and educated people drank cyanide-laced cool aid at the behest of their spiritual “father,” Jim Jones. Jim Jones was clearly mentally ill. There were obvious warning signs of this right from the start, but victims and survivors blithely ignored these warnings, not because they were stupid, but because they were desperately seeking spiritual, political, and social authenticity in a chaotic and changing world, and because Jim Jones seemed, at least at the start, to provide that authenticity. By survivor accounts, Jones started out a seemingly awake, activated, spiritually sophisticated, powerful, progressive, egalitarian, socialist leader seeking to build a utopian society free of inequality and racism.\textsuperscript{202} In their desperation to realize this promised authenticity, they ignored warning signs and became trapped in a descending spiral of violence, paranoia, and indoctrination, with absolutely disastrous results.


Between the venal enterprises of publisher supported spiritual charlatans and the murderous activities of cult leaders like Jim Jones lies a vast and turbulent ocean of spiritually naive, confused, villainous, and mentally ill actors who talk about everything from corrupted filaments of God to cosmic shape-shifting lizards and cosmic intergalactic conspiracies. Sometimes, as in the case of paranoid schizophrenic Daniel Paul Schreber, the connection and the mental illness are obvious. At other times, the mental illness is obscured behind a patina of charisma, reason, intelligence, and superficial authenticity which makes it hard for some to distinguish and discern. Such is the case of David Icke who seems to have had authentic connection experiences, but whose connection experiences are filtered through a paranoid and racist intellectual and emotional framework.

The question for the person interested in authentic spirituality at this point is, how do you tell the difference between someone who has had many connection experiences and who has spent time healing their damage, establishing mental health, and integrating and grounding their experience, from someone who is naive, confused, venally motivated, and possibly mentally ill? It is an important question not only because following along behind a half-cocked paranoid schizophrenic messiah whose only interest is money and power probably won’t

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203 Schreber, Memoirs of My Nervous Illness.
lead to anywhere authentic, but because sometimes, lives are at stake.

Answering the question is a bit of challenge, and it is a challenge we cannot ignore. As my partner and I argue in “The Seven Essential Needs,” humans have powerful, and probably biologically rooted, spiritual needs for actualization of, and connection to, Self. These needs can no more extinguished than you can extinguish our need for nutritious food and water. But just like a corporation can divert your need for nutritious food to “satisfy” you with processed junk, so to can corporations, hucksters, charlatans, and the elite’s actors, divert you down confusing and impotent pathways. We cannot ignore these spiritual needs and we cannot ignore the diversions that occur. We must raise the level of discourse and find ways to positively meet them, otherwise inauthentic traditions and mentally ill gurus will continue to ruin our days.

So, to return to the question, if the presence of connection experiences and connection outcomes are not enough to tell an authentic connection framework from an inauthentic framework, what else do we need? Well, if you want to increase your chances of finding an authentic connection framework and a knowledgeable teacher, you look, in addition to the presence of outcome measures, for the Seven Pillars of Authentic Spirituality. If you want to tell whether a connection framework, church, temple, priest, spiritual teacher, guru, evangelist, or whomever, is representing an authentic path, look for the Seven Pillars of Authentic Spirituality. Presence of all the Seven Pillars is a 205

strong indication that the spirituality being represented is authentic, pure, and not corrupted, colonized, or represented in confused or inauthentic ways. Absence of a single one is a red flag and clear invitation to get out.

And just what are the seven pillars of authentic spirituality? Linking back to our earlier discussion, the seven pillars of authentic spirituality are like the engineering standards that professional engineers use when they set about to build their safe bridges. Professional engineering standards are the ways of thinking about things, the procedures, the rules, and the guidelines that help engineers build solid and safe bridges. Likewise, the seven pillars are the standards upon which we can assess whether or not a spiritual tradition or spiritual teacher is authentic or not, and upon which we can build authentic, safe, spiritualties. When these seven pillars are present, you can be more confident that the path you are on, the person you are listening to, the screen you are connected with, or whatever, is providing authentic healing and connection guidance. When applied correctly, these pillars help you identify hucksters, pretenders, mentally ill gurus, and corrupted or ineffective systems of spirituality and thought, thereby saving you time, energy, confusion, and maybe even your life. If you find even one of the following pillars absent, *caveat emptor* applies.

We are going to move on to a discussion of these seven pillars in a moment. Before we do that, however, a few comments are in order. **First off,** be clear, these pillars are not outcome measures as defined in the previous section of this book. That is, these are not things that happen to you as a
consequence of connection. Rather, they are the things that you should look for to be present when “shopping around” for a path, a school, or a teacher that purports to offer connection guidance and human development. Think of these seven pillars as guideposts or markers, like fluorescent tags on a tree, that show you the way, even when it is dark and you are confused. If you are following a path of spirituality or human development, if a book you are reading or a teacher you are listening to does not present with all these pillars, chances are they are not fully authenticate.

Second, understand, even though these pillars are offered as guideposts and way signs, they are not intended as final statements on the nature of authentic spirituality or systems of human development. These pillars are not intended to end discussion and lay down final commandments. These pillars are provided to orient you to the idea of authentic spirituality and get you started on critically discerning psychological and spiritual practices. They are intended to initiate a much-needed discussion and dialogue on what counts as authentic spirituality. We certainly need a dialogue on what counts for accurate, professional, meaningful, and authentic spirituality, because authentic connection has profound implications for human health and well-being. It might even be implicated, as some suggest, and as we tend to agree, in saving the planet. We need to open a discussion and raise the bar on what counts as valid, reliable, and authentic spiritual and psychological practice. If we do not do this,

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206 Harvey, Teachings of the Christian Mystics.
then we risk seeing ourselves and the people we love led down paths of sleepy disconnection that sicken and disempower rather than heal, awaken, activate, and unite.

Who really wants that?

And besides, in a world characterized by powerful technologies of death and enslavement, looming political and economic crises, and life-ending ecological catastrophe, we really cannot continue to brook half-baked spirituality, half-cocked gurus, and twisted and corrupted offerings. If our world collapses because we can’t get people properly healed and connected, we are all doomed. We need to move forward and we need to move forward now.

Finally, third, be aware, there is a theory behind why these pillars are important and it has to do with the nature of the Consciousness that we connect to. I won’t go into detail about the nature of this Consciousness here except to repeat what I have said already, and which all mystics will agree with, is that Consciousness is characterized by awareness, compassion, bliss, love, and vast intelligence. If awareness, compassion, bliss, love, intelligence are not reflected in the actual teachings and practices of the path or the guru, if you find them exclusionary, mean, bitter, passive-aggressive, judgmental, irresponsible, stupid, ungrounded, and dis-empowering, you have reasonable cause for suspicion and very good reason to question the authenticity and sincerity of the guru, path, or tradition.

With all that said, it is now time to have a brief look at the Seven Pillars of Authentic Spirituality.
1. Accessible and Inclusive

The first pillar of authentic spirituality is accessibility and inclusivity. In the early stages of exploration, when you are just getting your footing on a path of spiritual/human development, when you are just starting to read and evaluate a new spiritual author or guru, whatever path you are considering should be accessible and inclusive.

What do accessibility and inclusivity mean? It means that the path should be open to all. It means that there should be no exclusions. It means that nobody should be left out or “left behind” for any reason. This includes any exclusions based on skin colour, ethnicity, age, genetics, gender, income, or any other superficial criteria, no matter what. Neither should there be one set of rules and expectations for one group, and a different set for another group. There should be no inner circles or secret chambers, and power and privilege should not be available only to a chosen a few.

How does a spirituality achieve accessibility and inclusivity? Obviously, it has to be open to the public, and it has to be financially accessible to everyone. If you have to be invited in, like for example with Freemasonry and other “secret” boys clubs, if you have to engage in secret rituals to advance in a hierarchy, think twice. Also, consider the financial cost. There is nothing wrong with paying for services but, at the same time, the fees have to be reasonable and there should always be an avenue in for those who cannot afford. It should never cost you your life savings and you should never be required to donate your
house and other assets. If you are being asked to give more than what a resource or service is fairly worth, move on.

Also note, accessibility and inclusivity are about more than throwing wide the door. In order for a spirituality to be accessible and inclusive, the door needs to be wide open and the teachings you find inside need to be clear and easy to understand. This should be obvious. If a spirituality is full of complicated jargon, esoteric verbiage, and pompous prognostication, what I, tongue in cheek, call EPMO, it won’t be accessible and inclusive. The goal of authentic spirituality is to develop a system that can enlighten and connect everybody. The only way to do that is to make things as simple and accessible as possible. You should not have to be a rocket scientist or a rabbinical rabbi to understand awakening, activation, connection, or the deep truths of creation. If you do, then something is askew. Despite what some people might say, obtuse and esoteric complexity does not represent valid spirituality. EPMO is a simple recipe for hierarchy, control, and exclusion. People who offer complex jargon as spiritual knowledge have one goal and one goal only, to exclude some people from their club.

The stipulation that authentic spirituality should communicate and be accessible applies not only to the meaning of things, it also extends to the interpretation of things. There should be no ambiguity in the teachings of an authentic path. Likewise, there should be no doubt and confusion. You should know what things mean, period.

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207 Egotistical, Polly syllabic, Multimeta hporic, Obfuscation—EPMO—https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/EPMO

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Clear, precise, grounded and easy to understand teachings are important. Clarity and precision remove barriers to inclusion, while ambiguity and confusion raise barriers. If you cannot understand things, you are immediately on the outside. What is worse, ambiguity and confusion allow for hierarchy and domination to emerge. Lack of clarity and precision allows for the development of distinctions between those who “know” and are “worthy,” and those who do not know and are unworthy. It also facilitates massive global division where some people, some sects, some denominations, some clubs, some nations, some “races,” may feel they are superior and have the “right” interpretation, while others do not. When people start thinking that they are the only ones with the truth, or the only ones who can understand, the ground becomes fertile for the development of hierarchy, exclusion, and even violence.

Clarity and precision contribute to accessibility and inclusion, and help avoid the development of hierarchies and violence, and so they are important. The most important reason we need clarity and precision, however, is so we can judge for ourselves. If we are going to be able to assess a spirituality, spiritual practice, or spiritual guru/teacher, if we are going to rely on our own thoughts.

\[\text{To be sure, more advanced discussions might pose pedagogical challenges for those just starting on the path. That is, if you are new to the path and you do not know the concepts and ideas, you might have trouble understanding at first, and you might have learning to do. In the end, however, if you learn the concepts and ideas, the meanings should be clear and you should be able to understand and agree. When you cannot pin the meaning of spiritual texts down precisely, something is terribly wrong.}\]
and not the authority of someone else, we need clarity and precision. If a spirituality is confusing, if the concepts are messy and unclear, if you have to dig through multiple dusty volumes filled brimming over with obtuse and contorted EPMO, how can you tell if your path is authentic or the priest or guru knows what they are talking about? The answer is, you cannot. If a spirituality is filled with confusing and convoluted verbiage, if concepts are poorly specified and set out, and if it is all too complex and confusing to sort out, you will not be able to assess. Thus, in the interests of accessibility and personal discernment, spirituality and the concepts and ideas that make it up should be clear and precise. Excuses, like the common excuse that it is impossible to describe the luminous, otherworldly realities with any degree of accuracy, that it is impossible to be scientific and precise, or that “the plan” is mysterious and ineffable, do not apply. Concise, accurate, and accessible definitions that leave no space for misunderstanding and exclusion are an absolute prerequisite for building an authentic, accessible, and inclusive spirituality.

If you find that teachings are not accessible to certain groups, classes, ethnicities, or genders, if you find there are secret “inner chambers” and that only a few may enter, if people are excluded or put down in any way and for any reason whatsoever, then the path you are following is not authentic, period. If accessibility and inclusivity are not written into the very core of the teachings, you are not building, nor are you following, an authentic spiritual path.

Do you find an emphasis on accessibility and inclusion in authentic spirituality traditions? Yes, you do. Gandhi, for
example, was all about including everybody, especially the Hindu untouchable caste.\textsuperscript{209} He had a particular emphasis on removing class distinctions and treating everybody on the same level. You find the same in the biography of Jesus Christ who walked amongst and taught the poor and disenfranchised. You also find this emphasis extended to the work of, for example, Christian mystics. The 14th century female Christian mystic Julian of Norwich is insistent that

...the revelations which she was given and the insights that followed from them were not for her own benefit alone...but where given for...all the ordinary mean and women of her time... she wrote in English, not French or Latin, so that her book could be read not just by the aristocracy or the clerical establishment by anyone able to read English; it could also be understood by anyone who had it read aloud to them. It was not restricted therefore to those--mostly clerics, therefore mostly men--who were well educated....She writes not only for those with special religious commitments but for everyone. Neither is her book full of demands and imprecations. It is gentle, reassuring, even while it fosters ever-deepening trust in God.\textsuperscript{210}


You also find examples of spiritualities that do not work to be accessible and inclusive. A classic example here would be Freemasonry and other “secret” schools in the Western esoteric and gnostic traditions. Freemasonry, although it purports to offer an authentic spiritual methodology of connection, nevertheless is a secretive invite-only organization with an emphasis on recruiting up and coming business people. Similarly, Scientology, despite its ostensible concern with global healing, free thought, and personal “clearing” and empowerment, is not an accessible religion at all. It is a highly secretive organization that requires its “thetans” to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for access to exclusive spiritual training.

2. Grounded and Embodied

In addition to being accessible and inclusive, an authentic spirituality should also be grounded and embodied. Grounded and embodied means that an authentic spirituality will recognize the significance of the physical universe and the importance of the physical body (whether that body is human or otherwise) and will honour them as such. Rather than dismissing physical creation as some kind of degraded divine afterthought, as something we have to “escape” or graduate out of, or as something that must be tamed and restrained for human purposes, authentic spirituality recognizes and embraces the significance, power, and glory of physical creation.

We can state the issue quite plainly; physical creation is the vehicle of spirit, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the body of consciousness, and the vessel of God. An authentic
spirituality will always understand that the physical universe and the physical body are central features of spiritual creation and key sites for the movement of Spirit. Authentic spirituality and authentic practitioners will always embrace manifestation and incarnation with positive regard. Authentic spirituality will always treasure and respect life, the universe, and everything. If we may be so bold as to say, authentic spirituality always honours the body as an important and sacred vehicle for highest Self and highest Consciousness.

There are a few important implications of this grounded and embodied view of the physical universe and the physical body that we need to pay attention to. First of all, because an authentic spirituality is grounded in a healthy respect and awareness of the significance of the body as a vehicle for Consciousness, authentic spirituality always looks to the health, well-being, and improvement of the body and mind (i.e., the physical unit) as a fundamental goal. The body cannot operate at peak performance as vehicle for consciousness if it is not mentally and psychologically healthy and whole. Therefore, authentic spirituality always looks to the improvement of physical existence. This means that you will not find an authentic spirituality condoning the degradation, damage, or destruction of the body or the world in any way. An authentic spirituality will condemn violence of all kinds, suffering, poverty, and the pollution of the physical (and psychic) environments as sacrileges against the body. An authentic spirituality will encourage and work toward manifesting salutatory and respectful conditions that preserve the natural world and that provide a nurturing
environment for said body. Authentic spirituality teaches us to nurture the development and maintain the integrity of all physical creation, including the human body. It can be no other way. Physical creation is the site of the incarnation and manifestation of Spirit and we must respect, nurture, and protect this site above all other things. To do other than respect the body would make about as much sense as getting up in the morning and beating your car (or bike) with a sledgehammer before you drive it. That is stupid. The body is a vehicle for Consciousness and must always be respected as such.

The second implication of this standard of grounded and embodied spirituality has to do with our collective view of childhood, and the way we train and socialize our children. Obviously, if the physical body functions as a vehicle for Consciousness, then having a healthy body, having a healthy physical unit, is a base requirement for full expression of Consciousness and strong connection. In this context, protection and proper development of the physical unit through infancy, childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood are of critical importance. A damaged vehicle will be subject to mental and physical illness, and will have problems awakening, activating, and connecting.

If the care and development of the body are critical, then when it comes to the proper development of the physical unit, our current parental and socialization practices are inadequate, because our current practices are quite toxic and damaging. I briefly outline the research that supports this statement in an article.
entitled “Toxic Socialization,” where I also point out that “when definitions of abuse are liberal, just about everybody on the planet becomes a victim of abuse at some point, a fact which most can anecdotally confirm simply by examining their family life, school, and work life. This is not a revelation that should be taken lightly since even single instances of emotional violence perpetrated by trusted adult figures can have long term debilitating consequences.”

Of course, upon reading this, some people mind find themselves struggling with disjuncture. Some might even find themselves justifying forms of violence and abuse in childhood as part of a “necessary” disciplinary process. Others may be ignoring their own habits and actions and tell themselves that they do a good job of raising their children to their full potential, despite the fact that they are violent and abusive. Given the amount of research that demonstrates the debilitating impact of toxic socialization, and the rarity of the fully actualized and connected human being, these justifications are hard to sustain. If our socialization practices were better, if our spiritualities were more authentic, if we were better parents, if we treated people better, if we did a better job


looking after each other, there wouldn’t be so many angry and disconnected people raging about on this world.

Please understand, this should not be read as a judgmental slam against parenting or humanity in general, but merely as an appeal for self-honesty and a strong admonishment to change. We do not engage in toxic parental practices, we do not damage the physical body, because we are evil or bad parents, but because this is how our parents, priests, and professionals taught us; consequently, we believe we are doing the right thing. But, we are not. Toxic socialization damages the body and undermines our ability to connect. If we want to stop toxic socialization and develop socialization practices that do not damage and undermine the physical unit’s ability to connect, our first step must be facing the truth and uncomfortable implications of our own actions. Once we do that, then it only requires a little support to actually change. And, change we must. If we want to save the world, we cannot continue to turn out angry, diminished, and disconnected human beings. Toxic socialization practices must end immediately

Finally, a third implication of the embodied and grounded nature of authentic spirituality is that money is a key factor in the authentic spiritual unfolding of this planet, and therefore money should, as explained in Rocket Scientists’ Guide to Money and the Economy,\(^{213}\) be understood for what it really is, respected as an important tool of modern life, and distributed fairly and without

exploitation. In an age where everything from clothing to food to housing costs money, you simply cannot properly look after your physical unit without money. Nor, it should be noted, can you put aside the necessary time for connection practice if you are working three jobs just to get by. If you cannot look after your physical unit, and if you are too busy simply trying to survive, you will have a hard time with authentic spiritual practice.

Of course, to say that money is important and we all have to have enough doesn’t mean we should pursue wealth accumulation beyond a need for satisfactory human comfort and protection. The callous accumulation of billions or the ostentatious purchase and display of Ninety-six Rolls Royce vehicles demonstrates not spiritual mastery, but egoism and addiction, despite what many apologists might say. Money needs to be distributed fairly and distributed properly so everybody can heal and connect, but it also needs to be treated as the dangerous and addictive substance that it is; otherwise, the addiction will destroy the world.

To summarize, the second pillar of authentic spirituality is all about grounded and embodied spirituality. In practice, this means that authentic spirituality will love and respect the natural world and the physical body, will hold childhood up as a critical and sacred time, and will take money seriously, knowing that everybody needs enough to survive and thrive. If you find any of these things

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214 Sosteric and Ratkovic, *Lightning Path Workbook Two - Healing*.

absent on the path you are following, you are missing the second pillar, cannot build an authentic spirituality, and are probably following an inauthentic path.

As for the validity of this pillar, you do find a concern with grounded and embodied spirituality in this world’s authentic spiritual traditions. You find it in the concern for right environment of mystics like St. Teresa of Avila who emphasize the need for calm, safe, drama free environments.\(^{216}\) You also find it in the almost ubiquitous concern to heal human illness and end human suffering characteristic of Christ’s teachings, Buddha’s teachings, and even other more modern traditions, like the dated and now largely defunct Arica School, started by Oscar Ichazo,\(^{217}\) which places heavy emphasis on transcending a dysfunctional and bodily ego to achieve healthy reconnection.\(^{218}\) Finally, you also find it in Zen Buddhism in an emphasis on empirical reality and cause and effect. For example, the Zen “Wild Fox Koan,”\(^{219}\) a Zen fable, teaches a

\(^{216}\)St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*.


\(^{218}\)I feel compelled to note here that while there is apparently value in Ichazo’s connection framework, publications of the Aria school can be extremely expensive, and the vast majority of their “teachings” are only accessible to students behind an expensive pay wall. Although Ichazo’s original desire was to have his school open and accessible to the world (apparently, Ariza means “open door”), even going so far as to say the school should be accessible to the working classes, the institute as currently instantiated fails on pillar one and pillar two. You can browse the Arica school at https://www.arica.org/

\(^{219}\)A version is provided by Wikipedia at the following url: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wild_fox_koan. The irony of using a
very clear lesson about the importance of staying grounded to empirical realities. In this story, a Zen Master is turned into a fox to teach him a lesson about the importance of cause and effect and the wisdom of not pretending to be above it.220

3. Responsible and Non-Judgmental

Accessible and inclusive, grounded and embodied, are the first two pillars of authentic spirituality. The third pillar of authentic spirituality is the pillar of responsibility. To be as clear as possible, an authentic spirituality teaches broad responsibility, for your body, your family, your children, this society, and the entire world. Authentic spirituality neither teaches, encourages, expects, or requires you to turn away from reality, disrespect your own health, neglect your own children,221 or ignore the suffering of this world. Authentic spirituality never teaches you to justify and accept anything that is unacceptable (like poverty) just so you can “attract” yourself some wealth. Authentic spirituality requires responsibility for all life on this planet, on a truly global scale. If a spirituality does not teach broad and general responsibility, then it is not authentic at all.

supernatural fable to teach the importance of cause and effect should not lost here.


221 Among other things, a remarkable story of neglect by the niece of Scientology ruler, David Miscavige: Miscavige Hill, “Beyond Belief: My Secret Life Inside Scientology and My Harrowing Escape EBook: Jenna Miscavige Hill, Lisa Pulitzer: Kindle Store.”
The stipulation that authentic spiritualties should be responsible is an extension of the outcome measure, activation. As we’ve seen, “activation” is a consequence of authentic spirituality. One of the consequences of this activation is that people who have one or more connection experiences often become more active at home, at work, politically, and so on. Individuals following an authentic spirituality of connection realize things (they awaken), they take responsibility for things, and they take action. This is quite clear when we consider biographies of great spiritual leaders like Christ or Gandhi, or the activities of more modern teachers. Jesus Christ did not sit home and beam positive and loving thoughts into the cosmos, he got out and incited rebellion. Similarly, Gandhi did not sit home drinking chai tea: he spent his entire life on the road, in South Africa and in his native India, fighting for Indian independence and justice or all people.

The stipulation that an authentic spirituality should teach a responsibility founded on action is violated by many “New Age” spiritualties, which often encourage an individual to abdicate responsibility and engage in passive non-action. Such is the case with so-called Law of Attraction (LOA) style spirituality. LOA pundits teach not

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action and responsibility, but avoidance and the abdication of responsible action in the world. They teach, for example, that to deal with war you don’t go to anti-war rallies, you sit at home and send “positive intent... into the thought-substance of the mass consciousness.” They teach inaction and denial of responsibility in the face of reality. The denial of responsibility is quite explicit. As Law of Attraction (LOA) founder Esther Hicks said, “You did not come into this environment to create through action.” You come into this world to passively attract. All you have to do to get your big California mansion is “attract” it and voila. If you remain positive, it will happen. Obviously, this is load of spiritual horseshit. Just like bridges require a lot of work from engineers, teachers, workers, etc. California mansions do not materialize without a lot of very hard work from a lot of hard-working people.

It is relatively easy to make a case that authentic spirituality should be responsible and should encourage action in the world, since responsible, change-oriented action is a feature of many traditional and even modern (LOA aside), connection frameworks. But, what about the second part of this pillar, that authentic spirituality should be non-judgmental. How does that fit in?

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To understand the relevance of teaching non-judgment, you have to understand two things. Number one, you have to understand something about guilt and shame. Guilt and shame are honest and natural human reactions to actions we know to be wrong. When experienced properly, guilt and shame are useful “self-adjustment” tools. The problem is, these emotions can be quite painful. When we do something we know is wrong and we experience these painful emotions, we have two choices. We can either acknowledge the source of the guilt and shame and change our behaviour, that is, we can take action in the world to make it more aligned with what we know to be correct, or, we can repress the truth of our actions and instead pretend that our actions are aligned and positive, even when they are not. Unfortunately, since change can be difficult, and since guilt and shame can be quite excruciating, even debilitating, there is psychological incentive to repress awareness and engage in avoidance. More to the point, our body’s have a natural aversion to it. Our body's naturally seek to avoid the experience of pain, physical or emotional. When we experience pain, we look around for ways to reduce it. When it comes to guilt and shame, the natural response is to repress, avoid, and deny. We repress the actions that cause us guilt. We avoid taking responsibility. We deny that it ever happened.

This psychological incentive to repress brings us to the second reason why authentic spirituality should eschew

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judgment, guilt, and shame. Judgmental spiritualties encourage, even inflame, our sense of guilt and shame, thereby contributing, in a very direct way, to avoidance of toxic psychological repression and the avoidance of responsibility. You don’t have to be Sigmund Freud to see that this avoidance happens all the time. Watch the people around you as they pathologically avoid experiencing guilt and shame by denying their actions and finding ways to blame others. Or, better yet, reflect upon your own actions and avoidance. The experience of guilt and shame leads to avoidance, and this avoidance leads directly to abdication of responsibility and action, and probably all sorts of emotional and psychological dysfunction. Thus, a spirituality that is ostensibly about responsibility eschews the use of judgment because judgment enhances guilt and shame, and enhancing guilt and shame leads to avoidance of responsibility.

To summarize, the tendency to self-repression in response to guilt and shame is exacerbated by systems of inauthentic spirituality, psychology, and human development that are judgmental. When we feel judged, our guilt and shame are amplified. When our guilt and shame are amplified, self-repression and avoidance become much more likely. Obviously, a spirituality that claims to be authentic cannot be encouraging denial, avoidance, and false-accusations. If a spirituality or religion utilizes guilt

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227 The uber rich are particularly good at this. See the most excellent book by Anand Giridharadas, *Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World* (New York: Knopf, 2018), https://amzn.to/2FDff49.
and shame to control behaviour, by definition, it cannot be authentic.

Is responsibility, as well as guilt and shame, a thing in various connection frameworks. It is. Most connection frameworks recognize the importance of responsibility, and even very corrupted ones will teach broad responsibility for others and the planet. The question, of course, is whether or not the framework’s pundits “walk the talk.” Many spiritualties teach broad responsibility, but then when you dip into their murky waters, you find their founders or their representative priests and gurus stashing the cash while the people around them suffer and starve. Obviously, a spirituality that does not practice what it preaches is not an authentic spirituality. A spirituality that does not teach responsibility, or a spirituality that presents as a hypocrisy, is not an authentic spirituality, period.

As for guilt and shame, once again, this is a feature of authentic connection frameworks, especially those of the Western variety. Jesus Christ advised those seeking connection to forgive, let go, and “turn the other cheek.” Other authentic world teacher do the same. Most connection frameworks that arise from these teachings, however, do not warn of the debilitating consequences of psychological and emotional guilt and shame, most exploit it to control their followers. This is true of very large connection frameworks like Western Catholicism which weaponizes guilt and shame, and also the small and medium cult-like expressions you find popping out now and again. If a spirituality utilizes guilt and shame to control its base of followers, it is not an authentic spirituality.
4. Empowering

So far in our discussion of the pillars of authentic spirituality we have suggested that an authentic spirituality should be accessible and inclusive, grounded and embodied, and responsible and non-judgmental. The fourth pillar of authentic spirituality that should be present is empowerment.

Empowerment here is an extension of the outcome measure of activation noted in part two of this book. There, we noted that political, social, even familial activation is an outcome measure of authentic spirituality. Activation occurs when one identifies (awakens to) and becomes empowered to change situations for the better. When people make a connection, they awaken and are empowered to make changes and improve.

Since activation is an outcome measure of authentic spirituality, an authentic spirituality should recognize this activation by supporting and teaching empowerment, both at a personal level and a collective level. Authentic spiritualties should broadly teach we have authority over our own lives, and that we all have the authority to create, as we see fit. An authentic spirituality will teach that we are responsible, powerful, and sovereign and that we know the difference between what is right and wrong. As beings of independence and power, if we want something, we do not have to beg God, the fates, or anybody else. We just need to work for it. That is all.

Since authentic spiritualties teach empowerment, authentic spirituality must never be about “following the leader” or giving in to some external power. Authentic
spirituality should not teach or train an individual to bow before authority, follow orders, believe in fate, or submit to outside and external powers, like God, “galactic rays,” karma, or whatever. There is nothing wrong with guidelines, morality, rules, and expectations, but this should be coupled with teachings that empower and give people the authority to exist and create in the world, as they so choose, so long as we are uplifting and not harming others.

Because authentic spirituality is empowering, authentic spirituality should model empowerment and the devolution of authority. Authentic spirituality never supports and/or enacts the empowerment of the few over the disempowerment of the many. If spirituality is to be authentic, it must reflect our fundamental equality and our true power and responsibility. It must never engage us in systems of hierarchy or authority intended to restrict, disempower, or exploit others, nor must it propagate ideologies that enslave, disempower, or teach submission to authority, whether that authority is “in heaven” or on an earthly throne. Any spirituality that acts and enacts hierarchy and disempowerment is not an authentic spirituality.

A case in point here is the exoteric Christian Church. The exoteric Church generally teaches exactly the opposite of empowerment. They characterize their followers as sheeple and advise the sheep to listen to the rules and follow the good Sheppard, Christ. Notably, this is exactly the opposite of what Jesus taught, which was to stand up against exploitation and empire, and to work against
poverty and suffering,\textsuperscript{228} to “let your light shine” and do good works (Mathew 5: 15)

Finally, an authentic spiritual framework should be a non-violent spiritual framework. Violence can come in many forms, physical, emotional, and psychological. In general, any physical, verbal, or non-verbal act that is experienced as a threat or that actually hurts you in a physical, emotional, psychological, or spiritual way, is a violent act. Most connection frameworks will give lip service to non-violence, of course; however, not all traditions encourage their leaders and practitioners to practice what they preach, and some traditions actually encourage violence against others, so long as the “other” is evil. This is the case with the Western traditions based on Zoroastrian nodes introduced earlier. As noted earlier, these archetypal nodes encourage violence against those they define as “evil.” In western traditions, the evil ones are to be violently destroyed and cast into the pits of hell.

It is not just western traditions that can be violent towards others. You will also find that some traditions encourage violence against those who are not within the tradition. The fascinating story of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (a.k.a. Osho), recounted in the Netflix documentary \textit{Wild Wild Country},\textsuperscript{229} is a case in point. Members of this cult-ashram were emotionally and psychologically violent towards the local townspeople. They tried to rig local elections and they tried to poison the local people. They

\textsuperscript{228}Sosteric, “Rock and Roll Jesus: The Catholic Church and the Containment of Global Revolution.”

\textsuperscript{229}Way and Way, \textit{Wild Wild Country}. 

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even developed a paramilitary “peace force” which purchased numerous weapons to be used, ostensibly, for defense. The arming began in January 18, 1983 when the ashram ordered a revolver, and continues forward from there.

In two years’ time, the inventory included at least 14 .357 Magnums; several other handguns; three riot guns; a Ruger Model 77 bolt-action, high-powered rifle with telescope sight; nine military-style semiautomatic weapons; and four tear gas grenades.

The Rajneeshees discussed buying fully automatic weapons as early as 1982 [and] …Within two years, however, the Rajneeshees saw a need for automatic weapons, making at least three attempts to buy them.

In addition to encouraging violence against “evil” others, you will also find that some traditions rely on violence, or the threat of this violence, to control their members and force compliance. My own childhood experience in the Catholic Church attests to this. The Catholic Church encourages actual physical violence against children (spare the rod and spoil the child) and also the threat of violence, the worst of which is the threat of

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eternal damnation for not following the rules, to control its passive membership. And of course, there are many traditions and cults where various forms of violence amongst members is a regular and daily occurrence. If you have ever been a part of such a tradition or cult, or if you are a member of such a tradition now, a few moments of thought will suffice to reveal the violence to you.

To be clear, a connection framework that allows or encourages violence of any form is not an authentic tradition. It is basic psychology, really. Violence and assault cause physical, emotional, and mental distress. Violence and assault, even the threat of assault, damages the physical body and causes all sorts of psychological, emotional, and physical illness. Violence and the trauma that ensues from that violence damages the physical body. More to the point, violence and assault \textit{disconnects} the body from its own higher consciousness. Any tradition that operates with violence operates in the opposite direction of health and connection.

Examples of traditions that teach passivity and compliance, or that say they are about empowerment, but practice and implement the opposite, could be multiplied. What’s more important than enumerating all the traditions and schools which use violence against others or their own followers is to simply learn to identify them \textit{in situ}, and avoid them when you do. If you are in a tradition where violence is involved, perhaps reconsider your membership. It is much better to recognize this inauthenticity early, since, as members of violent traditions will tell you, it can

\footnote{Once again, for an overview of the impact of violence and stress on the physical unit, see Sosteric, “Toxic Socialization.”}
be difficult to extricate oneself once one has become embedded. Thankfully, red flags here are easy to spot. Hierarchy in a spiritual tradition is one red flag, as is the presence of various forms of violence. If hierarchy and violence are present in any way, shape, or form, your best bet is to avoid and get out.

5. Fruitful

At this point in our discussion, we have covered four of the seven pillars of authentic spirituality. The fifth pillar of authentic spirituality is fruitfulness, by which we mean simply that authentic spirituality should make a real and positive difference in your life, and the life of those you surround yourself with.

The notion that authentic spirituality should be fruitful relates directly back to the pillar of empowerment, and our earlier discussion of outcome measures. The notion that spirituality should be fruitful is, in fact, a restatement and extension of the requirement that authentic spirituality should lead to measurable and meaningful outcomes, and that it should be empowering. If you think back to the outcome measures we discussed earlier, a fruitful spirituality is one that leads to the outcomes of healing and connection. Healing leads to physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual well being. Connection leads to awakening, activation, and ascension. The whole process is comprised of numerous “fruitful outcomes,” including psychological breakthroughs.\footnote{Rahtz et al., “Transformational Changes in Health Status: A Qualitative Exploration of Healing Moments.”}
emotional cleansing (i.e., the sudden dissipation of anger and envy),\textsuperscript{233} improved self-esteem,\textsuperscript{234} enhanced intellectual power,\textsuperscript{235} reduction of existential angst, an increase in meaning and happiness,\textsuperscript{236} self actualization,\textsuperscript{237} a general increase of life satisfaction,\textsuperscript{238} and even experience of transcendence and “cosmic consciousness.”\textsuperscript{239}

One particularly interesting fruit of authentic spirituality practice worth isolation and investigation is freedom from all forms of addiction. Everybody is familiar with addiction to alcohol and drugs. But addictions in society are far more pervasive. We can be addicted to substances, like drugs and alcohol, but also to high carbohydrate and high fat processed foods, to shopping, to exercise, to sex, and even to money.\textsuperscript{240} You know you are addicted when you get to point where you spend all your


\textsuperscript{234}Parish, Create Your Personal Sacred Text: Develop and Celebrate Your Spiritual Life.

\textsuperscript{235}Hanes, “Unusual Phenomena Associated With a Transcendent Human Experience: A Case Study.”

\textsuperscript{236}This Is It and Other Essays on Zen and Spiritual Experience, Kindle Edition (Random House, 1973), https://amzn.to/2IYr2rv.


\textsuperscript{238}Ervin Laszlo, Stanislav Grof, and Peter Russell, The Consciousness Revolution (Las Vegas: Elf Rock Productions, 1999), 67, https://amzn.to/2TlOCmC.


\textsuperscript{240}Sosteric, “How Money Is Destroying the World.”
time seeking out and interacting with that addiction, and no time on other important things, like family, friends, spiritual practice, and so on.

Because of the toxic condition of the world we live in, addiction is a pervasive problem. Most people end up addicted to something. Most people turn to something to ease the pain of samsara (the physical world), or to give them feelings of euphoria and pleasure which are absent from their daily life.

For your information, addiction is actually a common problem identified in the spiritual literature of this planet, especially Buddhism and Vedanta where it is discussed as desire or attachment to worldly things. The Crest Jewel of Wisdom by Shankara,\textsuperscript{241} for example, spends a lot of time talking about addiction to money, power, ego aggrandizement, and so on. The text says that desire/addiction undermines your spiritual progress by attaching you to the dramas and baubles of the material world, thereby distracting you from connection and connection practice. As a consequence of your addictions, you become locked in normal consciousness and stuck in the delusional world of samsara, which is true, and makes perfect sense. If you spend all your body’s energy on denying your addictions and trying to find your next fix, for example, if you work all the time to “make money” or you get caught up in all the vamporous dramas of a disconnected world, you don’t have any energy left for self-reflection, self-analysis, and connection practice. If you

\textsuperscript{241} Adi Sankaracharya, The Crest-Jewel of Wisdom (St. Albert, 2019).
don’t have any energy left, you won’t make any spiritual progress forward.

What is the solution to addiction? Authentic spirituality! In the Crest jewel, we learn that authentic spiritual practice frees you from addiction/attachment. This freedom can occur gradually and over time, as we slowly begin to realize the nature of the addiction and its negative impact on our lives, but it can occur instantly, as the biography of Bill Wilson attests, as the consequence of a powerful connection experience.244

The relationship between addiction and authentic spirituality is something to consider when evaluating a spirituality or religion for its authenticity. If the spirituality is authentic, it should not only address addiction, as The Crest Jewel does, but it should also be successful in treating a person’s addictions; or rather, the person following an authentic spirituality should find success in treating their own addictions. Whether the fruitful cure is experienced instantly as the miraculous outcome of a connection event, or over time in a process of growing awareness and personal change, one of the fruitful outcomes of authentic spirituality practice is the reduction and eventual elimination of addiction in its practitioners. If you’re not seeing or experiencing this fruitful outcome, that’s a seven pillars, alarm raising red flag.

As a final comment, it may be useful to reiterate what we said earlier, which is that authentic spirituality should teach and emphasize the significance and importance of fruitful outcomes in the present. That is, spiritualties

244Alcoholics Anonymous, ‘PASS IT ON’ The Story of Bill Wilson and How the A.A. Message Reached the World.
should not suggest that your primary benefit from spiritual practices comes in the next life, through entrance into “heaven,” the avoidance of rebirth, the enjoyment of celestial “virgins,” or whatever. Authentic spiritualties assert the benefits of practice in the here and now. If a religion or spirituality is avoiding the discussion of fruitful outcomes in the here and now and instead of distracting you with fantasies of after-life salvation, look away.

6. Logical and Consistent

So far we have discussed five pillars of authentic spirituality which are that an authentic spirituality should be accessible and inclusive, grounded and embodied, responsible and non-judgmental, empowering and fruitful. In addition to all these, an authentic spirituality should also be logical and consistent. Authentic spirituality should never be irrational, inconsistent, or illogical. Authentic spirituality should always be logical, consistent, and make total sense.

For some, the notion that authentic spirituality should be logical and consistent might seem like spiritual antithesis, After all, when we speak of human spirituality, we are talking about an immaterial and invisible universe of Consciousness. In other words, God, or however you want to refer to it. This has always been a matter of faith, has it not? There is no concrete evidence that such a thing actually exists, some will say; thus, in the context of human spirituality, logic, consistency, and common sense are, by definition, impossible.
In fact, however, they are not. Authentic spirituality can and should be logical, grounded, and consistent, with its own assumptions and propositions and with everything fitting together in a sensible way. It should never step outside the bounds of reason and common sense. As soon as spirituality starts to become illogical, inconsistent, or too far out of touch with what we generally recognize as logical common sense, we have a problem. This is true whether or not you prefer to rely on “natural” explanations of connection (i.e. neurological explanations) or whether you openly consider transcendent and transpersonal explanations.

It is important to underline this point. Logic and common sense can apply to both naturalistic explanations of spiritual phenomenon and to any “supernatural” explanations that may be invoked to explain the observable phenomenon (like connection experiences and connection outcomes) that attend authentic spirituality.

It might sound outrageous, especially to the fundamentalist atheist, but it is true, and we are not the first to assert this. Oscar Ichazo, founder of the Arica school, makes logic, rationality, and a “scientifically systematized” spirituality a central goal of human endeavor.\(^{243}\) You can even apply logic and common sense to supernatural phenomenon. In fact, some might say that logic, common sense, and the mounting evidence provided by the study of connection experiences demands not only that we consider non-materialist explanations for some of the things we experience, but that we accept these

explanations as the most logical and parsimonious available. As Shear\textsuperscript{244} points out

From a common-sense perspective, we are intimately aware of consciousness, and it is a truism that consciousness has a variety of properties (among them qualia, intentionality, and non-spatiality) that are so different from those of matter that it is difficult if not impossible to see how consciousness could ever have been produced by matter. The problems that arise here are formidable, and have given rise to what has recently become popularized as ‘the hard problem’ of explaining the existence of consciousness in a material universe.

The “hard problem” is the problem of what consciousness is exactly, and how it arises. It is often assumed by lay people (and many scientists) that scientists feel this is a done deal, that scientists all agree that consciousness arises in the physical body, in the neurology of the brain and CNS. Put another way, it is assumed that scientists all believe that when your brain dies, you die. In fact, this is not the case. Consciousness as a phenomenon, and connection experiences which intimate transcendent realities, have not been satisfactorily explained in materialist terms. Some scientists,\textsuperscript{245} myself included, do


\textsuperscript{245}See for example Dossey, “Nonlocal Mind: A (Fairly) Brief History of the Term”; Laszlo, Grof, and Russell, \textit{The Consciousness Revolution};
indeed propose transcendent realities as logical and necessary explanations for what has been scientifically observed. We can arbitrarily dismiss these issues and these conclusions if we want, and no doubt some readers are fighting hard the intellectual inclination to do so, but as one scholar noted,\textsuperscript{246} “if a physicist or a cognitive scientist suggests that consciousness can be explained in physical terms, this is merely a hope ungrounded in current theory, and the question remains open.”

The point here isn’t to get into a debate about the origins of consciousness. The point here is to emphasize the need for logic and consistency. Whatever your particular feeling about the nature of consciousness and connection, whatever side of the fence you are on \textit{vis a vis} the role of religion, connection experience, and consciousness in human existence, it all needs be logical and consistent. Our thinking has to be logical and consistent, and any ideas we have about connection, what it is, how to obtain it, and what’s it all for, have to be logical and consistent as well.

It is possible and it is important because without logic and consistently, you get cockamamie nuttiness. Consider the following anecdotal example. A few years ago, I read an article that suggested the problem of obesity in America was in fact not a problem at all. According to one spiritual “pundit,” obesity was a good thing because it was a sign of enlightenment! People who became enlightened often developed “Buddha belly,” said this writer. The conclusion?

\textsuperscript{246}Dossey, \textit{Recovering the Soul: A Scientific and Spiritual Search.}

Adipose tissue was a sign of closeness to God! Surprise surprise. The fact that more and more individuals in North America were experiencing the Buddha belly (otherwise known as the obesity epidemic) was not the result of processed food and an advertising industry working overtime to addict the population to fat and sugar, it was the result of spiritual maturity.

Obviously, this pundit’s notion that enlightenment causes obesity was not logical, it was ignorant, uneducated, and absurd. Not only that, it was dangerous. They had no sense of the health problems that attend obesity (like heart disease, diabetes, joint failure, etc.), no sense of the dangers of junk/processed foods in the diet of North Americans, and no sense of the impact of the mass media and advertising on encouraging greater consumption of junk foods. To be sure, there are different body types. It is also true that heavyset individuals can be perfectly healthy, but that is not always the case. Obesity, especially when attended by inactivity and poor diet, can lead to various problems. It has nothing to do with enlightenment and everything to do with lifestyle.

The example of “Buddha Belly” may seem trivial; nevertheless, it illustrates a point—some people don’t apply logic and common sense to their spirituality, and that is a problem. Our spirituality and our thinking about it should be logical and common sensible. Sadly, often, it is not.

When wagging the finger at illogic and insensibility, we would not want to blame the general population. The failure here is often a failure of scholarship, not mass thinking. It is the scholar’s job to sort shit out, to examine
the phenomenon, and to explain the world. When scholars assume that human spirituality is silliness, when they suggest that no “serious” scholar would ever take it seriously, as one of my colleagues recently did to me, when they dismiss it all as “savage supernaturalism” as sociological “luminary” Peter Berger embarrassingly did in his book *A Rumor of Angels*, it is not the people’s fault, it is the scholar’s fault. When scholars reject the area outright, perhaps without ever really taking a serious look, they leave a vacuum where all sorts of flighty, frivolous, and even dangerous nonsense can squeak its way in. There are even dire political consequences for their (our) lack of involvement. Butler argues that scholar’s, in particular progressive scholars, disinclination to get involved in human spirituality has left a vacuum that has been hijacked by conservative political interests, with increasingly detrimental global effect, as evinced by the international rise of nationalist and right-wing politics.

The point here is simple: logic and consistency should apply as a pillar of authenticity throughout the corpus, and scholarly involvement can help make that happen, if they get over their own intellectual prejudice. It is not without precedent. August Comte, founding father of sociology, wrote *The Catechism of Positivism; or, Summary Exposition of the Universal Religion*. In this book, Comte literally tries to start a new religion. In the book, he outlines what he thinks

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is a logical and rational alternative to the religious offerings of his day.\textsuperscript{250} This book is not recommend for reading because it is dry, pedantic, boring, tiresome, sexist, and prejudiced, but it is worthwhile that sociologists and their students are aware of it, since it provides precedent for an academic getting involved in and even trying to start a religion. Similarly, Star Hawk, a feminist psychologist, has contributed to the development of Wicca and Goddess worship.\textsuperscript{251} However, none of these succeeded in bringing a logical, grounded, sensible framework into the mainstream of scholarly attention or larger society. Comte’s effort was spiritually unsophisticated, and even though Wiccan religions, druidic worship, shamanism, and other forms of paganism are proliferating,\textsuperscript{252} they nevertheless stay on the margin, and often suffer the same insensibility and illogic of mainstream traditions. Take the example of druids, who presumably base their spirituality on ancient Roman and Celtic traditions. Richard Hutton points out that except for a couple of vague references in the historical record, druid-

\textsuperscript{250}Auguste Comte, \textit{The Catechism of Positivism; or, Summary Exposition of the Universal Religion} (London: John Chapman, 1852), https://amzn.to/2I7oSRy.


Druidship has no historical roots at all. In fact, druidship is an imaginative construction. Druids make druidism out to be whatever they want it to be. Of course, there’s nothing wrong with fantasy cosplay, as long as you don’t take it as representative of authentic spirituality, and as long as you stay logical, grounded, and consistent. Obviously, when a group of people just make stuff up to suit their own fantasy predilections, this is neither logical nor consistent with existing spiritual knowledge, nor is it authentic in any way. It might be fun from a play perspective, but if one is seeking an authentic spiritual practice, it is a total waste of time.

7. Empirical and Verifiable

At this point in our discussion, we have covered six of the seven pillars of authentic spirituality. Authentic spirituality should be accessible and inclusive, grounded and embodied, responsible and non-judgmental, empowering, fruitful, and logical. The final pillar of authentic spirituality is empirical verifiability. This pillar represents the simple requirement that authentic spirituality should, within reason, be empirically grounded and verifiable. Put another way, there has to be something real going on. There has to be more to spirituality than just snake oil and empty words. There should be evidence that it heals and connects.

While some might doubt that you can put spirituality to the empirical test, at this point, this shouldn’t be a

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controversial statement at all. The entire journey up to here has been an empirical journey of setting standards, examining outcome measures, and comparing and contrasting authentic versus inauthentic spiritualties, based on empirical evidence. By now we should understand, human spirituality and the connection experiences which root it are real and verifiable things which you can fruitfully analyze and meaningfully investigate. As Shear notes, obvious:

...such experiences are, like any other experiences, obviously capable of being studied scientifically. Indeed, more than a thousand of studies of physiological, psychological and behavioral correlates and effects of such experiences and procedures designed to produce them have been published over the last thirty years.²⁵⁴

Indeed, this is true. “Such experiences [are] obviously capable of being studied scientifically,” and from a variety of angles. You can study it psychologically, creating survey’s²⁵⁵ and researching the contribution of the experience to mental health and well being,²⁵⁶ as American

²⁵⁴Shear, “Mysticism and Scientific Naturalism,” 83.
psychologist Abraham Maslow did.\textsuperscript{257} You can, study the history of the phenomenon throughout the Eastern\textsuperscript{258} and Western\textsuperscript{259} world, as Andrew Harvey and Arthur Versluis did. You can study the neurology of the phenomenon.\textsuperscript{260} Despite the fact that sociologists have largely ignored the phenomenon, you can even study it sociologically. Indeed, there are many interesting sociological things to say about connection experience. You can research the social class correlates of connection experience.\textsuperscript{261} You can examine how authentic spirituality and authentic connection events can lead to progressive political transformation.\textsuperscript{262} You can look at how elites consciously and deliberately co-opt human spirituality and bend it to serve their own agenda.\textsuperscript{263}


\textsuperscript{258} Harvey, \textit{Teachings of the Hindu Mystics}.


\textsuperscript{262} Sosteric, “Mystical Experience and Global Revolution.”


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You can even write narratives about how spiritual leaders like Jesus Christ were not reactionary conservatives bent on oppressing women and minorities at all, but anti-status quo revolutionaries\textsuperscript{264} devoted to overthrowing elite power structures.

As you can see, there is absolutely no reason to believe that the productive attention of science cannot be turned to an empirical examination of connection experience. To suggest otherwise is to betray one’s intellectual prejudice and empirical naiveté \textit{vis a vis} the phenomenon of connection experience. Really, at this point, there is nothing revolutionary on the table at all. To say we expect empirical verifiability is to simply state what a few scholars already know, and more scholars and people need to know. Not only can we talk about, theorize, and even have connection experiences in a logical and sensible way, we can study connection experience in a rigorous and empirical way as well. “Mysticism” needs to have no part in any of this.

As a final note, while we should approach human spirituality from an empirical perspective, this empirical perspective should not prevent theorization and speculation, nor should it be used to ridicule and suppress those who do theorize and speculate, even when this theorization and speculation is outside the boundaries of established canon. The story of Rupert Sheldrake, a Cambridge trained Oxford scientists who was literally excommunicated from science for daring to speculate


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about a non-material reality, is an embarrassment to scientists everywhere. Keep in mind, gravity was postulated as an invisible force of nature by Newton in the 17th century, but gravity itself was never actually observed, and consequently remained only a theory, until September 14, 2015 when Einstein’s prediction of gravity waves was finally directly observed, bringing scientists one step closer, ironically, to what mystics have always known, which is that the universe is a vast cosmic ocean of consciousness, and all things in it merely waves in that ocean.

But, we digress.

The point here is that science can research human spirituality and it can contribute not only to the empirical verifiability of human spirituality, but to its logic and consistency as well. If this is true, and there no reason to think that it is not, then there is no reason not to demand that if a human spirituality is to be considered authentic, it should be logical and consistent, as per pillar six, as well as verifiable and empirically grounded, as per pillar seven. If you are finding the absence of either, you are probably not facing an authentic spiritual path.

Summary

In this chapter, we have examined the seven pillars of authentic spirituality. As noted, authentic spirituality

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should be accessible and inclusive, grounded and embodied, responsible and non-judgmental, empowering, fruitful, logical and consistent, and empirically verifiable. These pillars are not optional. If a spirituality is authentic, these seven pillars must be present. What is more, aspiring to them is not enough. You cannot just say, “We accept these standards and we will try to do our best.” Just like an engineer building bridges must be able to guarantee their adherence to standards, so also must an authentic spirituality guarantee adherence to these pillars before we can call it authentic. If even one of these pillars is missing, something is wrong, and the spirituality is not authentic.

As a final comment allow me to say that in my view it is important not to loosen standards or backtrack on these pillars. As we have seen, even mentally ill people can have authentic spiritual experiences. there are consequences to inauthentic spirituality. These consequences range from time wasted on inauthentic and impotent practices, to the horrific cyanide deaths of Jonestown.

The deaths in Jonestown took anywhere between five and 20 minutes. First, your entire body starts to convulse. Then your mouth fills with a mixture of saliva, blood and vomit. Then you pass out, and then you die. Your body is deprived of oxygen completely. It’s a horrific death.²⁶⁸

Religion and human spirituality are no different than civil engineering and the building of bridges. In both cases, lives are stake. In both cases, standards are required. In both cases, unnecessary death results from the abdication of standards. Religion or engineering, in the end, there is simply no excuse for that.
Conclusion

This, finally, brings us to the end of this *Rocket Scientists’ Guide to Authentic Spirituality*. In this book, we have examined *outcome measures* and the *seven pillars of authentic spirituality*. Both of these offerings are different ways to look at the problem of human spirituality, and both help us increase our spiritual standards and the sophistication with which we approach the topic.

So, what are you going to do with this information? In the end, of course, the path you follow is your choice. After reading this book, you have two choices. Choice number one is to continue in the direction you are already going in and hope that it takes you somewhere good. Keep your traditional atheism and go on ignoring human spirituality despite its obvious relevance to things. Keep your dogmatic and ungrounded spirituality and hope for the best. Choice number two is to do a full one hundred and eighty-degree turn, and plow full steam ahead in a new spiritual and scientific direction.

You can decide for yourself what you want to do but if you want my advice, when it comes to building real bridges across real chasms, or building a bridge/connection to your own highest Consciousness, do not sit on your proverbial buttocks and do not settle for anything less than total spiritual/scientific truth. This is not a game, after all, and real lives are at stake not only a small, cult scale, but on a global scale as well. Scientists long ago sounded a planetary emergency, and it is getting worse with each passing day. The planet, human life, all life on Earth in fact, is in
jeopardy. Your soul, if you believe in that, is above it all and
goes on happily no matter happens to this Earth; your body
and human society, however, do not. They are under very
real threat.

And just what does this threat have to do with
authentic spirituality? Decades ago, while the world was
ramping up for WWII, Alert Einstein commented on the
nature of religion and its importance to the evolution and
survival of humanity. At that time, he made a distinction
between the original and authentic teachings of human
spirituality and the “subsequent additions,” which he felt
corrupted the original teachings. Einstein did not have a lot
of respect for the “subsequent additions,” but he did have a
lot of respect for the spirituality he felt was buried in
ancient teachings. He said that these traditional teachings
could cure all our social ills and save humanity from
destruction. His position on this in not equivocal.

If one purges the Judaism of the Prophets and
Christianity as Jesus Christ taught it of all
subsequent additions, especially those of the
priests, one is left with a teaching which is
capable of curing all the social ills of
humanity.269

Although not using the nomenclature introduced in
this book, Einstein is making a clear distinction between
authentic and inauthentic spirituality, and he is making a
clear statement on the value of the former. Einstein wasn’t
very clear on what made authentic spirituality authentic,

269 Albert Einstein, *The World as I See It*, Kindle (Samaira Book
and his thinking on connection experience was a little muddled, but he did intimate he had mild connection experiences himself, and he did think these were valuable for personal, scientific, social, and political reasons. We absolutely agree. Authentic spirituality has important connection outcomes (i.e. healing, awakening, etc.) which are valuable for personal, scientific, social, and political reasons. As we have also seen, authentic spirituality does not have to be detached from common sense pillars and standards. We can think about and assert standards that not only help us evaluate current spiritual offerings, but also help us develop modern, sensible, embodied, logical, accessible, inclusive, empowering, fruitful, and rational scientific alternatives, which honour the foundations but provide a more sophisticated and more effective experience. Seriously. Science has made significant, revolutionary even miraculous contributions in every area of human interest and concern except human spirituality. There is no reason to expect that it cannot do the same for human spirituality. All we have to do is get over our intellectual prejudice long enough to a) reject the tropes that suggest that spirituality and science are antithesis and b) take a closer look. Once we do take a closer, open-minded look we will see, there is something in human spirituality, something in connection experience, something ancient and long ignored by modern science, something incredible and of deep human significance, that,

if as a species we want to survive, we simply cannot ignore any longer.
About the Author

Michael is a sociologist with a specialization in psychology, religion, occult studies, “mysticism,” and social inequality. After a series of dramatic connection events caused him to question the materialist foundation of modern science, he began practicing and exploring connection. This book is the outcome of over a decade of this “mystical” and scholarly exploration and discussion conducted with the help of his life partner, Gina Ratkovic.


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