

LIVING INSIGHTS: ONE PERSON'S PERCEPTIONS OF REALITY

Jack Sisk - © July 8, 2022

INTRODUCTION

The Living Insights Center celebrates the wonder and mystery of Ultimate Reality, and humanity's yearning to understand, embrace, and attain It.

Ultimate Reality is beyond human comprehension, and no one's views can capture it perfectly. Because we are individuals experiencing different bodies, minds, and lives, our views of It inevitably vary. Our Center honors each person's right to see Ultimate Reality in his or her own way.

We are all students in the school of life, and we can learn from each other. Therefore, our Center respects every authentic religious and spiritual tradition, as well as paths outside those traditions, and attempts to present and represent as many of them as we can, as best we can.

We believe we can all be enriched by sharing our beliefs, so I'm offering mine. These are my personal views, and they should not be taken to be views of the Center as a whole. The Center holds no views over any others.

I'm not attempting to persuade you my views are correct. Rather, I'm just offering them for your consideration, in hopes of generating thought and dialogue.

Much of what you read here will reflect the Hindu faith as I'm in that tradition, having converted to it because of experiences I had primarily beginning at the age of 14. Even so, I've found my beliefs are quite similar to some held by people in other religions, particularly their mystical branches.

I certainly don't claim to have everything figured out, despite my best efforts. I've learned from many people, and my experiences and understandings continue to evolve.

I bow to all of you and cherish your lives and wisdom.

Jack

ONE PERSON'S PERCEPTIONS OF REALITY

Ultimate Reality, God

There is an Ultimate Reality.

It is infinite, without beginning or end.

It is entirely conscious without limitation.

It includes but also transcends absolutely everything in the universe (including all matter, energy/vibration, consciousness, potential, dimensions, apparent void, and time).

It created everything and continually sustains and changes/recreates everything within Itself.

It is aware of everything.

And It is beyond human understanding and description.

Every religion or spiritual path can point people in the direction of this Ultimate Reality, but none can ever fully conceive It, so no one may legitimately claim to have a true and complete description of It, much less the only one.

Although It cannot be described, it is useful to try. One fundamental Hindu perception is that the Ultimate Reality is an ocean of consciousness continually creating vibrations within Itself that take that consciousness and bring it into patterned forms, and that's the physical universe. (Physics is also starting to say the substratum of everything is consciousness, although the Hindu and scientific understandings aren't quite the same.)

We may assign names to the Ultimate Reality - names such as God, Brahman, Allah, Jehovah, Adonai, the Creator, the Great Mystery, Great Spirit, the Clear Light, and so forth - but only the Ultimate Reality can know whether it has a name for Itself. For ease of reference, I'll usually call It God in this summary.

So God is a consciousness and energy that contains, created, continually sustains and recreates the universe within Itself, and also transcends the entire universe (and all universes, if the theory is right that there are multiple or even infinite universes). God is in everything, and everything is in God. Because everything is part of God, everything is sacred and should be treated as such, even the things we don't like and should try to change.

The ultimate God is not a being who looks like a bearded old man seated on a throne. God can and does take many forms, including deity forms that appear human or similar to humans (for some people, a bearded old man), but is far more than all of them.

Diversity of Views

The Ultimate Reality is like an infinite clear light, and our human species' consciousness as a whole is like a prism. Clear light actually contains all of the colors. When that light shines through all of us, it is spread into all the colors of the spectrum. Each of us has our own mental structure and density, our own lens, and thus refracts the light to our own color. No single color is the entire spectrum, and each color is just as much a part of the spectrum as any other.

Imagine we are all standing in a circle and at the center is a flame representing Ultimate Truth, which is our goal, and that I ask that we all point at the flame. It will appear that each of us is pointing in a different direction. But we're all pointing at the same goal, and the direction we're pointing is merely the result of where we're standing in the circle, the places our paths have brought us to.

God and the Universe

According to both Hinduism and in a way physics, the fundamental composition of the universe is consciousness and all matter (or, Hindus say, absolutely everything) is vibrating (energized). Both also say every particle of what we experience as matter is disappearing millions of times every second.

Twenty years ago science would tell us that if we could see an atom it looks like a solar system, with a solid center (nucleus) and solid planets (electrons), with the distance between the nucleus and electrons being proportionally greater than the distance between the sun and the earth, and with that space (99.999+ percent of the atom) being totally void. Now science knows none of that is correct. The nucleus and electrons are constantly disappearing in and out of form, in and out of formlessness. The void isn't void at all. Rather, both it and everything we consider matter is full of something and scientists don't know what it is so they call it "dark energy." Hindus say it's consciousness. (I don't really understand quantum physics, so I hope I've described it accurately, but I've often read literally no one understands it, which is not surprising inasmuch as no one understands God).

Hindus say God uses certain vibrations, for which we have the name OM or AUM, to continually recreate the entire universe within Itself in every instant, taking everything in and out of form and formlessness. Hindus name the Ultimate Reality Brahman and name the aspect of It that is actively recreating the universe in every instant Shiva (one of the infinite forms Brahman takes within Itself).

As God contains everything that exists, including all aspects of matter and consciousness, It includes all of our bodies, minds and souls. It encompasses our every thought and action. It envelops us, fills every cell of our being, is in every breath, every thought, every moment. There is no distance between us and God. God contains and transcends the entire universe, and at the same time is within absolutely every part of each of us (body, mind, and soul) and everything we experience.

Incidentally, science now reports that the physical universe is expanding at an accelerating rate. This leads to the uncomfortable conclusion that at some point stars will be so far apart that they won't be visible to others, and that every atom will ultimately pull apart. I suspect there's no need to worry about this, as God presumably can change the universe's physical "laws" if it chooses to. Some scientists theorize that there already are multiple universes with different laws.

Why do we exist?

We may never know why God manifested the frequencies that brought into being and continues to sustain and constantly recreate that which we experience as the material universe, including ourselves. Perhaps God chooses to experience Its infinity through us, all other sentient beings, and everything else. Perhaps it's just one aspect of having a Reality that's infinite in its diversity.

Is the Universe an Illusion? Does God Predestine Everything?

Some people say "The universe is an illusion." This is true, but it doesn't mean the universe doesn't exist, just that it isn't what we think it is. Some say "The universe is just a dream in God's mind" or "God is doing everything." I do not believe either is correct.

Such statements can be taken to mean that nothing in the perceived universe actually exists, or that only God can really do anything, and may use this as a basis to lose interest in living or in caring for others - in other words, as a basis to avoid taking responsibility for one's life and conduct, to avoid doing anything for oneself or others. To the contrary, we do exist and we participate in determining what happens. All of the things we experience actually do exist, and they simply are not exactly what we think they are when we experience them only as separate from each other, separate from ourselves, and separate from God (and, therefore, devoid of sacredness). They exist both as separate things in the realm we experience with our senses and minds, and also as parts of God's one totality without any separation from It or any part of It. This is paradoxical, but it is Reality. This is a bit like an ocean with localized turbulent currents within it. I call myself a "dualistic nondualist," seeing Reality as both dualistic and nondualistic at the same time. The internal inconsistency of this obviously is intentional, reflecting the paradox that is our existence.

Similarly some people say everything that happens “was meant to happen” or occurs according to some divine plan. This is not my perception. God could have manifested everything to operate in accordance with causal processes that would be completely predictable and, therefore, predestined. To a large extent, the universe actually does work this way, through causation, including the process we know as Karma (“You reap what you sow”). However, I believe the universe is like a “game” or improvisational theater God created with some predictable rules (causation/karma, impermanence, gravity, and so forth), but that the outcomes of the game/play are not preordained and rather are partially left to us. There is a divine “plan” only in the rules of the game. We have the ability to improvise, although our decisions largely are conditioned by our pasts (karma).

In other words, God appears to have manifested us to have not only individuated lives and consciousnesses - and what incredible and mysterious things those are! - but also a freedom and responsibility we know as Free Will, which operates to some extent outside the processes of causation and predictability. Free Will enables us to play the apparent game or improv theater (in Sanskrit: lila or leela) that God has placed us in. Without Free Will, there would be no game, and no apparent point, as the outcome would be entirely fated. Free Will makes us active participants in creating the universe we inhabit - through our actions, and also through our thoughts. This is a powerful responsibility, but also an incredible gift and opportunity.

The Goal of Life

The objective of our lives is not to get to Heaven and stay out of Hell, although such realms do exist and we may indeed spend some time in them. Rather the goal is to attain full resonance with the fundamental Oneness of God, consciously and completely merging with God (everything), including God’s ultimate consciousness and state of being. (We also hope to have temporary experiences of this state of consciousness along the way, and I know from personal experience and accounts of others that this is possible.) As some have said, this is a bit like consciously becoming a drop of water merging into the ocean. I believe a better way to describe it is to say it’s like turbulent localized currents in an ocean disappearing into the ocean’s total flows - we’ve always been part of that ocean, but our individuated consciousnesses are and create turbulence which we experience as ourselves and our lives, preventing us from being aware of and fully integrating into our oneness with the ocean, with our goal being to eliminate that turbulence. In this writing, I call it Absolute Conscious Reunion (or Reunion, for short). Hindus call this liberation moksha, mukti or nirvana (a term more commonly used in Buddhism).

The most fundamental choice that God gives us is to choose between seeking Reunion and maintaining the illusion of separation. Life basically is about moving in one direction

or the other. Reunion requires the kind of Love that pulls us together with everything, that acknowledges and treats everything as sacred. Separation is based on Ego, which is the mindset in which we believe we're separate from everything, we're the center of the universe, we're incomplete, we have needs that must be met even if it means others' needs won't be met, and there isn't enough to go around. Our Free Will permits us to either move towards Reunion or move away from it.

Many describe the fundamental nature of God as Love, but I believe this is too limited as God includes everything, including all that is the opposite of Love. What we can say is that Love is a part of God that beckons us to Reunion. On a more limited level, love (with a small l) is, of course, the term we use to describe the emotion which enables us to intimately connect with others, to give of ourselves for others, to think of oneself as part of a unity with someone. That kind of love, if unconditional and selfless, can move us in the direction of Love.

Reunion in part requires that we become the type of people we perceive God wants us to be - virtuous, kind, compassionate, honest, and so on. All traditions talk about this at least partially in terms of codes of conduct (such as the Ten Commandments) that must be satisfied in order to attain admission to God's home (whether described as Heaven, paradise, moksha, enlightenment, nirvana or something else). This also includes the necessity of Loving one another, even those we don't like, those who do harmful things. Loving someone doesn't mean one has to like them or approve everything they do. It doesn't mean one shouldn't try to change harmful behavior.

Some traditions, such as Hinduism, say that's only a start and that we must also become God-like in our consciousness and being, one's vibrational frequency. Again, if one is to consciously become one with the ocean, one must experience and know oneself as water and must stop creating personal turbulence.

Reunion is complete only when one disappears into this state of being. One approaches it when one experiences it constantly to a large extent and still functions in the world, and always treats absolutely everything as sacred.

The fact that we initially are not God-like does not mean we are fundamentally bad ("original sinners"). Would we say an infant is bad because its capabilities are limited? Our fundamental deficiency is not that we are sinners, but that we are ignorant of the true nature of Reality, that everything is part of God, that everything is sacred. We move away from Reunion when we operate on the basis of Ego perceptions. When we do that, we experience emotions like fear, attachment, greed, anger, competitiveness, and being judgmental. This can lead to sinful behavior. All of these emotions are based on ignorantly placing our focus on our individuated selves - our Egos. What we perceive as evil

fundamentally is merely the product or extreme form of these fear-based, self-centered emotions and attitudes.

Humans seek relationships and experiences that can give them a partial experience of Reunion, such as deep meditation, romantic love, sexual relations, spiritual congregation, immersion in nature, and so forth. Sometimes these experiences also can be pursued to serve the Ego, but in their pure forms they are experiences moving us in the direction of Reunion.

Reincarnation

Again, Hindus believe our goal in life is Reunion rather than getting to Heaven or staying out of Hell, although we believe in one or more versions of both and may reincarnate in them. We are eternal beings (souls) temporarily inhabiting our bodies and minds, and life is a school to teach us the lessons that will enable us to eventually attain Reunion. We will have as many lifetimes, on earth or elsewhere, as it takes to learn and fully integrate all of these lessons. We will reincarnate in part on the basis of the karma we have created. Karma and reincarnation are educational processes, not punishing ones (although it may feel otherwise at times). They are designed to bring to us the circumstances which will help us learn and evolve. Life should be viewed as a blessed opportunity to advance on one's path, even when it holds pain and burdens. Every obstacle and enemy presents an opportunity to learn and grow. Life isn't easy, but it is our path to paradise.

We may even be temporarily reincarnated in a realm so hellish that it couldn't be on this planet, but we will leave it when we have learned what we need to learn there. Likewise, we may temporarily be reincarnated in a realm so heavenly that it couldn't be on this planet, and we will leave it when it is time to proceed on the path to Reunion. Everyone will graduate from "Earthschool" sooner or later. Everyone is walking a labyrinth. The center of the labyrinth represents the goal, and every step ultimately takes you closer to the center, even when it appears you're walking away from it.

Many people accept reincarnation as an article of faith. I accept it because I have partial memories of numerous past lives. Many people do.

A great question is often asked: How can we possibly remember things which happened before our brains existed? There's a simple answer: Our souls are like thumb drives which carry information from lifetime to lifetime. Our bodies have brains which are processors and hard drives holding our memories of this lifetime, but within each of us is another database stored in our souls. These databases carry memories of our past lives, the lessons we've learned, the lesson plans for the lessons we still need to learn, and our personal karmic "programs" which, when we incarnate, interact with the broader karmic programs of the world around us, bringing us the consequences of our past actions and

thoughts, and the circumstances which will enable us to learn what we still need to learn. We can access those databases by living from our soul levels rather than our Ego levels. We generally live in our Ego minds, which sense, interpret and react to the world around us. We think our minds tell us who we are. But they basically only tell us who we are in relation to the physical universe. We are really much more than our minds. Our minds lead us to believe we are our bodies, thoughts, emotions, and sensory experiences, but actually we are souls observing our minds and all of that. Our bodies and Ego minds are vehicles our souls use to live in the material plane. In the West we're told we can't access our souls until we're trying to get through a Pearly Gate and our Egos and bodies drop away. In Hinduism, we believe we can access our souls during our lifetimes, and we are encouraged to do so because our souls are more experienced and wiser. Our Egos do serve a purpose, as they are necessary in order for us to function in the material plane, but we should weaken them so they will not control our lives. Some say it's necessary to destroy (or "kill") the Ego, but this is incorrect and, in fact, impossible as long as you're in a body and a personality.

It can take a while to start accessing these memories, in part because our Western minds generally are closed to the idea because we've been told reincarnation isn't real. However, when we are open to the possibility and start working with it, we can. Again, the key is to start living primarily from the soul level of one's being rather than the Ego level.

Western hypnotherapists (not Hindus) are finding that when they regress people to their past life memories, we remember we reincarnate in groups. We repeatedly reincarnate with other souls in order to help each other evolve. Therefore, it's entirely predictable that we'll meet people we knew in past lives. If you meet someone for the first time and feel like you already know them, this may well be part of your soul group. Once you make a connection, overlapping memories can be triggered. For example, you might recognize people you were married to, and they might remember it as well. This isn't ridiculous, but rather is consistent with the way reincarnation happens. My own memories bear this out.

Tibetan Buddhists reportedly say that there is no one you meet who was not your mother. To be sure, Tibetans almost certainly meet far fewer people in their lifetimes than we do in our congested modern societies, and perhaps they don't take this literally anyway, but suffice to say there's more going on than most people realize.

People also reportedly have similar memories of where we go between lives. However, this differs from one culture to another. It seems that what we experience is partially a result of the conditioning we've had during our lifetimes, what we've been taught to believe we'll experience. This is logical inasmuch as our consciousnesses continue past the deaths of our bodies and Ego minds, and our consciousnesses thus help shape what we'll experience.

People often express skepticism by noting how many more bodies have souls now than did in the distant past. This is easily answered. First, God presumably creates new souls all the time. Second, we may have reincarnated in many other places (planets, realms) and forms (for example, animals). Third, maybe the waiting time to receive a human body is shorter now.

According to a 2018 study by the Pew Research Center, 33 percent of all adults in the U.S. believe in reincarnation, and this includes 29 percent of all Christian adults and 36 percent of all Roman Catholic adults. The total number of Hindus and Buddhists is only about three percent of the population, so most of the Americans who believe in reincarnation are Christians.

God's Forms, God's Devotees

The Ultimate God fundamentally is universal and for the most part exists on a level transcending our personal lives. God surely can communicate with us directly, though I don't believe I've ever experienced it. However, God also can be involved in our plane of existence through personified deity forms. Most people are more comfortable relating to God through forms that resembles people, rather than as the undifferentiated all-there-is Brahman, and God accommodates this. The Hindu pantheon consists of such forms (Vishnu, Shiva, and many others). Sometimes God takes forms on Earth which are or appear to be human form, in order to help people (such as Krishna, Rama, and Jesus). These are known as avatars.

Each deity form embodies different aspects of God, and some are more complex than others. These forms generally look human not because Brahman created us in Brahman's image, as Brahman has no single image as its the entire universe. Rather, the forms look like us because on this particular planet humans have evolved, and God appears in forms that look like us because our consciousnesses factor into the process - we'll find such forms more relatable and less frightening than other forms God might take. (Some Hindus believe these forms are merely imaginary and symbolic, whereas others believe they actually exist; I was in the first group for most of my years, but now I'm in the second.) Some of the forms are female because consciousness is considered male and energy/vibration female, so you can only have the totality if you have both. Therefore, the primary deity forms come in gender couples, such as Vishnu and Lakshmi. Hindus who worship God through one or more forms always remember that beyond and encompassing the forms is the ultimate God, Brahman.

Simplistically stated, Hindus believe everything is within God and that there are three realms, differentiated by different vibrational frequency ranges. One realm is unique to God. One realm is the one we experience as our universe. In between is a third realm, populated by beings widely recognized in the religions, such as the deity forms, angels,

saints, disembodied bodhisattvas, spirit guides, and so on. At Living Insights, so many people come who are doing their spiritual work, and so many altars have become vested with devotional and transformational energy, that many have found the range of frequencies experienced at the Center expands to reach into the middle realm, and sometimes even beyond. Therefore, it is not rare for people to experience some such beings.

This surely will sound imaginary to many. However, we all know there are energies which exist and pass through us even though we cannot directly experience them with our senses, such as radio waves and television signals. Those are not the only ones.

In addition to the aforementioned avatars, various religions recognize other embodied or disembodied beings who are dedicated assisting us, such as angels, saints, and bodhisattvas (the Buddhist term for beings who forego nirvana and instead vow to reincarnate as many lifetimes as necessary to help all beings attain liberation). God can choose to act through them, just as God can choose to act through anything, but these beings also can and do act on their own, with God's blessing and power. Sometimes our prayers will be answered only by acknowledgments that they've been heard. Sometimes there will be miraculous healings.

One notable example is St. Therese of Lisieux. The Roman Catholic church considers her the greatest saint of modern times because people receive miracles so often when they pray with her. We are extremely humbled by the fact that the Living Insights Center is a place where this often happens. This is a long and moving story, beyond the scope of this particular summary. But I will say this: Many people, myself included, are certain St. Therese is present at our Center, I have a great devotion to her, and this in no way conflicts with my Hindu beliefs. I've occasionally been asked how I could remain a Hindu if I believe in her, and was told I should worship the same God Therese worships. I replied that I do worship the same God, that there can only be one. Without hesitation I honor all divine beings worshipped in the various faith traditions.

Everything is Connected

Reunion includes the fully conscious recognition that we actually have been, are, and will always be one with everything, part of the ocean of energized consciousness that God is and has created, sustains, contains, and experiences. Only Ego-based ignorance keeps us from seeing this infinite interconnectedness. Buddhists too place a great emphasis on this awareness, calling it knowledge of Dependent Origination or Emptiness (which mean that everything does exist but only within and as part of this complex web of connection). It's said that when a butterfly flaps its wings on one side of the Earth, it ultimately can affect the weather on the other side of the globe, but this is only a somewhat superficial illustration. We can see it too in recently discovered quantum entanglement, where a

change in one subatomic particle can happen simultaneously in another particle a tremendous distance away, faster than the speed of light. That too is just one glimpse into the true nature of the universe.

An important corollary to this is to never forget or take for granted the infinite ways the diverse components of the universe support us. The practice of praying before a meal can reflect this wisdom, for one has a partial Reunion experience when one acknowledges and expresses gratitude for the beings (both animals and plants) that give their lives for our nourishment, the people who have played a role in growing, delivering or preparing the food, the molecules that will be digested, the planet and sun that sustain us, and so on.

The system of karma operates not just on our individual level, but also on all levels, including family, community, regional, national, species, and planetary connections. Likewise, Hindus believe that in order for everything to attain Reunion we must fulfill our Dharmas - the dynamics which must be fulfilled in order for everything to be resolved into uniform oneness - and Dharma too operates on all those levels. As an illustration, the climate crisis is a result of our collective karma, and overcoming it requires that we fulfill our collective Dharmic responsibilities to each other and to all life forms on the planet.

We are a Family

Reality is infinite, and because our minds are finite, none of us can ever fully experience and understand it until Reunion is achieved. For this reason, and because each of us is an equal embodiment of God, every person and every person's beliefs deserve respect (unless they call for harm). Even those who hold beliefs that are destructive as they are based on or reflect Egoic attitudes should receive compassion from us.

Every person fundamentally embodies God. The Hindu greeting "Namaste" captures this fact, because it means "the sacred in me acknowledges and honors the sacred in you." Every person is equally a part of God. Every person is a creation of God. Every authentic religious or spiritual tradition ultimately can move us forward on the path to Reunion. Every person ultimately will attain that Reunion. You may have learned lessons that someone else still needs to learn, but likewise they may have learned other lessons you still need to learn. We're all in Earthschool together, and we all will graduate sooner or later.

We don't need to like each other, but we should Love each other. If you Love God, and if you understand every person is an embodiment of God, then Loving every person should be easy. It may be helpful to recognize that people who intentionally harm others generally do so out of their own pain, and thus deserve our compassion, or that they may be vehicles for karmic consequences to manifest.

Happiness

What an incredible gift life is. What a shame it is that we so often allow ourselves to forget the wonder of it all, forget that we are eternal beings in temporary circumstances, and sink into unhappiness. It does take work to be happy, especially as life throws so many difficulties at us, but ultimately we have some power to choose. As one wise woman with advanced cancer said, "You don't need to wait until life isn't hard to decide to be happy."

Releasing Ego attachments and living at the soul level is a key. We often feel unhappy because we can't manifest things we feel we need. We feel the glass is half empty. Some say we should instead feel the glass is half full. Perhaps the better approach is to decide the glass is too big and realize it already contains everything we need. We don't really need many of the things we think we do. Our Egos make life much more complicated than it needs to be. As many have said, the richest people aren't the ones who have the most, but the ones who know they have enough

It's wise to learn from the past, but not to carry it around as heavy baggage that burdens us. It's wise to plan and work for the future, but not to allow worrying to drain the strength we need for living in the Now. Let's be present for our lives in every instant. After all, Now is the only time that exists. It's wise to always remember that no matter where we go, or where we are in our lives, we're still only in the present moment. As Ram Dass famously said, "Be here now." If we aren't, we're sleepwalking through life.

It also appears that making other people happy contributes greatly to our own happiness. We're each on our own journey, but it's best to travel together and care for each other. We're all part of the One.

Love to All. Love All.

Thanks so much for taking the time to read this.

Jack