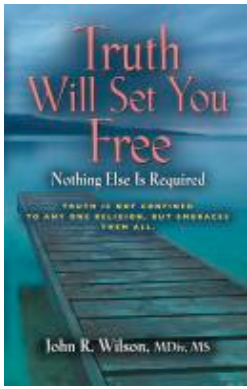


Truth Will Set You Free

Nothing Else Is Required

TRUTH IS NOT CONFINED
TO ANY ONE RELIGION, BUT EMBRACES
THEM ALL.

John R. Wilson, MDiv, MS



*The true story of one man's journey seeking truth, **Truth Will Set You Free** outlines a lifelong spiritual quest. Nearly every faith tradition claims to be the one true religion. How can that dissent be reconciled? John R. Wilson, adopted as a toddler by middle-aged Southern Baptists, sought to answer that question. After decades of study and insight, Wilson reached a credible conclusion: Truth is not confined to any one religion, but embraces them all.*

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John R. Wilson

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First Edition

Chapter 3: Alternate Viewpoints

One of the ideas remembered from seminary studies came from the Unitarian Universalist (UU) tradition: “the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.” This concept resonated with me like nothing else from my studies. In contrast to the fundamentalist “father” of only the faithful, this father was the father of everyone. Unlike the fundamentalist “brother” that was exclusively limited to fellow believers; this brotherhood included the entire human family. This rang so true to me that after graduation, I eventually sought out the Unitarians and spent ten years in their midst. It was not a smooth transition, as there was one year of Unity (more about that later) and three years of moderate Baptist participation that intervened. However, the decade of involvement with the UUs was so meaningful and instructive that I still consider myself a UU and stay in touch with the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA).

Being democratic in structure, the UU members and friends developed UUA “Principles and Purposes,” which outlined the most remarkable list of religious statements that I could imagine being produced by a religious organization, especially one made up of a diverse array of people with such divergent views. Unitarian Universalism includes traditional Christians, ancestors in Transylvania, humanists, and modern day pagans (Neo-Pagans).

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Humanists typically are committed to the scientific method and believe that which can be verified by scientific experimentation and analysis. The humanist point of view is not usually considered “spiritual.” Nevertheless, these sincere pragmatists share values such as love, democracy, freedom of religion, human dignity, respect, etc. with followers of Earth-centered spirituality, likely the oldest spiritual tradition on the planet. Long before modern civilization, people were connected with the Earth and viewed it as a living entity all its own. These devotees of Nature understood the “Spirit” of the sun, moon, stars, seasons, fertility, and the elements. Thus, Unitarian Universalists unite in appreciating the contributions of all religions, scriptures, and traditions. What characterizes them most, though, is that no belief system is considered the path for everyone. The traditions that UUs likely do not readily align with are those that aggressively campaign as the one and only credo for everyone. Thus, it was a natural progression for me to embrace this more universal religious tradition.

Living Love

A few years prior to this involvement with liberal religion, I was introduced to Living Love. This “Science of Happiness” was an entire system of practices, derived from both science and religion and based on the writings of Ken Keyes. He taught that our lives are dominated by events and situations in which we frequently experience the discomfort of emotional separation through some form of fear, deprivation, or frustration. Feeling separate from everyone and everything offers little in the way of an

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abundant life. That is why “one way” religions may not liberate as much as they bind people to beliefs, doctrines, rituals, rites, and spiritual practices. When religion becomes exclusive, it imprisons the faithful like houses with barred windows and locked gates. Who more likely experiences freedom, those locked inside the walls or those who are free to roam elsewhere?

When we foster exclusiveness, reject people or circumstances, and demand our own way (of seeing and doing things) we can feel discomfort much of the time. We resist and complain whenever things do not go our way. However, happiness is a state of mind, which can be cultivated to create a mindset that is capable of loving more of Life, no matter what happens and it is a “work” that almost anyone can do. (Keyes, 1975)

A small group of us from the Unity Church attended a weeklong training in the Living Love system, which turned out to have a significant influence on my life. This event was likely the tipping point for me, the catalyst for breaking free from the past and taking giant steps in the direction of liberty.

Many can identify a point in life at which their spiritual direction changed from going along with the crowd to finding their own way. Keyes’ Living Love training emphasized that only one person was responsible for my experience of life: me. Blaming other people or relying on others to determine my own reactions to the world is a robotic lifestyle, devoid of actual living. *Happiness is a byproduct of freedom.* As one removes addictive “separate self” directives from the subconscious mind, one can consciously replace them with liberating “unified self” ideas (universal principles). This process of psychological and spiritual development

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is liberating as one learns to reduce obsessions with “Security, Sensation, and Power” and expand opportunities for “Love, Cornucopia, Conscious Awareness, and Cosmic Consciousness.” All of these options are available to us and instructive for growth in higher consciousness. For those interested in learning how to practice unconditional love, Keyes has written several excellent books that specifically outline and explain the Living Love “methods.” (Keyes, 1975)

This was my experience with Living Love. The system of learning (unlearning) was foundational in nature and broad enough in scope to encompass nearly every other concept that appeared later on. The central idea was “freeing” oneself. The primary observation was that each of us is enslaved to some degree by our prior experiences. The past stays with us, engrained in our minds like programs in a computer. As a result, we constantly demand that the present moment be different than it is.

We resist *what is* with a passion, not realizing that separating ourselves from events and people actually creates our own misery. On top of that, the sense of separation builds upon itself, snowballing until one reaches either the heights of confusion or the depths of despair. It was my experience that Christian salvation did not save me from myself. My focus on “separate self” thinking has remained with me throughout my life. However, when salvation is defined as a process of liberation, then learning “unified self” thinking certainly contributes to that process. (Keyes, 1975)

Living Love was all about getting free from the grasp of fear, disappointment, and anger (forms of emotional separation). Everyone seems to want freedom from these to some degree; it is likely that few prefer to remain in a

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constant state of discontent. The Living Love system offered several ways to chip away at that which engulfs each of us: automatic resistance patterns from our past.

Ever since my first exposure to the Ken Keyes material, I have used Living Love tools to move away from separation and toward Unity with Life. Separation from circumstances or from other people is a malady that we ourselves create and can easily remedy. For example, merely uplifting an emotion-backed demand (insist that a situation be different) to a preference (merely *prefer* that it be different) is one way to release the emotional discomfort. Keyes provided numerous such methods.

I am convinced that we are never really separate from anyone or anything; it is simply not possible to be a part of this Universe without an indelible connection to everything in it. However, to tenaciously hold to exclusive religious beliefs promotes a sense of separation from other people. If Love is the one experience that most of us are seeking, then it makes little sense to cling to attitudes that physically, psychologically, and spiritually separate us from each other. It makes more sense to promote the essential Unity of all Life.

Truth Within

Not all teachers of religion are enslaved to the dictates of a traditional faith perspective. One such teacher was known as “Dadaji (Amiya Roy Chowdhury).” Although a lifelong participant in the Hindu tradition, Dadaji was not an advocate of strict religious rites, rituals or trappings. This revered “elder brother” wore few vestments, forsook no earthly pleasures, and created no empire. He

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reminded me of the presumably historical figure, which may have been the actual Yeshua, in contrast to the popular “Jesus” idolized by the Church. Both Dadaji and Yeshua were part of the spiritual traditions they were born into, but both of them rejected the legalistic expectations of their respective religions and connected with Truth more deeply than most.

Dadaji spoke of the “Truth Within,” which he believed is not attained through gurus, ascetic practices or elaborate rites and rituals. Rather, he taught that Truth is available to each of us as we remember “Him,” do our duty, and love life. By “Him,” Dadaji was referring to Divinity, the essence of all that orchestrates the Universe and expresses as all of Life and as each of us. Doing our duty is simply to address those things that we need to do to live, work and play in the world.

As an old adage indicates, before you become enlightened you “chop wood and carry water;” after you become enlightened, you “chop wood and carry water.” Both Dadaji and Yeshua remembered God, performed their duty as they understood it, and believed in an abundant life. Whatever our spiritual understanding, we are no different from these sages; each of us can relate spirituality to everyday life. (Dadaji, 1987)

This attitude of Loving Life seems similar to Living Love. Being happy involves resisting less and loving more of everyday life, accepting *what is*. Loving our moment to moment experience is different from liking or not liking it; everyone has preferences. Loving life is remaining in the natural state of serenity in the midst of life. Living in the world, but not *of* the world (attributed to Jesus) may mean being responsible for one’s own interactions with life and accepting it on face value, without undue

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judgment or demands that it be different. Dadaji, Yeshua, Keyes, and others recognized that they could not save anyone from their own choices; all of them instructed people to follow their example (learn from me, my way is the way, do as I say, do what I do, etc.)

As noted above in the Serenity Prayer, we can change the direction and focus of our lives. Dadaji, like Yeshua, was considered miraculous by those who knew him. He embraced life and remembered God (Gopal Govinda) as well. Life and spirituality are not mutually exclusive. Like Yeshua, Dadaji had devoted followers, but created no organizations. His aim was simple: live in Truth, because it can set a person free. Thus, Dadaji and Jesus seem very much alike to me. I wonder if the Spirit in Yeshua is the same as that in Dadaji. Is that same Spirit within all of us? I think both of them would say, "Yes."

Philosophical Religion

Unity Movement

After my seminary years and prior to my Unitarian Universalist involvement, I was exposed to New Thought, an eclectic movement of spiritual seekers that endorses other religious traditions. While searching for the Unitarians, I inadvertently stumbled upon a small community of Unity students.

At first glance, Unity seemed somewhat traditional because the minister wore a suit with a huge cross around his neck and the building had a pulpit up front and rows of pews like most churches. However, it was soon obvious

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that Unity was different. For one thing, there was a feeling of being “home” that could not be denied. It was not unlike the discovery that “I am a UU” that occurred in the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship a few years later. My impression was that Unity was expressing Truth and that I already *knew* what they were talking about. They spoke of spirituality as the “Christ” within, about prayer as affirming “Truth,” and about God as the “Good.” All of these resonated deeply with me and I spent an entire year investigating Unity beliefs.

This initial taste of Unity revealed the depths of my previous indoctrinations. In spite of the experience of feeling at home, the innate knowledge of “God within,” and the open-ended nature of spiritual discovery, previous teachings about Satan, evil, demons, and hell continued to haunt me with anxiety. Even though the Unity approach to God (Universal Good), Jesus (Way-Shower), and the Bible (Spiritual Lessons) was preferable, I allowed apprehension from the past to creep in. I became concerned that Unity was not “traditional” Christianity. It was different from the Christian churches I knew and it utilized traditional language to describe universal principles and eclectic ideas.

My religious heritage had been so ingrained that I could not break the chains and fully embrace the Unity philosophy. I chose instead to attend a moderate (Love thy Neighbor) Baptist congregation with views between those of Unity and those of my former church affiliations. Incidentally, this moderate congregation is where I met the Jewish woman mentioned previously and gained the insight that changed the focus of my spiritual adventure. I spent three years with these more reasonable Baptists, yet it remained so steeped in the substitutionary sacrifice

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doctrine (Jesus' death and resurrection paid for my sins) that my discomfort eventually led me to the UUs. Thus, the journey that originated with Southern Baptists, led "home" to Unity, detoured to moderate Baptists, and continued with Unitarian Universalists before returning home to Unity once again.

Unitarian Universalists

Unitarian Universalism (UU) originated with the merging of two traditions, the Universalists and the Unitarians. The Universalists believed that salvation by Jesus included everyone. Therefore, they became known as the "no hell" Christian churches.

Universalists believe in God and Jesus like most other Christian groups, however, they would not agree that anything was needed for salvation; not faith, not works, not experience, and not rituals. They do not agree with the doctrine of salvation for believers only. In many Christian circles, they are considered non-Christian, which demonstrates the diversity of "Christian" beliefs. However, their tradition goes back in history as far as any other Christian sect and the Universalist tradition stands on equal footing with the Orthodox Church and modern evangelical churches.

Unitarians were also believers, but their faith perspective developed more recently out of the Congregationalist tradition of democratic church governance and individual responsibility. Many famous people either called themselves "Unitarian" or were considered to be part of the fold. Among them were

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Thomas Jefferson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Dorothea Dix, and Florence Nightingale.

Unitarians have been instrumental in furthering the cause of education, women's rights, mental health, and peace, to name a few. Unitarians are the religious "liberals" so often opposed by fundamentalists and others. Unitarians do not tend to buy into the practice of idolizing the Bible or of worshipping Jesus as God. Unitarians align more with the human, compassionate Jesus who came to heal the sick, liberate the captives and proclaim "Good News" to the poor and oppressed.

Unitarian and Universalist organizations merged in the mid-twentieth century to share those common values. They reflect the Christian ideal of "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." UUs seldom, if ever, align with religious charlatans who preach love and forgiveness, but actually exhibit antagonism and discrimination.

During a UU Summer Institute (retreat), I attended a workshop that included an exercise about my "ideal day." In the exercise, we were to think about what an ideal day would consist of. For me, it seemed that the activities at the retreat would be part of such a day for me. Having breakfast with people of like-mind, attending workshops on various topics, going on an outing to a local mountain stream, gathering for lunch, attending other workshops in the afternoon, eating dinner together, being entertained by fabulous musicians, and hanging out to all hours of the night, etc. all seemed ideal to me. Ironically, my favorite day was being exactly where I was at the time: in a workshop, at a retreat, and with people I liked to be with. After all the attendees pondered the question, the workshop facilitator revealed the twist: "How can you create your ideal day more often?"

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I knew that attending retreats on a continual basis might be cost prohibitive, so there had to be another way to accomplish the same thing. Then it hit me: Unity! I remembered Sundays at Unity to be ideal in much the same way that the UU retreats were. Unity had wonderful music, excellent workshops, social events, personal responsibility for spirituality, and lots of love. I realized that I could have my ideal day at least 52 times a year and attend some retreats as well.

In addition, there was one thing that Unity offered that I did not find at UU: a commitment on nearly everyone's part to Truth principles (not dissimilar to Life, Love, Abundance, Awareness, and . . . Unity). Like my first experience at a Unity church, my return was uplifting. The Unity community again enfolded me in peace and love as my ongoing spiritual home.

Relevant "isms"

Philosophical Taoism

One of the most significant influences on my journey has been philosophical Taoism. This is the ancient Chinese system of thought, based on the *Tao Te Ching* and the traditions that both preceded and followed it. The "Tao" or "Dao" is so basic to the universe that it cannot even be "named."

The Tao is not God, or an object of worship, but the context, or emptiness behind all that is. It is the "Mystery" from which all things emerge. It is that which is "not" (substance, potential), that makes things useful.

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It is not the bowl that is functional, but the space inside the bowl; it is not the door that allows entry, but the opening within the doorway. This apparent nothingness is actually something (Tao). It is the vastness of infinite potential, out of which emerges duality: Yin and Yang, sun and moon, day and night, east and west, etc. From this duality, everything in the universe expresses and relates to everything else. Harmony in one's personal life, then, results from a consistent focus on the eternal Tao, rather than constant distractions from the "10,000 things" evident in the world. (Lin, 2006)

Taoism, along with Yin and Yang (duality), seems to explain Truth as well as any religious tradition. Like Truth, understanding Tao is a process of unraveling everything that distracts from Tao. It is a progressive experience of unlearning or "cultivation." All religions are subject to duality. None of the polarities between this or that, you or me, and us or them holds a monopoly on Truth. Religions, doctrines, and creeds of every religion contradict each other on several levels. Thus, no one view can prevail. Religion thus becomes a matter of selling, recruiting, convincing, evangelizing, converting, and even brainwashing or threatening people into the fold.

Since religious traditions tend to be mutually exclusive, then what is the relationship between them? In my view, it is not exclusivity, but the interaction between religious views that contributes more to one's spiritual journey. It is the interplay between my point of view and yours that entices both of us toward Truth.

Religion can distract people from Truth, but the contrast of religious beliefs can also facilitate our understanding of it. Fundamentalism conflicts with Atheism, Agnosticism, and Universalism; Catholicism

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vies with Protestantism; Hinduism competes with Buddhism, Islam clashes with Catholicism; Judaism is incompatible with Polytheism; and Philosophical Taoism contrasts with Religious Taoism. What could possibly constitute Truth in the midst of such diversity of beliefs? Truth is necessarily an all-encompassing concept. Truth acknowledges and affirms the spirituality of every person, whatever their religious perspective. Everyone is right and no one is wrong. How is this possible? Since all paths contain the potential for Truth, every step along a person's journey is a new point of arrival, realization, and enlightenment. *Each of us is "home" here and now. Therein is freedom; that is how I see it.*

Gnostic Christians (Gnosticism)

Even in the first century C.E., various Christian points of view were expressed. Gnosticism was one of them. Gnostics did not believe that the God of the scriptures was actually the supreme one. They considered this world inferior, so its creator must be inferior as well. Gnostic devotees figured there is a spiritual reality that transcends physical reality and they believed inner knowledge of this was available to those who awakened to it. They viewed Jesus from the same perspective of an inner knowledge that transcends physical reality.

The early days of Christianity have long been characterized by the popular notion that Christianity originated with a single Christology (understanding of Jesus) that everyone accepted. However, the first centuries were anything but homogenous as numerous groups of followers each promoted their own view of

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Jesus, his mission, and his message. Not much has changed in over 2000 years.

Orthodox Christianity standardized the faith through councils, creeds, and ceremonies. Heretics and their writings were purged and the common people were schooled in doctrine, dogma, and disciplines of the official Church. The Bible was constructed according to priests, bishops and popes; sacraments were performed for dealing with sin, salvation, and sanctification. The Christian “faith” was thereby altered from a variety of personal paths toward spiritual liberation to an institutional religion with one point of view, the orthodox, authorized one.

Even then, history shows that the spirit of freedom cannot be ignored forever. A schism developed between East and West; later, the Protestant Reformation further divided the Church; then, the science vs. religion debate has continued to evolve over the years. Evidently, there is no pure “Christian” faith, just as there is likely no pure Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Taoist, or Buddhist faith. Truth is universal, yet it also allows for this diversity of opinion on religious matters.

It is also no accident that movements have developed an interest in bringing divergent views together, dismissing none of them, and respecting all of them. Ecumenical movements have led to worldwide meetings and councils attended by devotees of many religions with totally different belief systems. Some Christian denominations have made efforts to unite with other denominations to find common ground and to share in mutually beneficial organizational efforts. Some new religions have developed, based on the idea that universal principles are more inclusive than exclusive.

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Thousands, if not millions, of people have seen the light of Truth and realize that their own journey does not have to infringe upon or detract from the religious experience of another. It is not necessary for religion to imprison the hearts and minds of people, because religion can facilitate freedom as well. While some religious tenants are oppressive, others are liberating.

The list of religious abominations, rules, rituals, and commandments is often exhausting and the opportunities for relief can seem few and far between. Each of us at one time or another may have opted for religious views that we experienced as uncomfortable distractions from Truth. Perhaps we later discovered alternative religious perspectives that paved the way to freedom.

Classic Mysticism

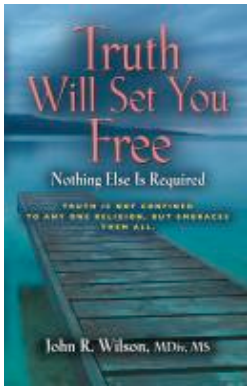
One additional concept that contributed to my spiritual freedom was the path of Mysticism. Within nearly every world religion are people that seek the experience of unity with Reality. These earnest souls utilize various practices to facilitate their spiritual journey. They focus on the open-ended nature of Truth and search the innermost aspects of their being for the universal meaning of life. Through contemplation, meditation, and affirmation, they presume the ability to “know” that which cannot be fully known. In spite of human limitations, they find themselves immersed in an ocean of love, enraptured in a field “beyond ideas of right and wrong” (Rumi), illumined by light, or all of the above. In other words, *mystical experience is available to*

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anyone who is open to it. There is nothing to get, receive, or gain; mysticism is merely a different perspective.

All of these alternate viewpoints: Metaphysics, Living Love, Truth Within, Taoism, Gnosticism, Mysticism, etc. indicated to me the prevalence of religious diversity. In spite of claims to the contrary, there seems to be no single Way, Savior, Revelation, or Faith with which everyone is comfortable. Almost every “Way” claims to be the one and only way. However, people already “saved” by one of those ways still become dissatisfied and seek out another way. Diversity of religious experience may not be the problem; perhaps it is the solution.

In my experience, every person is convinced that their own faith perspective is the right one. For them, it is, until they come to believe it is not. My sense of it all is that *our definitions of God and our spiritual practices may differ, but the process of liberation and spiritual principles are universal.* Thus, religious diversity can be appreciated, rather than denied, debated, or disdained. What difference does it make to my personal point of view that another person holds to a different belief?



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