

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE PROPHETS?
A TWO-STEP REVELATION FROM THE BLACK LIGHT
TO THE GREEN ANGEL
(WITH TRANSPERSONAL AND PARTICIPATORY
COMMENTARY)

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ABSTRACT: The article examines a Prophetic Vision/Mystical Illumination (after Michael Washburn), a meeting with Al' Khidr—the Angel Holy Spirit—(after Henry Corbin), and a Luminous Night Journey (after Muhammad and Sufism) and locates the event in the theistic Abrahamic or Prophetic Tradition. The Prophetic encounter with the Angel Holy Spirit discloses a relational cosmos calling for more relational practices. Spiritual narcissism is discussed in the light of the Theophanic Other and the relational function of the Eternal Thou. Relational spirituality is depicted as a dynamic interpersonal path of beauty, which, because of its open-ended nature, can be compared metaphorically to an Ocean without Shore.

KEYWORDS: Angels, theophany, Prophetic Tradition, spiritual-narcissism, revelation, Sufism, transpersonal psychology, relational-spirituality.

For, if it is true that God wants to be eternally (that is to say *now*) known by a Witness (*shahid*), this witness can be no other than himself ... This witness must realize that if he is the Witness of God, it is because he is himself the *mirror*, the *eye* through which God contemplates himself.

The Jasmine of the Fidele d'Amore (Henry Corbin, 1990, p. 207)

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN ANGEL

Recently, it has been acknowledged by scholars in the field of transpersonal and participatory philosophy that it is important to reveal one's own experience when writing about matters transpersonal (e.g., Heron, 1998; Wilber, 2001). And, since transpersonal philosophy cannot be done at a distance (Wilber, 2001), it would appear that participation and representation (autobiography) must be central to the construction of transpersonal knowledge.¹ Stanislav Grof in *The Cosmic Game* (1998) included some of his own non-ordinary adventures into realms "beyond consensus reality" (1988, p. 43). Christopher Bache's autobiographical account serves as the bedrock of his research into a sacred mind (2000). Perhaps not strictly in the transpersonal camp, A. H. Almaas' *Luminous Night Journey: An autobiographical fragment* (2000) is somewhat self-explanatory; and John Heron, with regard to Michael

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Washburn's *Ego and the Dynamic Ground* (1995) is critical of a lack of ownership in the text:

...it is not at all clear how this theory is experientially based. There is a sustained and cogent account of what is going on at the different stages, [which included in the final regeneration of spirit phase "prophetic vision"] but no account of whom, if anyone, it is *all* going on for (my bracket). (1998, p. 75)

In other words, whose ego was regressing to the *dynamic ground in service of transcendence* and who then is suffering ego-death, and who is being graced and transfigured by prophetic visions and mystical illumination?

So with this encouragement from such distinguished transpersonal theorists, anthropologists and philosophers, and with a vague Biblical echo somewhere gently exhorting me not to hide my available light 'under a bushel' (not that I am a traditional theist by any means), I want to 'come out' as a recipient of something like Washburn's "prophetic vision" (1995, p. 245). More importantly, and perhaps in keeping with prophetic tradition, I come out—as an initiand and (therefore) a disciple of a Theophanic Angel—an Angel that makes its home mostly, but as we shall see, apparently not exclusively, in the Islamic and pre-Islamic Persian *weltanschauung*.²

Personal Context

The event occurred in New Zealand, and I was, at the time, naïve when it came to Judaism, Islam, or Gnosticism. I came from a secular and nominally Christian background. My mother was a non-practicing Protestant (an ancestor had been a pioneering Methodist missionary who had preached in Maori). My father was a non-practicing Catholic New Zealander, whose father immigrated (first to America) from Mount Lebanon (and the village of celebrated poet and author of 'The Prophet' Kahlil Gibran). My father's people were Maronite Christians, an ethno-religious group originating from North Syria who spoke a dialect of Syriac Aramaic. My father did not pursue his heritage and was largely uneducated. I was born in 1960 and was certainly affected by the new spirituality of the times, anti-Viet Nam, pro-hippie and like many of my generation following the Beatles toward the East. By the time I was 20 every second book I read was on Zen Buddhism, and by 23 I had written to the late Abbott John Toller in Nara (Japan) seeking refuge there as a Buddhist monk. My life took a different turn into psychodrama, psychotherapy, exposure to Grof's breathwork, dietary restriction, and a sincere invitation to a 'greater power' to govern my life. While I carried a desire for 'higher consciousness' or enlightenment the last thing I would have expected or courted was a meeting with an Angel. At that time, for me, Angels belonged to a bygone age of Christian superstition (at which I had rebelled), trite figures on Christmas cards, or to a certain stream of New Age enthusiasm and self-deception.

In terms of the Angel-Theophany there was no overt cultural pre-conditioning pattern to mediate the experience, and yet, contrary to the contextualist position (e.g., Katz, 1978), it seems to me now to be a highly culture-specific event. For seven years or so, beginning in my late teens and early 20s, I participated in a series of rather dramatic psychic and mystical openings that culminated in the encounter with a being of light in a luminous dimension seemingly not of this world. I have come to believe this realm is what Sufi mystics call the *alam al mithal*: an intermediate dimension, a living world of light, luminosity and cosmic love. During these years, at certain peak moments, intimations of this world would open up, and I would find myself participating with a benign, intimate, and sensuous Presence.

With hindsight I can see that each of these openings was somehow an attribute of the same event ... there was an intelligent telos to the whole process. The overall trajectory of the event matches pretty well with Washburn's developmental model; there was a regressive u-turn in service of spirit and a process of spiritual regeneration, except that, contra Washburn (1995, p. 21), it did not start in midlife, but in my early 20s, and there were some events in earlier childhood. The overall pattern included opening to immanent spirit, de-repressing various transpersonal potentials, but also the recollection of participatory feeling (after Heron, 1992), and the opening of subtle organs or *latifah*, and its basic structure was di-polar in that it opened to and retrieved both immanent and transcendental potentials in ascending and descending patterns of revelation (cf. Daniels, 2005; cf. Heron, 1998).

For many years I kept this charism mostly to myself as a matter of prudence and modesty, and because I did not really understand what it was, other than a deeply personal, deeply fascinating, holy, and an astonishingly liberating event. I had supposed it was an encounter with a Christ-like figure or personified archetype because of some of the symbolism e.g., a long-haired, bearded man in a Garden of Light coupled with the extreme quality of Love, cosmic comprehension and numinous redemption it carried.

Soon after the event I began absorbing transpersonal psychology (in particular Wilber and Grof, and which included 'Transpersonal Training' with the latter in San Francisco). Wilber's authority and centrality at the time, asked me to imagine the visionary moment as something to be discarded on the way to a more recognizable Hindu/Buddhist non-dual enlightenment. As Mike Daniels later observed, with Wilber, theistic religious experiences are "easily dismissed within his scheme as 'merely' subtle" (Daniels, 2005, p. 230). So I came to think of the event as something redundant and lower down the ladder on Wilber's hierarchy and did my best to dismiss it. I was young, 28, emotionally shaken from the events, and I clung to the raft of Wilber and Grof's worldview because it gave me a positive way to view the event other than psychosis.

However, as I absorbed Washburn's challenge to Wilber with its more relational developmental model (1995), the penetrating critique of authoritarian religion and the participatory approach offered by John Heron (1992, 1998) (with whom I was fortunate to spend some 10 years in spiritual co-inquiry in

New Zealand), the masterful participatory re-shaping of Grof's work by Richard Tarnas (1991), and the democratization of spiritual paths and their respective enlightenments by Jorge Ferrer (2002), Wilber's magisterial account became less compelling for me, and the advent of the Angel-Holy Spirit began to resurrect itself. Around 2002 I discovered the works of Henry Corbin, and the Angel finally found its place (e.g., Corbin 1969, 1990), and, rather than attempting to discard, transcend or otherwise move on from the Angel, I began to feel again our warm embrace.³

Henry Corbin was professor of Iranian studies at the Sorbonne, a celebrated commentator on Islamic religion and Persian Sufism. After discovering the work of 'the Shayk of Light' Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, Corbin became devoted to Iranian mystical thought, which he saw as a means to spiritual initiation and salvation. Suhrawardi was also known as 'the murdered Shayk'—he had attempted a revival of hermetic and Zoroastrian gnosis because he saw that "Zoroaster, the prophet of ancient Persia, belonged to a hierohistory of the people of the Book" (Avens, 1988b, p. 4). It was because of this assertion that he met a martyr's end. Zoroaster, perhaps the first prophet, also claimed he had spoken to God "face to face" (Zaehner, 1961, p. 92).

So now, after 25 years of developmental seasoning (with hopefully some integration), ongoing research, and the gift of reflection, I have decided to 'come out' as a disciple of Elijah/Khidr, that which the scholar and mystic Louis Massignon translated as 'The Verdant One,' The Green Angel (as everything associated with nature and water) (Corbin, 1969, p. 56).⁴ I believe I encountered Elijah/Khidr or, in Henry Corbin's language, the Angel "Holy Spirit" (1969, p. 54), and I want to co-create a place for that encounter within the discipline of contemporary transpersonal psychology. The following, then, is an 'autobiographical fragment' (to borrow from Almaas) of my participation in the Luminous Night, meeting the Prophet of my Being, and investiture by the Angel Holy Spirit. However, I do not profess to be anything like a *Sufi*, *Shayk*, *Nabi* nor any kind of Prophet. This is partly because the Angelic revelation or Elatic function transcends Islam (as it does Christianity and Judaism), partly because I have had no contact with the culture of Sufi Orders, and partly because I do not wish to be charged with being a *pseudo-Sufi* (e.g., Nasr, 2007, p. 111) much less a false Prophet.

Furthermore, I do not think of myself as a scholar or theologian of Islam, Christianity or Judaism; my interest has been in the science and culture of transpersonal psychology (Lahood, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2013). Nevertheless, I hope the event and my attempt at a retrospective transpersonal anthropology (in the realm of spirit) will have some value for transpersonal psychology and the study of mysticism, religion and participatory spirituality in general.

I am involved with a small group of persons who are interested in co-creating the modes of being and presence that are requisite conditions for an Angelic relationship to emerge, which is to say I am involved in a long-term co-relational-inquiry (see Heron & Lahood 2008, Lahood, 2010b, Lahood, 2013)

into the Angel's 'Shore' (to adopt Ferrer's metaphor). This inquiry has been underway for some years now, and I believe the Angel's embrace guides our inquiry into non-authoritarian spiritual life or, in other words, relational spirituality (see Lahood, 2010a, 2010b, 2013).

Writing the Unspeakable

Speaking of Angels requires a language that is both poetic (Hillman, 1992) and enthusiastic (from the Greek word 'entheos'—to be possessed by a deity). The enthused language I have used (below) is the same with which I would impart the vision to a friend. I have done my best to capture a heart, my heart, on fire with mystical love—and have likely failed. If my speech seems a bit self-aggrandizing, too inflated, intoxicated or inebriated, let us look, for a moment, at the language of another figure in the Abrahamic Tradition who may have drunk from a similar well (or rafted to a resonant spiritual shore) and has become likewise besotted.

Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Baha'i Faith, while he was in the dungeon of the *Siyah-Chal* (called the Black Pit of Persia) in 1852–53, had a vision of what he called the 'Maid of Heaven,' and it was this vision that sealed his mission:

While engulfed in tribulations, I heard a most wondrous, a most sweet voice, calling above my head. Turning my face, I beheld a Maiden—the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of my Lord—suspended in the air before me. So rejoiced was she in her very soul that her countenance shone with the ornament of the good-pleasure of God, and her cheeks glowed with the brightness of the all-Merciful. Betwixt earth and heaven she was raising a call, which captivated the hearts and minds of men. She was imparting to both my inward and outward being tidings, which rejoiced my soul, and the souls of God's honored servants. Pointing with her finger unto my head, she addressed all who are in heaven and all who are on earth, saying: "By God! This is the Best-Beloved of the worlds, and yet ye comprehend not. This is the Beauty of God amongst you, and the power of His sovereignty within you, could ye but understand. This is the Mystery of God and His treasure, the Cause of God and His Glory unto all who are in the kingdoms of Revelation and of creation, if ye be of them that perceive. (Ullman & Reichenberg-Ullman, 2001, p. 88)

Imprisoned and in extreme circumstance something profound occurred to *Mirza Husayn-Ali Nuri* (Baha'u'llah) and he suffered glorification.

What was going on for me at the time? I was deeply bereft; I had lost a strained relationship to a beloved partner and our infant child several years before, and somewhere I was inconsolable. Beneath this loss, was a whole system of loss and abandonment, consistent with what Grof has usefully described as a COEX system (1985), and underneath this, I believe, was the agony of what Washburn has called 'primal repression' (1995), the separation (or in keeping with Sufi tradition, 'exile') from cosmic source...my yearning for peace,

salvation, or union with God was immense and at times misguided and misplaced in its efforts to find communion. The more loss suffered, the more I yearned for salvation and peace. I found myself in a veritable desert of desolation, acute self-consciousness, debilitating shame and loneliness beyond measure. It is true to say that during these years I spent a fair amount of time on my knees, and I recall very well the Hour of Terror when I realized the way in which I was co-creating my world was self-destructive, and so I became quite still.

I am still weighing in with how much I want to say publically about my personal circumstances because, such events, as Grof has amply shown, are closely woven into biographical trauma (1985). The event was not dissociated from the human world of social relations or the intersubjective worldspace in its catalyzation, although it may appear to be in this fragment. I believe it came as a healing charisma or Grace in an attempt to restore right relations and a felt sense of kinship with the cosmos. It was a condensed experience of cosmic separation and reunion implicating primal repression (Washburn, 1995), perinatal structuring (Grof, 1985, Tarnas, 1991), socialization and language acquisition—the fall from participatory feeling (Heron, 1992) and original wounding as in Sufi cosmology:

To come into being at all as creatures distinct from the Creator, we must exist at some remove from the source of our being. Otherwise we would have no independent being whatever, and there would be no creatures, no Creation. Our eternal individualities would be impossible. For us to *be* at all there must be an original separation, a fall or a rupture giving birth to our independence as persons. It is this original otherness that makes possible both our independent being and our perpetual longing. It is the necessary curtain separating God from his creatures and it gives rise to what the Sufis call the Test of the Veil. (Cheetham, 2007, p. 7)

I was certainly at a transpersonal impasse—the only way through for me was to reach out to something having been selectively blinded to hope and trust and pray that in doing so I would reach a new land where I might feel safe, released and whole. This was another moment of egoic terror, and I had no idea that something might reach *back* - yet it did. Abraham Joshua Heschel, a Jewish theologian, claims there is a play between *theo-tropism*, the human yearning and reaching for God, and reciprocal action *anthropo-tropism* of God reaching and yearning for contact with humans (1962). “Each time the heart sighs for the Throne, the Throne sighs for the heart, and so they meet ... each time a flame rises from you, a corresponding flame comes down toward you” (Corbin, 1994, p. 73).

Luminous Night Journey

The rapture began with a build-up of tension and pain in my body. I felt sick with fear and wanted to vomit. I could not help myself, and my body began to writhe in agony. Into my awareness storms a terrifying, violent and shattering encounter with my father. Now, with eyes closed, it was as if my mind's eye opened wide, and

I beheld a green light spiraling out of my heart and flying into the Sun. The emerald light poured into the Sun, and, as if it were being impregnated, it seemed to swell and grow. At the same time the universe began to beat like a mighty drum, a great heartbeat accompanied by a silent chant that seemed to roar “death”! And I felt a deep unstoppable roar answering the chant from within and something like a fire inside of myself as the Holy Flame awakened from its long slumber and consumed me as if in an eternal fire of cleansing flames.

First, it was as if my mind became filled with translucent and luminous light, but then I was engulfed in a three dimensional vision of brilliance — a great force burst out of the Sun; a mask of Death leapt out the flames to destroy ‘my father’. I/he/it had a snake in one hand and a drum in the other, and all of me was laid waste by its dance of death and destruction.⁵ The awful being trampled ‘my father/myself’ into dust and oblivion again and again and again over eons, until I was all trod out, all trampled underfoot, eons of dust — all gone, quiet, quite dead, and I felt at once a great liberation and vast emptiness’.^{6 7}

Then I became slowly aware as if slowly waking up from some deep sleep, after the dust had settled, it was as if I had lost all consciousness, as if my consciousness had been absorbed into something else. Then, I was dimly aware of a great fullness and peace wherein there was no hint of time or space only an Eternity of Black Light, so vast and deep, so silent and pregnant as to defy all description. All weight, all lightness, all Bright Luminous Darkness. I am nothing but a breath blowing across the empty face of an endless Ocean of Night — benign, potent and utterly unfathomable.⁸

And ‘I’ was nothing, but nothing yet potentially everything in a Void of Voids, an unending and ever-hidden Ocean. And then, as if from far above, a light of such exquisite lightness and gentleness descending upon those still, dark waters and I – a quivering music – a sweet and luminous note never struck on any earthly instrument – was taken up in a rainbow of light and sound that filled all of heaven. I was drawn slowly and gently up the rainbow in the Green Light as a musical note of such pristine delicacy, yet of such resolute love, and as I rose in the air I was, knew I was, Risen ... and as I climbed or was drawn higher and nearer, I became as if insane, swooning in ecstatic remembrance.⁹

The heart of hearts was opening upon an inner ocean of joy, gratitude, praise, and peace, beyond any feeling I thought possible to know - it seemed beyond human. A luminous, shimmering body of Light, and then, I was in the Garden of Paradise and my most Beautiful Lord was before me lying against an eternal rock looking at me with a Face of such Beauty as to shatter the mind—my poor keyboard explodes.¹⁰

And he came toward me my Heavenly Twin, My Heavenly Father, my Beloved, and as we embraced, I was released from every cage, of every past and every future. I saw that we were robed in the same raiment—I wore his clothing and he mine—a radiant white shirt, purple jeans and leather sandals (this seemed to be oddly important). What happened next is unspeakable.^{11 12}

We lay together, against our rocks, in the Garden of Light in such sublime ecstasy, and the heavenly being gestured towards my genitals. This transmutitive motion somehow releasing my mind from sin and error, our nearness lending understanding of the mystery of sexuality and its nearness to God. All was transmitted in a silent musical language, and every gesture, image and symbol spoke to me of the nature of God...the nearness of God, the glory of God. Laughter from this being carried knowledge greater than our universe. The Perfume of the Garden was like the gentle hint of a deeper unbearably sweet secret fragrance of the heart; I am overwhelmed by the Perfume, and as the smallest of flowers in the Garden of Light unfolded their translucent petals—worlds—whole universes came into being in unrestrained splendor, brilliance, magnificence and Glory.

Everything in that world was transmitting the nature of cosmic love and the secret knowledge of eternity. I understood as I looked upon the Face of the Most Beautiful Form that I was in the presence of the infinite divine; the abundance of creation; the inexhaustible source; the great peace and sufficiency; a feeling of fullness and utter completeness—I was looking at my eternal immortal beloved self, and I somehow understood all of this, as if it was an event agreed upon before time, before ‘coming into being’ an ancient covenant to become the ‘word made flesh’ in the valley of time and mortality. In this I felt cosmically complete, an absolute plenitude, and returned after a long exile of forgetting. And yet, there seemed to be something ‘behind’ or beyond the being, a hieroglyphic, geometric language. So while this reunion of the Soul with its Soul was a gestalt utterly complete in itself—a cosmic endpoint in which I understood it to be a boundary—as if it was the far limit of what was to be known, there was some wholly unknowable Ground from which this figure had emerged as if in a kind of gestalt cosmology.

Not only did I encounter this radiant being of unspeakable love with his overflowing, abundance and creation, his plenitude of cosmic honey, his beatifications, and cosmic benedictions, but also in the process I became so utterly transfigured that I became his twin. A perfect image in his likeness and lights co-enveloped in such a mystery that we appeared to be co-creating or rather multiplying each other.¹³ The being then took me to a special place, the centre of the Garden and revealed a cup, and we then sipped from it (our lips touching—this was important) ... igniting the sweetest, most delicate illumination of immortality, a wondrous wine; a living water; a nectar that promoted an ecstasy so sublime, so utterly unbridled and free, yet so astonishingly gentle as to be quite beyond the powers of my poor, dazed and be-dazzled keyboard.¹⁴

As the chambers of the mystic heart opened wide, so did the prophetic visions ... then came the very secrets of the universe — the greatest of these was the secret divine’s greatest secret. And therein, I was given a sacred mission to bring all persons to their own Angel or Perfect Nature. I was shown the exact nature of our earthly suffering to come and how we would participate in this and shown the futures—all of which was transmitted in the light of our

heavenly laughter (much of this I cannot recall—it has receded like a tide back to the ground, leaving me in a pleasantly august swoon when I recollect it).

After drinking from that most blessed cup, kissing the lips of the luminous being, and tasting of the incomprehensible mightiness of cosmic love, we walked to the edge of Paradise.¹⁵ Standing high above the world in the pre-eternal infinite and looked down upon the Beloved earth-world and the lustrous Angel of the Holy Spirit; my celestial Self in Heaven turned to me—“here is death, you may stay here in eternal delight and glory or you may go.” And I felt “yes we are in death.”¹⁶

I felt as if I was in a recapitulation of a decision made eons ago. I knew that I was always here, always in heaven, that in one sense I had never left that high abode and another me would walk the earth and departing that Absolute, Bliss-Filled Paradise I ‘fell’ (or rather dove) into being as this world and all its particulars. This was not a dive into the ‘vale of tears’ or some misbegotten world of illusion but a joyful and lusty embrace of time and space, those powers that enable something of God to come into being; into sacred form—The Ocean of Being poured into the drops.¹⁷

The most ineffable or indescribable aspect of the Holy Vision, the most impossible aspect to communicate with any sense of having imparted anything even remotely resembling the event itself, was that of ‘coming into being’ as the world...as all creation. It was as if a waterfall of translucent pure knowledge cascaded into the many forms—each one the Face of God. The world of Light transmuted into the world matter, the world of matter made Light. Attar wrote that Muhammad, in the Ascension, saw

The Face of Him who made the Universe
Saw not himself—he saw the Soul of Souls (Armstrong, 1993, p. 140)

That last page of this visionary book was that of a Holy Bird (feathers of purple and white) swooping down and across the ocean, effortlessly flying, and in the midst of it all I heard a mighty song like a “hallelujah” lifted up by what seemed to be the Voice of the whole world of nature—rather the whole universe—broken into the song of all songs; “I and my Father are One, and forever reunited.”

And yet, there was still, in that most complete and utter union and Oneness, the signs of sacred distinction and divine differentiation. Having attempted to speak of the unspeakable, I will now attempt to further locate this event in the Prophetic Tradition as envisioned by Henry Corbin.

THE PROPHETIC TRADITION

In his later years, the author of *Love’s Body* (1966), Norman O. Brown, turned his attention from the study of psychoanalysis, existentialism and Eros to the study of Islam (1982). Brown was convinced, following the Copernican

Revolution instigated by the scholar of Islam, Marshall Hodgson (1974), that the religion of Muhammad, rather than a theological poor-cousin, was potentially the repository of a truer and more metaphysically compelling form of Christianity (1982). Brown located Islam in the Prophetic Tradition or Abrahamic lineage (an open-ended process in which he also placed the poet William Blake) and saw it as a proper reaction and safeguard against the religious and cultural hybridization that became the Christo/Papal/Roman Empire:

It is time to discard the time-honored prejudice that treats Koranic theology as a confused echo of half-understood Jewish or Christian traditions, selected and polemically distorted to concoct a new-fangled monotheism to supply 'backward' Arabs with a 'cultural identity.' (Brown, 1982, p. 369)

Refugees from the destruction of Jerusalem, the remnants of Gnostic Christianity, Jewish-Christian Ebionite's, and Jewish Samaritans, along with Nestorians, Monophysites and Jacobites "took refuge in the desert from the triumph of Caesaropapism" (p. 370) along with another refugee—the Greek philosophical tradition. Here, living cheek by jowl, these groups cross-fertilized with Bedouin resistance to the Holy Roman Empire, and, in the Trans-Jordanian matrix, what was born of 600 years of cultural ferment was Muhammad's *Islam* (Brown, 1982). The Prophet's authority was sealed by his recital of the Holy Koran and his Luminous Night Journey in which he ascended beyond the 'Lotus of the Limit', the boundary of *human* knowledge, and met with his Lord (Armstrong, 1992, p. 104).

Accordingly, writes Brown, Islam retains the Prophet-as-messenger tradition of its Jewish and Christian forebears and neighbors but absolutely rejects the notion that God had materialized on earth in the form of Jesus Christ.

Islam discards the notion of an Incarnate Son of God and, Ebionite fashion, clings to prophecy as the essential mode of miraculous conjunction between the *lahut* and the *nasut*, the divine nature and the human or created condition. "The Prophet possessed eminently both the human (*nasut*) and the spiritual (*lahut*) natures. Yet, there was never an incarnation of the *lahut* into the *nasut*, a perspective which Islam does not accept. (Brown, 1982, p. 374)

There is nevertheless a mysterious bond between the two. According to religious philosopher, Roberts Avens, the *nasut* (human) is the *lahut's* (divinity's) greatest secret (1988a, p. 75). What then is the nature of the anthropos (cosmic person) within this tradition—what the proper human-divine relationship? This question directs us to contemplate a mysterious figure—the phenomenon named as *Khidr*—functionalized in the theological works of the French Islamic scholar and Persian Angelologist Henry Corbin (1969, p. 1994), Roberts Avens (1984) and more recently Tom Cheetham (2003, 2005)—as the necessary Angel.

Brown (1992) described Corbin's place as an important historical interface between Islam and the West. In Brown's analysis of Corbin, "the central

questions for the Prophetic tradition” (after Moses, Jesus and Muhammad) are: “Who is Khidr?” and “What does it mean to be a disciple of Khidr?” “These questions are the legacy of Islam for the Western, post-Christian world,” wrote Cheetham (2003, p. 104). This question was taken up by one of the important forefathers of transpersonal psychology, Carl Jung, who claimed the figure of this paper’s interest, the Angel Holy Spirit or the Hidden Imam, may well have existed outside of Islam, pre-dating the religion of Muhammad—thus making it a transpersonal artifact central to the theistic/prophetic tradition of the Middle East. Jung wrote:

There, [in the ‘Orient’] the parallel figure is Khadir or El-Khadir, the ‘eternally youthful Chidher’...The legend is purely Islamic. The strange thing is, that Khidr is not only regarded as a saint, but in Sufic circles even has the status of a deity. In view of the strict monotheism of Islam, one is inclined to think of him as a pre-Islamic, Arabian deity who, though not officially recognized by the new religion was, was tolerated for reasons of expediency. (1976, p. 154)¹⁸

In *Symbols of Transformation* (1946/1976) Jung included one of his few serious acknowledgements of Islam (in his vast writings on religion, myth and psychology), by recounting the Quranic story of Khidr and Moses (see Ahmad, 1999).¹⁹ Jung claimed that this story was the pith essence of spiritual rebirth. In it, Moses, who represents the law, the outward or conventional religion, is taken on a journey by a strange Prophet—who utterly confounds and confuses him. Acting in ways that are morally incomprehensible to him (e.g., sinking a boat and killing a youth), the enigmatic figure shows Moses something beyond the bounds of literal or dogmatic religion.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, an important scholar of Islamic religion, Sufi mysticism and the perennial philosophy, wrote in *The Garden of Truth* (2007) that this mysterious prophet is associated with Judaism and Elias [Elijah] and “the Eliatic function of initiation and spiritual guidance”(p. 107).²⁰ Secondly, Nasr says that the meeting between Moses and Khidr is the prototype of the relationship between a Sufi master and his student. “A Shayk or spiritual master may be appointed by his or her master, or the function may descend from Heaven upon the person” (p. 109). This person will then be called the “Khidr of the spiritual path” (p. 108). Perhaps the greatest of Persian poets, Hafiz exclaimed, “Where is the Khidr of the path?” (p. 108). To these questions I will return: “Who, what, and where is Khidr, and what is it to be his disciple?” But first a brief look at Sufi mysticism.

Muhammad’s Two-Step Revelation

The prototype for the mystical journey on the Sufi path of love is the ‘Luminous Night Journey’ or ‘Night of the Miraj’—the transfiguration of the Prophet Muhammad, and, as such, it underscores the very foundation of Islam. But according to Martin Lings (1970, p. 34), his other-worldliness has been much overlooked in the West—so I will emphasise it here. During his

Miraculous Night, Muhammad was spirited by the archangel Gabriel through a sequence of heavens, culminating in an ecstatic, ego-annihilating encounter with the Absolute. It is an event that establishes the paradigmatic mystical pathway for Islam: “This religious experience has been immensely important in the evolution of Islamic spirituality... and over the centuries mystics, philosophers and poets have speculated on its significance” (Armstrong, 1992, p. 139).

Muhammad’s Ascension is of particular significance to the Sufis. They felt that his visionary event went beyond the Lotus of the Limit where human knowledge arrives at its farthest reach (Armstrong, 1992). Here occurs *fana fi’llah* (egoic annihilation in God) followed by the most “perilous reabsorption” into God (Cheetham, 2005, p. 73). However, the goal of this evolution, it must be stressed, “is not absorption into the Godhead, but the realization of a concrete and spiritual self-hood [personhood] of a *caro spiritualis* (spiritual body)” (Avens, 1886, p. 9).

Armstrong wrote, “The Quran makes it clear that Muhammad saw only one of the ‘signs’ of God, not God himself, and later mystics emphasized the paradox of this vision, in which Muhammad both saw and did not see the Divine Essence” (1992, p. 139). Thus, in the words of the great Sufi *Shaykh* Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, “For if the messenger had not been called to the Ascension (Miraj) he would not have climbed up to heaven nor would he have come back down, and this journey brought to him the presence of the Angelic Host and the signs of his Lord” (Ibn Arabi, 2009). And some, it would seem, like Ibn Arabi, Ruzbehan, and perhaps myself, can be said to have followed in the footsteps of the Prophets. According to the eminent scholar of Sufism, William Chittick,

Many masters have summed up the path with a saying of an early Sufi that describes Muhammad’s journey: ‘Two strides and he arrived’. With one stride they tell us, he stepped beyond this world, and with the second stride he went beyond the realm of the spirit into the presence of the Real. The two-stride model of realization is most famously represented as “annihilation” (*fana*) and subsistence (*baqa*). Both terms derive from the Koranic verse, “Everyone on the face [of the earth] undergoes annihilation, and there subsists the face of thy Lord, Possessor of Majesty and Generous Giving.” (2008, p. 259)²¹

As noted, Henry Corbin was an important voice in the study of Islamic religion and Persian mysticism, and is notable for revealing a sophisticated angelology at the heart of the Abrahamic tradition (see Cheetham, 2003). In his metaphysics, wrote M. Ali Lakhani, “there exists a higher consciousness than our ordinary consciousness.” Yet this is not a collective one (after Jung) but “one that is intensely personal,”

This higher consciousness is signalled by the Black Light of *fana* (or egoic death), and is associated with the flight into the Darkness of the *Deus Absconditus*, the Hidden Treasure of the celebrated *Hadith* (“I was the Hidden Treasure and yearned to be known, so I created the world in order to be known”). It precedes

the Green Light of *baqa*, of the ultimate theophany [the personal Angel], which is associated with the pleroma of the *Deus Revelatus*. (Lakhani, 2009, p. 163)

In the event I participated in, first came the experience of *fana* and a sense of being absorbed into an ocean of bright Black Light; the revelation of the great Ocean of Illumined Darkness that permeates all things was the first step. In Sufism, this is known as mystical poverty or *darwish*—in this station of extinction we understand the words of the Prophet, “There is no God but God”—everything, our existence and subsistence, like that of the mountain or flower, is given by God. Cheetham wrote:

The luminous night is the night of supraconsciousness that is an “unknowingness which, as such, is knowing.” To attain this luminous night is to have attained the mystical poverty of the “Dervish,” (darwish) or “poor in spirit.” The supreme test for the human soul lies in the confrontation with the *Deus Absconditus*—to face not the shadow [of evil after Jung], but the Black Face of inaccessible Majesty within which is the Water of Life. (2005, p. 57)

The second step, after absorption by the Luminous Night was the Ascension—as the Green Light travelling upward to the Garden and the Angelic Guide and there to drink of the “The Fountain of Life,” to absorb the “Water of Immortality” (Corbin, 1969, p. 198), at the *fons et origio* ... the Fountain of Youth. This is to realize what the Sufis call mystical poverty:

Either he will be swallowed up by dementia or he will rise again from it, initiated into the meaning of theophanies and revelations ... by passing through the annihilation of annihilation ... the recognition of the Guide is authenticated, of the “witness in Heaven”... For this recognition implies the recognition of the Unknowable, which is to say metaphysical renunciation and mystical poverty. (Corbin, 1994, p. 117)

In the event in which I participated, someone came back down again while seemingly participating in the original fiat of what appeared to be the Angel of Creation; the Fall into being, manifestation and divine creation. In the transcendent heights I saw a Face:

The Face of Him who made the Universe ... the Soul of Souls

Such an encounter, according to this tradition, is characterized by the metamorphosis of a potential person in to a full-blown person (individuation)—at the same time it heralds the evolution of *potential* angelicity into *actual* angelicity (Avens, 1988b, p. 8)—it is thus an individuation of the soul, a reunion of the soul with its source—the Angel of Creation.

What I believe began then for me was the *path of personhood*: a continuing path of narcissistic recognition, letting go (after Evans, 1993) and the vulnerability of becoming more of a person. An idea at the heart of this mystic path of beauty is that by giving birth to the Angel paradoxically gives birth to more of our personhood. However, this is not the person of humanistic psychology

(e.g., Rogers, 1961), not the secular psychological person that has the soul all caged-up in the Cartesian-ego (Hillman, 1992). It is rather the fulfilment and birth of personhood enhanced by contact with a transpersonal Other.

In this form of spiritual realization personhood is not wiped out, as it is in some traditions (e.g., Loy, 1988). Rather personhood (transfigured) is vouchsafed as absolutely central—for it is *relationship* that is the ground of this cosmology.²² A more whole person is born with an opportunity (not a guarantee) to fully individuate through a relationship with the Angel Other and with human Others who now stand revealed as *Deus Revelatus*. This understanding of the Twin Angel finds a parallel in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* and the *Bhagavad Gita*.²³ The *sakshin* is the heavenly witness: “two friends with beautiful wings, closely entwined, embracing one and the same tree; one eats the fruits; the other does not eat, but looks on.” The *sakshin* is the guide; the human being contemplates it and is united with it to the degree that all his defects of character are effaced in it (Corbin, 1994, p. 35–36).

The Path of Love

In Sufi spiritual lore there are a number of ‘stations’ or gradations on the path of love that must be traversed as part of a self-transfiguring journey to God. The number of stations (sometimes valleys) differs according to different Sufi masters. Cheetham writes that within this tradition “there are many descriptions of these Stations and valleys along the way” (2003, p. 53), nevertheless they each refer to the unveiling of a *mode of presence* which correspond to the mystical Stations of the Sufi – the transformational and self-transfiguring moments that reveal “the hidden things” (p. 52) and that lead the soul to new states of being. It cannot be overestimated that in tradition of the Prophets, “The Stations are modes of being, corresponding to specific virtues, which have their place in an ascending hierarchy leading to the divine” (p. 53).²⁴

The Sufi ‘path of love’ was immortalized by the famous Persian poet Farid’ uddin Attar of Nishapur (who had as his guide a being of light), in his great work *The Language of the Birds*. In this famous allegory various different kinds of birds (homologous with human souls) must fly over a series of seven mountains and valleys of virtue: seeking, love, self-knowledge, independence, unity, bewilderment, and finally to the Holy Mountain *Qaf* - the last station or valley of spiritual annihilation and poverty... the knowledge of unknowing and “the utter emptiness of all things” (Chittick, 2008, p. 259). The birds are led by the hoopoe bird that serves as an analogy of a Sufi Shayk (guide/teacher) leading his students to enlightenment, which in Attar’s poem culminates in Oneness with God.

A later Persian mystic, the progenitor of the Baha’i Faith, Baha’u’llah, reworked Attar’s seven mountains into what he called *The Seven Valleys* (1978) in which the final station revealed a somewhat different spiritual resolution—something more of a bi-unity or sacred *dualitude* rather than simplistic Oneness with God. As one commentator has noted: “This is the state of annihilation of

self (fana') in God, but not an existential union: the essences of God's self and the mystic's self remain *distinct*, in contrast to what appears to be a complete union at the end of Attar's book [my emphasis]" (Winters, 1996). This was my experience: there was 'meeting;' there was divine differentiation, intimacy and relationship; there was a cosmic I-Thou; and, as in Plato's demiurge or world soul, it was "capable of relationship" (Sherman 2009, p. 85). There was/is the revelation of sacred distinction found in the writings of the Christian mystic Meister Eckhart:

Eckhart's notion of indistinct union ... is fundamentally dialectical, that is to say, union with God is indistinct in the ground, but we always maintain a distinction from God in our formal being ... Even in the ultimate union in heaven, Eckhart insists, this distinction will remain. (McGinn, 2001, p. 148)

Corbin refers to 'dualitude'—not the duality in the Christian or Cartesian sense, but a *sacred duality*, the sacred pairing of the human being and her Theophanic Angel—to create a complete being. Dualitude is, according to Corbin, a bi-unity, in other words, a unity that allows for distinction within that unity. "Although there is an essential unity between the two (*lahut* and *nasut*) the creature is distinguished from the Creator" (Corbin, 1969, p. 212). We are, according to Corbin, "an earthly creature with a heavenly counterpart, its archetype or angel" (1957, p. 167). There is then, an imperative within this mystic path to bring into awareness the relationship with our eternal individuality. Latent, in Washburn's dynamic ground, an unfailingly tender Person of Light?

THE ANGELIC FUNCTION AND NEW AGE RELIGION

According to Islamic theology, "God in the abyss of his essence is unknowable—the unpredictable, the incommunicable. The Face that the [*Deus*] *Absconditus* shows to man, the *Deus Revelatus*, is necessarily a theophanic figure" (Avens, 1988a, p. 68). Thus, for some Sufis, the guiding image of the Angel is closely bound to their pneuma-psychology and soteriology—the Angel is one half of a bi-unity or di-polarity in which the other half is an earth-bound person. The theophanic Angel, then, is the *orientation* of that person's mystical evolution, "the goal of which is not absorption into the Godhead" (Avens, 1986, p. 9) but a meeting with the Holy Face.

This is not a movement toward dissolution in the uncreate of popular New Age religion (see Lahood, 2010b)²⁵. It is not a mysticism "that plunges the spiritual into the undifferentiated night of being; it is essentially the meeting of a Face, of an intimate spirit" (Avens, 1988a, p. 69). In the claim made by many Sufis, "Whosoever knows himself knows his Lord" (Lord meaning the Angel or Name—not the quintessential Godhead). In the New Age, we are admonished (albeit lovingly) to disappear into non-dual unity without distinction. This New Age doctrine assumes that the 'Real' is only to be found by the spiritual undertaking of stepping back into the uncreate. Here, for example, to Byron Katie a popular New Age teacher orienting her followers,

You notice that everything is continually disappearing, and you celebrate it as it goes back to where it came from: non-existence, the uncreated. And eventually surrender ceases to be necessary. The word implies there is something outside of you to surrender to a monistic subjectivizing. (Katie & Mitchell, 2007, p. 121)

This kind of neo-Vedantic, non-dual mysticism is taken very seriously by many in the New Age.²⁶ It might be called in Islamic theology “the *Tawhid* (meaning a certain legitimate way of knowing the unity of God) of the elite” and therefore an “affirmation of the unity of being” (Avens, 1988a, p. 76). Here, “the totality of beings is experienced as vanishing into the sublimity of the unique being. Beings are seen as something purely negative in relation to divine Sovereignty. All existence is immersed in *res divina*” (p. 76)—in this mysticism our rational consciousness is exchanged for the privilege of “intuitive vision” (p. 76) of unity in the process of ego-death. Wrote Avens, this *fana* (extinction), this annihilation: “in its banalized form, expressed in the irritating and facile assertion that mystical experience consists of the dissolution of the personality” (p. 76).²⁷

Seen from the logic of Corbin’s Angelology the first step into the uncreate is essential, but it should only be a transitory passage. The first spiritual step then is “a return to a state prior to the opposition of subject and object” (the non-dual) where Divine Unity is absolute subjectivity “absolved of every *relation* other than itself” (Avens, 1988a, p. 74).²⁸ But this first step is followed by a second sacred step—the “annihilation of annihilation”—which is the rising and resurrection, the coming into being of “all the forms which previously have been immersed in the undifferentiated divine identity” (Avens, 1988a, p. 76), and all our relations are *restored* at a new level of understanding. It is this all-important second step the New Age nondual orientation misses out on because the orientation toward the Other and the Beauty of the Angel Face is missing.

Let us turn to the testimony of one of the chief exemplars of Persian Sufism, *Shayk Ruzbehan of Shiraz*. Ruzbehan’s experience is paradigmatic and follows in the cosmic footsteps of his beloved Prophet; he writes, “in the course of my visions ... I gradually woke up in the midst of these theophanic forms; my intention was to reach the uncreated, to reach a point when it will be possible to discard theophanisims. Then I saw god [*sic*] in the most beautiful forms, surging upon me from the world of mystery” (Avens 1988a, 74). His visionary trajectory has much resonance with my experience.

The goal of this two-step orientation therefore is not that of the so-called ‘universal’ nondualism privileged by the early transpersonal movement and set as the goal and zenith of spiritual evolution (e.g., Grof 1985; Wilber 1980). Rather, our goal is a relational, sensuous, and embodied spirituality, a “‘spiritual corporeity’ of Divine Presence rooted in Personhood” (Lakhani, 2009, p. 155), active in the here-now situation. This all goes to the heart of Islam’s esoteric science of love and the very act of creation itself. Shayk Ruzbehan wrote in his spiritual diary *The Biography of an Archangel* that, “We can love only a personal being, a being with a ‘particular face.’ Of necessity,

then, God, if he is to be loved, must assume the form of the Eternal Companion, the Witness in Heaven” (Avens, 1988a, p. 67). It may be wondered then if God yearns for relationship—and if *Creation* in its spatializing, individuating forms—is the necessary ground of relationality and love.

The Angel is the guide, the invisible Shayk and guardian reserved for those with no earthly master—“the master of the masterless,” set apart for those “who owe their investiture to no authority” (Corbin, 1969, p. 55). However, this Angel initiator “does not lead all of its disciples in a uniform way to the same goal” (Avens, 1988a, p. 9). Each is led to her own eternal individuality, for ultimately we are each a unique theophany—a Manifestation of God—and (within the Abrahamic Tradition) we discover this when we discover our individual Lord. Thus, it is the ministry of the Angel to “individuate a relationship with each human individual” (p. 15). Avens suggests a parallel here to Buddhism, in that the “Buddha individuates his relationship with each follower of the Middle Path” (p. 15). Human beings have the capacity to become Demonic (unconscious) or fulfill themselves in their Angelicity (transconscious), and, because it is lived in the situational world of relationships in all their complexity, the way of the Angel offers unending possibilities for the refinement of character, and continual restoration of the Good in our earthly relations.

THE ANGEL AND NARCISSISM

The great spiritual traditions warn of the spiritual pitfalls of inflation, hubris, arrogance, conceit or pride. Contemporary transpersonalism, because it draws from these same traditions, also concerns itself with the pitfall of spiritual narcissism (Ferrer, 2002; Lahood 2010b; Wilber, Engler, & Brown, 1986).²⁹ Tom Cheetham, a contemporary scholar of Corbin’s work, outlines the need for the Angelic orientation in terms of limiting narcissistic modes of being:

Without a Guide, the anguish and abandonment that begins as an intimate and personal despair expands to become public and dogmatic a-gnosticism that descends naturally into nihilism. To be unconscious in this way is to be unbalanced in the absence of the figure the Heavenly Twin, the Angel Holy Spirit who is the Orient of the soul and the foundation of all community. Bereft of any consciousness of this figure I am abandoned. My anguish and despair are mine and I am alone. But because I am plunged into unconsciousness there appears no boundary to my soul and my passions seem to fill the cosmos. ...This extraordinary inflation, the tortured arrogance with which the human soul becomes the measure of all things, is a form of *philautia*, self-love. The love which is properly turned towards the Angel and towards others through whom the Angel’s beauty shines is turned entirely inward. The energies of the soul are blocked from natural expression and release. (2009, p. 6–7)

Cheetham’s *philautia*, a term he draws from early Christian mysticism (see Clement, 1993), is a form of spiritual narcissism—due to the lack of orientation

to the Angel Face. Avens summed up the function of the Face in this way: without the cosmic orientation of an Angelology there is no alternative save to sink into a “Luciferian Inflation” and the mystical intoxication expressed by al-Halaj, “I am God” (1986, p. 15).³⁰ Corbin believed that deciphering the Angelic function was a key to a secret that preserved the spiritual-person not only from “pseudomystical monism,” but also from “abstract monotheism, which is content to superimpose an *ens supremum* on the multitude of beings” (1971, p. 25).

Corbin’s two spiritual pitfalls (above) may be equated with extreme *subjectivism* and *objectivism*, which Evans (1993) sees as two primary contributors to narcissistic modes of being.³¹ Thus, our self-enclosure through Corbin’s ‘pseudomystical monism’ is to subjectivize reality, to devour the Other; “subjectivizing the world is like incorporating it all to myself so that I expand to the size of the Cosmos” (Evans, 1993, p. 42). Recall Byron Katie (above) who claimed that “surrender” was unnecessary because, “The word implies there is something outside of you to surrender to” (Katie & Mitchell, 2007, p. 121), absolute subjective monism.

Opposite to this is another source of self-separation: *objectivism*. This is to set the world at a distance, to detach from feeling it, to look out on people as though a remote observer with a “disembodied intellect.” Here I “master my world with my mind and will” (Evans, 1993, p. 45). I peer out at it with an aloof and objectifying gaze...the I-It of Martin Buber has become a fixed perceptual gestalt. Our language separates subject from object and sets things perceived as apart and separate from my participation. I forget that all perception is participatory: sight, sound, smell, touch, taste, beauty ... the figures of a gnostic ground (cf. Heron, 1992).

What Corbin sees as the common *Tawhid* is “abstract monotheism” and is born out of objectivising God:

Naive and dogmatic monotheism, satisfied with complete objectivization of the divine: an *ens supremum*, a transcendent object is superimposed upon the totality of creaturely beings...The objectification of the divine results in the socialization [of religion]: all creaturely beings are assembled on an egalitarian plane and maintained equidistant from the transcendent object. (Avens, 1988a, p. 76)

According to Corbin, this pitfall occurs when we lose the orientation to the Angel’s Face:

When this happens, each man tends to confound *his* Lord ... with the Divine being as such, and to wish to impose Him upon all ... having lost his bond with his specific Lord-archetype (that is having lost knowledge of himself), each ego is exposed to a hypertrophy that can easily degenerate into spiritual imperialism; this kind of religion no longer aims to unite each man with his own Lord, but solely to impose the “same Lord” upon all. (1969, p. 210)³²

THE PROPHETIC SEAL

The spiritual imperialism Corbin warns of may also be implicated in religious narcissism. Jorge Ferrer has drawn attention to the problem of “doctrinal ranking,” which is to elevate one’s own spiritual tradition, practice or teacher “as the universally superior one,” a symptom of what he calls *spiritual narcissism*, which is “pandemic in the human approach to religious diversity” (Ferrer, 2011, p. 18).³³ He has listed various schools, traditions and teachers who engage in this kind of competitive spirituality:

This competitive predicament among religious beliefs is not only a philosophical or existential problem; it has also has profoundly affected how people from different credos engage one another and, even today, plays an important role in many interreligious conflicts, quarrels, and even holy wars. (2009, p. 139)

While Ferrer mostly focuses on the gradations of Hindu and Buddhist traditions, the same dynamic is found living in theistic traditions. I follow Ferrer with a few more examples: “Christianity regarded pagan religions as incomplete steps towards the final Christian revelation. Likewise, in Islam, the teachings of Jesus and the ancient prophets of Israel are recognized as relatively valid but imperfect versions of the final Truth revealed in the Koran” (Ferrer, 2008, p. 146).

Mani, the founder of Manichaeism, a hybrid religion drawn from Persian Zoroastrianism, Syrian Christianity, and Indian Buddhism, claimed a monopoly on spiritual knowing and that his vision was more perfected than the previous religions. “This revelation of mine of the two principles and my living books, my wisdom and knowledge are above and better than those of the previous religions” (Asmussen, 1975, p. 12). Mani the ‘apostle of light’ extended his authority and religious monopoly through soteriological threats of ‘no entry’ when it came time for entering Heaven, using as emotional leverage, the hope and promise of ongoing existence in the hereafter. “To join the Manichaean religion is the best one can do, because Manichaeism is the *only door of redemption* and XradeSahr [god] will summon all people at the end of time for the last judgment” (Hutter, 1993, p. 3).

Muhammad’s ‘night journey,’ celebrated each year in the seventh lunar month, is of great import to the Sufis. They felt that the Prophet’s apotheosis or “supreme vision” (Armstrong, 1992, p. 139) where he was guided by the archangel Gabriel through heaven marked the very limit of human knowledge. This transpersonal experience, held to be a defining one for Islam, entered the Western literary tradition through Dante’s work *The Divine Comedy*. However in an act “typical of Western schizophrenia” Dante scandalously placed “the Prophet himself in the lowest circles of hell” (p. 139).

The Prophet Muhammad is seen within Islam as the final messenger—the Seal of the Prophets (Khātām al-Nabiyyīn). The poet Rumi in his *Masnawi* wrote:

He has been raised to the station of Khatam (seal) by the grace of God. There can never be his like before him or after. When a master excels all others in his art, don't you use the word "khatam" to convey the idea that he has excelled all others in his domain? (Rumi, 1917, p. 8)

However, the claim to finality may not sit so well in other Semitic religions: "Because it precludes the acceptance of Messengers of God after the Islamic dispensation, the concept of the Finality of Prophethood (*khatm al-nubuwwa*) is the major theological barrier between the Baha'i Faith and Islam" (Fazel & Fananapazir, 1993).

Baha'u'llah, founder of the Baha'i Faith claimed that his revelation rendered all the previous prophets and the divine messages they carried incomplete. This led him to rank his revelation specifically over and above the competition—Muhammad and the Sufi masters and lights such as Ibn Arabi, or Jelaluddin Rumi. Baha'u'llah decrees: "Now forget them all, that thou mayest learn from the Master of Love in the schoolhouse of oneness, and return unto God, and forsake the inner land of unreality, for thy true station" (1978, p. 28). The translator then wrote: "This [inner land] refers to the Sufi idea of the inner plane [*alam al mithal*], which compared to Revealed Truth is but unreal" (p. 28). This is no small claim, for the *alam al mithal* is the "realm of Sufi visions, dreams and spiritual contact with teachers, which plays such important functions in spiritual life, providing guidance, spiritual commissions and initiations, and directing disciples to their chosen shaikh" (Lizzio, 2007, p. 9).

There is also competition between monistic religions and theistic ones, for example, David Loy, a contemporary scholar of Asian non-dual religions (Buddhism, Taoism, Vedanta), holds that "the theistic mystical experience might be seen as an 'incomplete' nondual one. In it there is still the awareness of consciousness pervading everywhere, but insofar as the experience is an awareness of...it is still tainted with some *delusion* [my italic]" (1988, p. 295). On the other hand, "Ramanuja regards the monistic state of becoming Brahman as a stage 'on the way to union with [a personal] God' and claimed that the 'entire system of Advaita Vedanta was resting on wrong assumptions'" (Ferrer, 2008, p. 146).

This spiritual one-upmanship does not always occur between traditions but among the various schools of a single tradition. Consider Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, who founded the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in New York in 1966, and who claimed that "'real life' meant following the Bhaktivedanta tradition, devotion to Krishna (God). None of the followers of *Jnana*, *Yoga* and *Karma* [there are four major yogas] can know g[G]od [*sic*], he argued – only the *bhakta* (devotee). He quotes from the *Gita* 'only through the process of *bhakti* can one understand g[G]od [*sic*]" (Morris, 1994, p. 85).

Buddhism and Hinduism also have a history of ranking and counter-ranking: "Buddhism and other Eastern mystical traditions place their own aspired states

at the highest levels” (Winkelman, 1993, p. 5), and “within Buddhist scriptures the way of the Buddha is always considered superior to Brahma” (Morris, 1994, p. 49), whereas the Vedanta of Shankara claimed its non-dualism as the final and highest order of consciousness. Nagarjuna, the important philosopher and reformer of ‘middle way’ Buddhism, “trenchantly criticized the Upanishad and Vedanta doctrine that Brahman (absolute spirit) was the sole reality in the world. There was no ‘ground’ or creator of the phenomenal world, and no ‘soul’ within the human subject, identical with Brahman” (p. 65). Nagarjuna, along with Buddha, claimed that the famous central tenant of Hinduism ‘*tat tvam asi*’ (thou art that) was nothing but a pneumatic illusion (p. 65).

Finally, it is important the reader understand that we are not talking about personal narcissistic-wounds but something absorbed or introjected from culture:

Consider, for example, the Dalai Lama’s defence of the need of a plurality of religions. While celebrating the existence of different religions to accommodate the diversity of human karmic dispositions, he contends that final spiritual liberation can only be achieved through the emptiness practices of his own school of Tibetan Buddhism, implicitly situating all other spiritual choices as lower—a view that he believes all other Buddhists and religious people will eventually accept. (D’Costa, as cited in Ferrer, 2009, p. 140)

Ferrer then goes on to say,

That the Dalai Lama himself, arguably a paragon of spiritual humility, altruism, and open-mindedness, holds this view strongly suggests, I believe, that spiritual narcissism is not necessarily associated with a narcissistic personality but rather a deeply seated tendency buried in the collective realms of the human unconscious. Ethnocentricity—the culturally inculcated or indoctrinated belief in cultural/religious superiority—very likely contributes to the structuring of this pervasive tendency. (Ferrer, 2009, p. 147)

I have to wonder if the annexation of further Prophetic revelation is also an expression of spiritual ranking and therefore an example of the kind of ethno-narcissism mentioned above. It is understandable that people make overzealous claims after coming Face to Face with God or have a life-changing meeting with a guru. Perhaps even the greatest of spiritual openings can be appropriated by the human ego (cf. Evans, 1993). Or perhaps the sheer power of the opening, for a moment in time, *is* in fact, the deepest dive into the Ocean for that cultural moment - a transpersonal gestalt of such power, a seeing through the veil with such clarity, that it truly breaks new ground. Nevertheless, such proclamations can also be politically motivated, and it is in their concern with power, “comparative status” (Evans, 1993, p. 1), or cultural superiority that I believe brings them into the realm of a pneuma-pathology.

Into the Ocean of Emancipation

When it is all said and done, wrote psychiatrist (and Buddhist) Mark Epstein, “The spiritual path is ultimately about confronting one’s own inherent narcissism” (1996, p. 33). Donald Evans, a Christian, philosopher and spiritual counsellor, says that the spiritual path has to do with a “transformative process in which we uncover and let go of our narcissism so as to surrender into the mystery out of which everything continually arises” (1993, p. 4). Following Evans, Ferrer claims the “overcoming of self-centeredness” is the common ground of all genuine spiritual paths. When we manage to shed our narcissistic self-centeredness in participation with a “dynamic and indeterminate spiritual power” (2002, p. 133), we may enter an *Ocean of Emancipation* (2002, p. 145). Ferrer holds that entry into this Ocean can be accompanied or followed by a variety of spiritual disclosures and a “transconceptual disclosure of reality” (2002, p. 45) and that “different spiritual ultimates can be enacted through intentional or spontaneous creative participation in an indeterminate spiritual power” (p. 151).

Stanislav Grof’s important research has shown that “LSD experiences could sometimes occur in a religious framework other than the experient’s own” (2002, p. 427).

In non-ordinary states of consciousness, visions of various universal symbols can play a significant role in experiences of individuals who previously had no interest in mysticism or were strongly opposed to anything esoteric. These visions tend to convey instant intuitive understandings of the various levels of meanings of these symbols.

As a result of this kind, subjects can develop accurate understanding of various complex esoteric teachings. In some instances, persons unfamiliar with the Kabbalah had experiences described in the Zohar and Sepher Yetzirah and obtained surprising insights into Kabbalistic symbols. Others were able to describe the meaning and functions of intricate mandalas used in the Tibetan Vajrayana and other tantric systems. (1988, p. 139)

While this has some similarity to my experience, unlike Grof’s patients (using LSD under clinical protocols), mine was a spontaneous, reoccurring and concerted *series* of comprehensive unveilings over a period of roughly 20 years (the meeting with Divine Sophia and the Lote Tree in my late 30s early 40s)³⁴. Without a religious context, with no guide or understanding, it was as if I had followed in the footsteps of the prophets ... to a long awaited rendezvous.

Anthropologist, David Young, in his discussion of “spontaneous visions,” and using as a model Jung’s archetypal psychology, argued that when something devastating happens to a person and her or his “previous attitudes to life break down,” the contents of the “collective unconscious” become activated, and “autonomous complexes” [spirits] are projected externally [basically an anthropomorphized image from the unconscious with which to communicate], “which can lead to psychosis unless these materials can assume a communicable

form such as a vision [e.g., A Twin Angel]" (1994, p. 185). Successful communication or translation canalizes these powers into consciousness, which can then become a source of creative insight and energy (p. 186).

However, this would deny the Otherness of God. Martin Buber, for one, took Jung to task for his *psychologizing* of God: for making "God's existence contingent upon the unconscious working of the human soul." Buber understood "the meeting of God to be one of mutual contact—the reciprocal meeting in life between one existence and another" (Brownell, 2012, p. 98). Whereas for Jung, God's very existence was dependent on the collective psyche—there is no transcendent Other, no Eternal Thou or Angel—only projection drawn from the personal or collective unconscious (Daniels, 2005, p. 222).

Ferrer's participatory position holds that "once a spiritual shore has been enacted, it becomes potentially accessible—to some degree and in special circumstances—to the entire human species" (Ferrer, 2002, p. 151). They become "like trails cleared in a dense forest" and therefore the "spiritual pathways traveled by others can be more easily crossed" (p. 151). In *Muhammad: A biography of the Prophet* (1992) Armstrong wrote, "The Sufis depicted Muhammad as a hero, blazing a new trail to God in this experience" (p. 139), and this two-step revelation became embedded and enacted in mystical Islam as the Sufi Path of Love. Ferrer's notion of the prophetic 'trail' being more *easily* crossed is tempered by Washburn:

Mystical illumination is an experience of inconceivable magnitude. When mystical illumination occurs, the aperture of the soul opens all the way and spirit, in the fullness of its radiant glory, graces the ego with the ultimate vision. Mystical illumination then...is inherently the nature of a gift... Irrespective of human will, it is spiritual power itself that elects the times and places at which it will bare itself to the ego. Mystical illumination, therefore, like prophetic vision and saintly compassion, is statistically extremely rare. (1995, p. 247–248)

Here, according to Washburn, human will has little to do with it, and spirit decides the who, where and when of the revelatory occasion. His statement allows *intention* on the part of spirit/God. Cheetham concurs, "The Personal Guide is not chosen by the ego" (2003, p. 106). Furthermore, to use the event I participated in as a form of transpersonal data (e.g., Young & Goulet, 1994), it was a series of disclosures, at first terrifying (in accordance with Washburn, 1995), fulfilling all of the criteria of near-death-experience (in accordance with Ring, 1990) and deepening in charismatic and illuminative power, culminating with "the supreme form of manifestation of Absolute being, in this tradition, which is the presence of the Angel" (Voss, 2007, p. 6)—the Angel's Shore.

INVESTITURE

Within the Prophetic Tradition there is a clause that states that something intrinsically miraculous can happen in the form of Elijah-Khidr or the Elatic

function as *fana fi 'llah*. Taking a step outside of the literal religion there is still the potential for divine election—this is the emic position (of the people). For the function of Elijah-Khidr is to “free us from the servitude of the literal religion” (Corbin, 1969, p. 55). Thus, the elastic function appears to have a mind of its own. Or, after Muhammad, “Light upon Light God guides to His Light whomever He wishes” (the 35th verse of the 24th sura of the Qur’an).

Among the mystics of Islam, the Sufi’s, spiritual power, grace, or *baraka*, is said to be passed down through the Prophet Muhammad through formal chains of affiliation “through initiation and spiritual practice from generation to generation” (Nasr, 2007, p. 107). Thus most Sufi groups trace their lineage back to the Prophet who was said to have been invested by God. “The Prophet invested Ali with a cloak or *kherqa* on initiating him into the esoteric mysteries, imparting to him therewith the heavenly wisdom that transcends all formal learning. In his turn Ali invested his own initiates, and through them the *selselas* or chains of affiliation passed the inner lore of mystical truth to succeeding generations” (Attar, 1983, p. 3).

Nasr is straightforward about this: one becomes a Sufi only through studying with, and being initiated by, a Sufi master (a conditioning/contextual process), and one becomes a Shayk (spiritual master) only by being appointed by one’s master. But Nasr is also clear that there is an exception to this rule: “the function may descend from heaven;” one can be initiated by Khidr—the “absent” or “invisible” guide—the Hidden Imam (2007). However, in either case (heavenly or human) “there is a need for divine investiture” (2007, p. 109). If we follow this tradition, it would appear that I had been, to use to use Attar’s language, ‘invested’ by the invisible guide, the master of the masterless, which means the mystery was not transmitted through a human Shayk (but a non-human Shayk).

I was invested through direct contact with the Elijah-Khidr and was clothed in “a garment of light” (purple jeans/white shirt, beard, sandals), and the material world was revealed as light, and I was clothed in this world. I was also given to drink a cup of wine, water or light; Nasr wrote:

The spiritual wine mentioned in the Quran ... is at once the fire of Divine Love and the light of illuminative knowledge and gnosis. It is also the invocation of God’s Names. The disciple is the vessel, into which the wine is poured once the vessel is emptied of its pungent liquid of selfish passions. (2007, p. 109)

I can say that in the zenith of the event this was true, but life has taught me that integration takes time and practice. While it has not been my personal destiny (as yet perhaps) to become involved in traditional Sufi or Christian groups, I have been content to use the transpersonal movement as a general affiliation both in its perennial orchestration (Grof, 1985; Wilber, 1980) and participatory-turn (e.g., Ferrer, 2002; Heron, 1998). I have remained, in my own way, a disciple of the Love and Beauty disclosed by the Angel Holy Spirit largely through the practice of co-inquiry and the field of creative psychotherapy.

OCEAN WITHOUT SHORE

Henry Corbin asked, “*Who is Khidr?*” and “*What does it mean to be a disciple of Khidr?*” (1969, p. 55). In other words, who or what comes after the Prophets? And “pursuing that question” the ‘Great Master’ Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi who is both revered and condemned in Islam, and who above all was a disciple of Khidr, claimed he had “plunged into an Ocean on whose shore the Prophets remained behind standing” (Brown, 1991, p. 93) and entered an Ocean without Shore. I cannot know exactly what he meant in this statement, but according to William Chittick, in his participatory account of Ibn Arabi’s teachings, “The human soul is open-ended, an ocean without shore” (2008, p. 254).

Perhaps the claim to being the end of all revelation is, after Ferrer, a form of doctrinal ranking and a bid for final authority and therefore a form of spiritual ethno-narcissism. Perhaps Ibn Arabi, understanding this, plunged into something like an *Ocean of Emancipation* and thus liberated himself from deep rooted ethno-narcissistic tendencies—is this what it means to leave the Prophets standing on their shore? My face-to-face encounter with The Angel Holy Spirit, rationally speaking, was impossible, a miracle, and my world was turned inside out (see Cheetham, 2003). A wave of Revelation flowing from the Ocean of Infinitude had overwhelmed my finite ego revealing the world as a Face of God (cf. Lings, 1970). The Angel is a person/archetype—invested with the spirit of freedom and liberation continually stepping beyond the control of the fixed.

A PATH OF BEAUTY

To be a disciple of Khidr in this age, and after many years of reflection I can profess to being something like that, is to be on the lookout for others through whom the Angel shines or to engage with others so that their numinous Beauty can. To plunge continually into the Ocean without Shore (if this be a metaphor for open ended co-created spirituality) with others so engaged can be imaged as *relational spirituality*. “The basic characteristic of this religion of the spirit is that it will be not only revelation of God to man, but also a revelation of man to man” (Avens, 1988a, p. 70) or woman to woman, etc., as the case may be.

Washburn claims that the power of the Ground is inherently “civilized” and that it is by nature “sensitive and other attuned” (1995, p. 242). As regeneration and integration take place in the divinized person, there is an “outreachingness of spirit” from individuated person to person—forming a community—a “mystical body of ego differentiated spirits [persons]” (p. 242) “moved to join in a higher life” with other integrated and individuated persons (Washburn, 1995, p. 246). This future relational religion will concern itself with the ‘Angel of the between,’ and the *Deus Revelatus* (as civilizing cosmic citizens) gathered in mutual-care, respect and responsibility, to co-create an open-ended interpersonal spiritually—to quote the great Persian poet Rumi:

When that anxious, self-protecting imagination leaves, The real cooperative work begins.³⁵

Beyond our anxious everyday narcissistic strategies, spirituality—living, loving and learning—will become cooperative, relational and participatory. The Vietnamese Buddhist teacher Tich Nhat Hanh claimed the next Buddha would probably not be an individual but a community. Perhaps, in the same way, we could envision the next Footstep in the Prophet lineage to be a collaborative and communal flowering, a deeply embodied co-inquiry into the transcendent and immanent life divine—a co-inquiry into the reality of radical peer relationship between humans-as-theophanies—as manifestations of God, as flowerings of the *Deus Absconditus*—come into being. And this is my answer to the question posed by Corbin, “Who is Elijah-Khidr and what does it mean to be a disciple?” for surely it is freedom and dignity for all (and the whole book of nature).

In our Angel cosmology the Divine Being is not fragmented but wholly present in each instance, individualized in each theophany, and to meet the Other in mutual Presence is a kind of attention that “is intensely relational” sensuous, embodied, participatory – a response to

the prophetic summons to experience divine love and beauty through seeing the world as a theophany, through seeking the Angel Holy Spirit in our encounters with the Other, and through incarnating love with other *persons* whom we encounter not merely abstractly, through their *personas*, but as the iconic face of the Beloved. (Lakhani, 2009, p. 35)

Theophanic reality is based on the realization of our unique personhood transfigured by love and beauty.

For to transcend our “personality” is not to disappear into some undifferentiated, vaguely blissful sea of divinity, but, on the contrary, to fulfil one’s “specific individuality.” Figuratively speaking, it is not the case of a drop of water merging with the ocean and getting lost therein, but rather, that of the ocean entering the drop of water. (Avens, 1984, p. 20)

This ocean entering the drop is reminiscent of Washburn’s notion of the porous ego suffused and rejuvenated with the cosmic ground (1995). How the drops of water then engage, co-inquire and co-create with each other is my interest. What are the ethics of embodied relational divinity? What is the path of beholding the Other as God’s manifest beauty on earth? What happens to the mode of Presence when a group of drops gather to intentionally enact their theophanic and charismatic presence in a collaborative, co-creative science of the heart? What mode of relational Presence is wanting to be born?

NOTES

¹ A number of reports exist from anthropologists who have experienced encounters with the spirit-worlds of their host cultures. These range from conversion experiences, Nepalese and Malaysian shamanistic healings, powerful dreams, spirits encountered in ritual, psychotropic states, and Tibetan Buddhist meditation among others (see Young & Goulet, 1994 and Lahood, 2007). The information gathered in these spirit worlds has been used as data

to gain a greater understanding of the culture, cosmology and spiritual realities as such (see Tambiah, 1970). As an anthropologist and psychotherapist with an interest in transpersonal psychology I use the information gathered in the visionary event as the ground from which to write about relational, contributory and participatory spirituality. I have some ambivalence about 'coming out' and using my experience as data in case I am misunderstood as evangelizing, self-aggrandizing, or some kind of New Age, neo-colonial cultural appropriation; nevertheless, I do wish to report on and theorize the event.

²The term 'disciple' is used in the same way that Jack Kornfield, for example, might be said to be a disciple of Buddhism. More importantly because it has a bearing on central question asked in the contemporary study of Theophany (meaning: a visible manifestation of God or an appearance of a deity to a human being). What is it to be disciple of the Elijah/Khidr archetype? (Brown, 1982; Cheetham, 2003; Corbin, 1969). This article is an attempt at answering that question.

³I am grateful to this journal, the reviewers and the editor, for allowing a place for the Angel in the transpersonal record. I would also like to express thanks to Jorge Ferrer, John Heron, Robert Frager (Shayk Ragip al-Jerrahi) and William Chittick for their various insights and criticisms on early versions of this paper. I would also like to acknowledge Henry Corbin and Tom Cheetham for creating a place for the Angel in their respective work.

⁴It has been about 25 years since the Angel encounter, but it is still very vivid to my memory. Over these years, I have written it up, painted it, put it to poetry, spoken it, enacted it collaboratively and taken it to one or two therapists. I have used it as a meditative and contemplative backdrop immersing myself in its feeling tones—it has become for me a form of prayer and communion. It lives on now in a relational embodying process. There are certain key images in the narrative that capture the event for me like pages in a luminous picture book—it was extremely visual, colorful and animated.

⁵Morphically speaking, the image of the Angel of Death looked very much like the same form or outline of the Shiva Nataraj of the Hindu pantheon. It had arms outstretched, and one foot was raised, and the other was crushing my ego in the shape of a small male human. This was not a moment of the 'death of God' a la Nietzsche but something like the 'God beyond God' of Meister Eckhart.

⁶With the gift of reflection I believe this was much less a personal father but something representing socialized religion.

⁷*Die before you die – Muhammad*

⁸*When God began to create heaven and earth—the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind [ruach, breath] from God sweeping over the water...Genesis 1:2*

⁹*The passing from the "black light," from the "luminous night," to the brilliance of the emerald vision, will be a sign, according to Semnani, of the completed growth of the subtle organism, the "resurrection body" hidden in the visible physical body (Corbin, 1994, p. 12).*

¹⁰*I saw the Lord in a most beautiful form - Muhammad*

Then I saw god in the most of beautiful forms, surging upon me from the world of mystery -Ruzbehan of Shiraz (cited in Avens, 1988a, p. 74).

On the horizon of eternity the Divine Face riseth out of the darkness, and the meaning of "All on the earth shall pass away, but the Face of thy Lord"...is made manifest - Baha'u'lla (1978, p. 37).

¹¹There was something of an 'erotic' encounter here that defies my ability to language it.

¹²*Then I was enveloped by the divine Lights until all of me became light and a robe of honour was bestowed upon me. The likes of which I had never seen*

(Ibn Arabi Trans Chittick and James, 2002)

When the human soul has completed its cycle of purifications...it enters a world of light and is united with its eternal partner: I go toward my likeness; and my likeness goes toward me; he embraces me and holds me close. As if I had come out of prison

(Corbin, 1994, p. 33)

¹³"This two is not a duality, but a dualitude: a unique and a unique multiplied by each other are one" (Avens, 1988a, p. 77). I saw many Faces of beautiful bearded men in the Face of the Angel as if in a holographic image.

¹⁴*[Jesus said] "Whosoever drinks from my mouth will become like me; I myself shall become that person, and the hidden things will be revealed..." Gospel of Thomas*

¹⁵*That ruby wine tasted by the pure in paradise...my being drenched in that wine which we drank in the pre-eternal dawn (Nasr, 2007, p. 109).*

¹⁶*He climbs up, and lo! Under his feet were an Earth and a Heaven (Hermes in Corbin, 1994)*

¹⁷ *I was a Hidden Treasure and I wished to be known, and so I created the world.*

¹⁸ According to Marshal Hodgson, Khidr was identified with Elijah and had many shrines in the Syrian hills. Given the Quran accords Khidr great antiquity, “it was not incongruous that his shrines dated back to pre-Islamic times and were sometimes shared with Christians” (1974, p. 461).

¹⁹ I will return to this oversight and its impact on transpersonal psychology in another article. Suffice to say here that Jung’s general missing of Islam may have been carried over into transpersonal psychology by three of the seminal and foundational theoreticians Stanislav Grof, Ken Wilber and Michael Washburn—all were strongly influenced by Jung’s writings and all of their early writings on transpersonal psychology are largely devoid of any real substance vis-à-vis Islam.

²⁰ This statement seems to add weight to Jung’s insight that Khidr pre-dated, and was incorporated by Islam. It cannot be ignored that without the presence of Angels or Theophanies the great religions of the Middle East would not exist. Elijah was said to have ascended bodily to heaven but has descended in secret many times since. Elias was also present with Moses at Jesus’ transfiguration on Mt. Tabor. Moses, Jesus and Abraham were present when Muhammad went on his transfiguring Night Journey; he stopped at the “Further Mosque” (Armstrong, 1992, p. 138) and prayed with them.

²¹ I find this statement deeply resonant with my meeting of the Angel. As the Prophet’s famous message goes, “He who knows himself knows his Lord.” In other words he who knows his Lord/Angel knows himself.

²² Loy wrote “God is God only in relation to me, but when there is no longer a “me” then the spiritual quest is over” (1988p. 291), and presumably relations are over as well.

²³ “Due to the similarities between the archaic dialect in the oldest layer of Sanskrit used in the Hindu *Vedas* and the archaic dialect used in the Persian *Gāthās* ... only the Hindu *Vedas* can be said to vie with the *Gāthās* for antiquity” (Herrmann, 2009, p. 131).

²⁴ The soul progresses through a series of ecstatic remembrances or recollections closely bound with death and the realm *beyond* death as a key experiential theme. This progression is oriented says Cheetham as “being towards the other side of death” (2003, p. 52). Cheetham writes, “For this kind of Presence to open up for us requires the discovery, or the recognition, of a space adequate for this Presence to reveal itself” (2003, p. 52).

²⁵ Meaning not yet come into Creation...existing eternally.

²⁶ As Bache explains “some philosophical systems, such as Vedanta, have simply swallowed the individual as a transitory illusion created by the Divine within the Divine. What is ultimately real, they have said, is not the individual but the One-without-a-second. To think otherwise is to be caught in the dualistic maze created by Brahman to know Itself from within diversity. We can experience everything that exists because in essence we are everything. In the final analysis, there *is* no small ‘I,’ there is only the One, The Divine Reality” (2000, p. 259).

²⁷ Avens has been critical, like James Hillman, of an “artificial transplantation of Eastern values into Western soil” (1980, p. 4). His acerbic tone may be due to the spiritual imperialism, materialism and spiritual defences one can encounter in the New Age (see Lahood, 2010b) where personhood, human needs, even love between persons can be seen as egoic illusions.

²⁸ This is, I believe, the ground on which non-relational transpersonal psychology grew (see Lahood, 2010b).

²⁹ We can also mention in this context John Welwood’s term “spiritual by-passing,” whereby spiritual practices and beliefs are used to avoid dealing with early wounding and developmental issues (Welwood, 1984).

³⁰ Interestingly, Tom Cheetham claims the figure of Jesus Christ for many Christian functions now as the heavenly guide, the Face of God’s Son (2003). It might be possible that the Face of the Vedantic or Buddhist guru functions in a similar way.

³¹ The Angel cosmology is participatory (Lakhani, 2009) suggesting a subject-object reality as espoused by participatory thinkers (e.g., Ferrer, 2002; Heron, 1998; Reason, 2003).

³² The Angel can also show itself as the Divine Sophia and according to Corbin is very much a feminizing process (1969).

³³ Authoritarian spiritual ranking seems to be born from a need of comparative status (Evans, 1993) and an attempt at having the bigger picture. Christopher Bache, following Heron (1998) claims we need to give up on trying to give a definite account of the whole transpersonal field but simply bring “forward a perspective based on one’s experience” and place it in “respectful dialogue” alongside other perspectives (2000, p. 7). While I argue here for the merits of the Angel’s Shore and Prophetic muse, nowhere do I claim the Angel cosmology to be superior to other religious traditions. I am simply arguing from within the logic of the revelation and the worldview the event bestows. Nor am I pointing any fingers at other religious traditions, although I have argued that contemporary Westerners in New Age religious formulations are prone to a kind of pneuma-pathology in the form of spiritual narcissism (Lahood, 2008, 2010a, 2010b). Nevertheless, it is also impossible to ignore that religious traditions are beset with conservatism, patriarchy, exclusivism, dis-embodiment, authoritarianism and

dogmatism (see Ferrer, 2002). To give a critical appraisal of these religious traditions from a western academic critical tradition is not to claim that this position is 'better' than the other. Addressing spiritual narcissism simply clears a path for engaging in a more relational spiritual inquiry and through the action of therapeutic democracy limiting the narcissistic potential seemingly inherent in the human condition (see Lahood, 2010b, 2013). To follow Jeffery Kripal, the Real and Good can be revealed in the scared present in radicalized relationship. Such co-creative practice is "dynamic, uncertain, and yet hopeful—a Tikkun-like theurgical healing of the world and God" (Kripal, 2003).

³⁴The aftershocks included an encounter with the Divine Sophia (a pristine alabaster Face rising in Glory out of the Black Light circled by a rainbow spectrum encompassing the whole of the cosmos), and an ecstatic vision of the Lotus of The Limit - a great tree in a vast world of heavenly blue blissful haze and high blue crystalline mountains—on each branch of the tree ten thousand white robed Prophets.

³⁵Rumi (1991, p. 245)

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"To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield!". This was the motto of an Arctic research expedition, In the Footsteps of Two Captains, which uncovered the mysteries of the crew of the St. Anna schooner that went missing in the ice almost 100 years later. What century-old artifacts were the researchers able to find? What caused the fallout between the two captains - Brusilov and Albanov? What role did Yereimia Zhdanko - the only woman on the ship - play in this tragic story? Is it possible to find St. Anna? Head of the research expedition Oleg Prodan answers these and other question