

# God, who or what is It?

By Dirk Gillabel, 2001

One could write a book about the concept and experiences people have about God. This article gives you a short overview about who or what God, or the Divine, is, based on people who have experienced the Divine, or God, each in their own way.

As a child I was told that when you die you go straight to heaven where you sit on clouds and eat rice pudding with a golden spoon. They forget to tell that after a couple of weeks of eating rice pudding, you probably started to hate rice pudding. As children we accept those stories at face value. As we grow older we abandon those stories and /or reject the idea of heaven, or form other notions of it. But where do we get those ideas? Once I was visited by two Mormons. Two young American men (I was still in Belgium at that time) who were sent out to spread their faith in other countries. They gave a short and nice explanation, with colorful paintings, about their beliefs. But when asked how they knew it was like that, or how they would explain people's first hand spiritual experiences, they could not come up with any answer. It is obvious that a lot of religious people take for granted what other people, usually authorities, tell them (who are supposed to know everything). Where do those authorities get their information from? From other authorities or from scriptures which were written by ancient authorities.

So many people put their faith in authorities, it makes life simple. They believe what they are told to believe, so they don't have to worry any more about what things might be. Authorities like it when people don't question their authority or power. But once in a while a single person will stand up and talk about their own experience. Such a person is often persecuted by the religious authority. Meister Eckhart, a Christian mystic from the 13-14th century, was regularly attacked by the Catholic Church. His ideas about God were very different than those of the Church. It still sees God as a male figure, the Old Testament God that punishes and rewards, despite the fact that in the New Testament Jesus talks about a God above the old testament God, whom he calls the Father. God the Father does not punish or reward, but loves all living beings unconditionally. The term 'Father' is from a Christian sect which was chosen as the state religion by Julius Caesar. There were many sects, mostly Gnostic. The Gnostics usually used the term Father-Mother, as they believed that God has no sex and is a dual entity, as what we experience in the created world is both male and female. The Gnostics did not accept authority figures among themselves, and stressed that experience is more important than theories. Thus a bearded old God with thundering voice is absent in their theology. Momoimus said: "Give up the seeking for a God, the creation, and similar things. Look for Him by taking yourself as point of origin. Learn what it is, inside yourself, that attracts everything to itself and that says: "My God, my spirit, my thinking, my soul, my body." Study the sources of pain, happiness,

love, hate. If you investigate these things carefully, you will find Him in yourself." It is an idea we find with many mystics, that God is both outside and inside oneself, and thus accessible to anyone. In general, the Gnostics looked at God as the Father-Mother, the highest being, which is actually a negation because nothing in our language can describe Him accurately. Therefore God is called incomprehensible, unlimited, indivisible, the Perfect, the Depth, the Abyss and so on. These are only descriptions and nothing more.

Paracelsus, the famous Medieval alchemist, said that one should not believe or accept anything from other people, but one should investigate and experience for oneself if something is true or not. In keeping with this we now turn our attention to people who have experienced what we call God. Usually they tell us that anyone can experience God and that we should not take their word for granted either. They show us what they have experienced, and that we can do this too.

Meister Eckhart: "I have occasionally spoken of a light in the soul which is uncreated and uncreatable. . . . This light is not satisfied to know the simple, still and divine being which neither gives nor takes, but rather it desires to know from where this being comes. It wants to penetrate into the simple ground, into the still desert, into that which distinction never peeped, neither Father, Son nor Holy Spirit. There, in that most inward place, where everyone is a stranger, the light is satisfied, and there it is more inward than it is when in itself, for this ground is a simple stillness which is immovable in itself. But all things are moved by this immovability and all the forms of life are conceived by it which, possessing the light of reason, live of themselves."

Meister Eckhart leads us to a living God-within-ourselves, who can be experienced and does not need external proof. As human beings we are more than just human, we carry the image of God within us, we are God in the process of becoming, we are both human and God. Deep inside us is something that is part of God and connects us with everything. We are of the same substance as God and therefore we can become conscious of Him and become one with Him. Man is a 'little God', in the process of becoming, who is given everything God has in power and fullness.

Eckhart sees God as having a dual characteristic. At one side God is the Divinity, eternal immobile, incorporating everything, unknowable for any living creature. At the other side God is Being in action, a revealing spirit, creator of the worlds and giving life to all creatures. The first aspect is waiting for us at the end of the road, the other is at the beginning of self-realization, our God-Self. Both are at the same time one. God is the essence of the world, and the world is the revelation of God. "All things are contained in the One, by virtue of the fact that it is one. for all multiplicity is one, and is one thing, and is in and through the One. . . The One is not distinct from all things. Therefore all things in the fullness of being are in the One by virtue of the indistinctness and unity of the One."

Similar to the Gnostics, Eckhart says: "God is transcendent Being and super-essential Nothingness. Concerning this St Augustine says: the best thing that man can say about God is to be able to be silent about Him, from the wisdom of his inner judgment. Therefore be silent and prate not about God, for whenever you dare prate about God, you lie, and commit sin. If you will be without sin,

prate not about God. You cannot understand anything about God, for He is above all understanding. A master said: If I had a God whom I could understand, I would never hold Him to be God."

Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) In Stockholm, Sweden he was a leading scientist and got a seat in the Swedish House of Nobles, where he remained an active participant in the Swedish government throughout his life. When he was about 55 he developed the ability to enter the spiritual worlds and converse with its inhabitants. Swedenborg wrote many books about his experiences, and his descriptions of these worlds would later be confirmed others who visited them through out-of-the-body experiences. Some of the insights he gained were so unusual that the Catholic Church came down on him more than once.

Swedenborg also said that man cannot really comprehend who God is because man tries to picture God through his senses, which by nature are limited. Visiting the heavens he found that no angel ever conceives of the Divine as being in any other form than a human form, and that those in the higher heavens are unable to think of the Divine in any other way. The human form of the Divine is called the Lord. This form allows the angels to perceive the Divine. God appearing in human form is a central theme with Swedenborg. He does not say that God is a old man, as does the Catholic Church. He says that although the Divine is invisible, unknowable, and without form, It can and does show itself in a human form as the Lord, in this way God becomes visible and knowable to the created beings. It is as this Visible God that the Lord now rules His kingdom in heaven and on earth. As such, as God-with-us, God operating visibly and understandably together with humanity, God exercises the infinite power of love and wisdom; and as such reveals the glory of the Divine.

Muktananda, a contemporary Indian mystic who attained God-realization, sees God as formless, but at the same time He can appear in form. "People wonder whether to meditate on the Form or on the Form-less aspect of God, but you should not feel any conflict about this. Both meditations give the same results.

Saints like Tukaram, Tulsidas, Namdev, Mirabai, and Janabai were devoted to the Form, the personal aspect of God. God came to them in a personal form, but they also realized the Formless. The God with form, or saguna aspect, is not imaginary. God's greatness is unlimited. He created this habitable world in the midst of nothingness out of the storehouse of His unlimited power. He alone became the world, manifesting Himself in all its various objects. How can it be difficult for Him, whose names and forms are limitless, to take form?"

Like Eckhart, Muktanandra says that looking for God outside oneself is foolish.

God exists in your understanding, which means that God is within you. You yourself are the inner thought-free state, aham, the pure "I"-consciousness, which is God." God is an extraordinary inner experience. As we live in a world of limitations and often personalize the unknown or mysterious, why would God not show himself in a human form? Nobody would accept Him in a form of a dog or a stone. Not that He could not do that, but who would accept such an image of God? Nevertheless, for those who are more spiritually evolved, they are able to see God in any form, as God is present in all of His creation and can communicate with us in any form.

Could God actually speak to you? Mystics have claimed that God spoke directly to them, often to the dismay of the religious institutions. We have been taught that God only spoke to a selected few in the distant past, as God spoke to Moses, with thundering voice and burning bushes. Why should God limit himself to such a display? As we are all God's children, why would God not talk in a normal way with a normal person? To Neale Donald Walsch, this is what happened and is still happening. His book "Conversations with God" was a New York Times bestseller.

Not shy of answering any question, God explains his communication with humans: "I talk to everyone. All the time. The question is not to whom do I talk, but who listens?" Although God talks to Walsch, God says that his most common form of communication is through feeling. "Feeling is the language of the soul."

"People choose to believe that God communicates in special ways and only with special people. This removes the mass of the people from the responsibility of hearing My message, much less receiving it, and allows them to take someone else's word for everything."

Walsch is not the only one who says that we definitely can feel the presence of God. Paramahansa Yogananda tells us that though the mind is incapable of encompassing Omnipresence, it is nevertheless able to feel God. We cannot grasp the totality of God, but there is a point of contact, where the Infinite becomes the finite. He calls this point of contact the superconscious mind. When we expand the ordinary mind until it impinges on the superconscious mind, we are able to feel God's presence.

When asking about the form or shape God has, God replies to Walsch: "That would be impossible, for I have no form or shape you understand. I could adopt a form or shape you could understand, but then everyone would assume what they have seen is the only form and shape of God, rather than a form or shape of God, one of many. People believe Me what they see Me as, rather than what they do not see. But I am the Great Unseen, not only what I cause Myself to be in a particular moment. In a sense, I am what I am not. It is from the am-notness that I come and to it I always return." Does God come to hear and fulfill your prayers? "God is the Observer, not the creator. And God stands ready to assist you in living your life, but not in the way you might expect. It is not God's function to create, or uncreate, the circumstances or conditions of your life. God created you, in the image and likeness of God. You have created the rest, through the power God has given you."

True to the explanation of the mystics, God also explains the concept of 'experiencing Himself'. In the beginning It was all there was. All that could know Itself, because there was nothing else. This All That Is could only know its utter 'magnificence' conceptually, but not experientially. It wanted to know what it felt like to be so 'magnificent', unless 'that which is not' shows up. It needed a reference point within itself, and thus It divided Itself into portions. Each portion could look back on the rest of Itself and see magnificence.

This is very similar to the Gnostic idea how the Father-Mother (the Divine) split itself into numerous divine sparks that went out into the Darkness. Each of us, and every living being, is such a divine spark.

As God tells Walsch: "My divine purpose in dividing Me was to create sufficient

parts of Me so that I could know Myself experientially. There is only one way for the Creator to know Itself experientially as the Creator, and that is to create. And so I gave to each of the countless parts of Me (to all of My spirit children) the same power to create which I have as a whole." "My purpose in creating you, My spiritual offspring, was for Me to know Myself as God. I have no way to do that save through you. Thus it can be said that My purpose for you is that you should know yourself as Me."

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