

# An Ocean without Shore: The resonance between open-ended charismatic co-inquiry and Sufi mysticism.

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*Meeting the Eternal Angel and Sipping from the Cup of Immortality*

## *Abstract*

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

## Autobiography of an Angel

Recently, it has been acknowledged by scholars in the field of transpersonal/participatory philosophy that it is important to reveal one's own experience when writing about matters trans-personal. And, since trans-personal philosophy cannot be done at a distance (Wilber, 2001), it would appear that experience, (participation) and representation (autobiography) must be central to construction of trans-personal knowledge.<sup>1</sup> 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 LSD research (2000). Perhaps not strictly in the transpersonal camp; A. H. Almass' *Luminous Night Journey: An autobiographical fragment* (2000) is somewhat self explanatory; and John Heron, with regard to Michael 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 (1998, p. 75).

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

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<sup>1</sup> A number of reports exist from anthropologists who have experienced encounters with the spirit-worlds of their hosts. These range from powerful dreams, shamanistic healings, spirits encountered in ritual, psychotropic states, and Tibetan Buddhist practices among others (see Young & Goulet 1993; Lahood, 2007). The information gathered in these spirit worlds has been used as anthropological data to gain a greater understanding of the culture, cosmology and reality as such. As an anthropologist I want to use the information gathered in the visionary event as the ground of my writing about participatory spirituality. I have some ambivalence about using my experience as data in case I am misunderstood as evangelizing, nevertheless, in the name of experiential research here I simply wish to speak unabashedly about the event and use the works of Henry Corbin, Norman O. Brown, Tom Cheetham and Roberts Avens to flesh out the Angel event as a genuine transpersonal artefact.

So with this encouragement from such distinguished trans-personal theorists and philosophers, and with a vague Biblical echo somewhere gently exhorting me not 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 more in keeping with Sufi tradition, I come out—as an initiand and disciple of an Angel—an Angel that makes its home mostly, but as we shall see, apparently not exclusively, in the Islamic and pre-Islamic Persian *weltanschauung*.<sup>2</sup>

I say this because the event occurred far from the Arab-Islamic-Persian world in New Zealand and I was, at the time, utterly naïve when it came to Sufism. There was no visible cultural pre-conditioning pattern to mediate the event of any kind (Katz, 1978), and yet, contrary to this contextualist position, it was 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 which culminated in the encounter with a being of light in a luminous dimension seemingly not of this world. I understand now that this realm is known by Sufi's and Persian mystics as the *alam al mithal*: and is seen as a intermediate dimension, a living world of light, luminosity and cosmic love. During these years, at certain peak moments intimations of this world would open to me (and I to it, through what I see now as a process of narcissistic shedding) and I would find myself participating with an intimate and sensuous Presence.

With hind-sight 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

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'disciple' is used in the same way that Jack Kornfield, for example, might be said to be a disciple of Middle Way Buddhism or Ram Dass a disciple of Hinduism. 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): e.g. What is it to be disciple of the Elijah/Khider archetype? (Corbin, 1969; Brown, 1982; Cheetham, 2003). This paper represents an attempt at answering that question.

(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 (1988); but also the recollection of participatory feeling (after Heron, 1992); the opening of subtle organs (e.g. *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. Heron, 1998; Daniels, 2005).

For many years I kept this charisma mostly to myself as a matter of prudence and modesty (and because there were not too many Sufi shayks in my neck of the woods to help me recognize it - this being New Zealand between 1979 and 88) but now, after 25 years of developmental seasoning (and hopefully some integration) I have decided to 'come out' as a disciple of Elijah/Khider, 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).<sup>3</sup> I believe I have encountered Elijah/Khider or, in Henry Corbin's language, the Angel "Holy Spirit" (1969, 54) and I mean to place that encounter within the discipline of contemporary transpersonal psychology. The following then, is an 'autobiographical fragment' (to borrow from Almass) 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* or Prophet. Partly because I think 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* (Nasr, 2007, p. 111) much less a false Prophet.

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<sup>3</sup> It 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 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.

Furthermore, I do not think of myself as a scholar of Islam, Christianity or Judaism (my interest has been in the science and culture of trans-personal psychology (Lahood, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b 2010a 2010b, 2013) nevertheless, I hope the event and my attempt at a retrospective anthropology will have some value for the trans-personal movement and the study of mysticism, religion and 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 collaborative relational-inquiry (see Heron, 1998; Lahood, 2013; Lahood, 2010) into the Angel's 'Shore' (to borrow 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 2010; 2013).

### The Unspeakable

Speaking of Angels requires a language that is both poetic (Hillman 1975) 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 of the companions who I believe has drunk from this same well (or rafted to this same 'shore' using Ferrer's metaphor) and have become likewise besotted.

Bahau'llah, the founder of the Bahai Faith, claims that while he was in the dungeon of the *Siyah-Chal* called the Black Pit of Persia, in 1852-53, he had a vision of what he called a '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* (Bahauallah) and he was transfigured.

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 inside 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) and underneath this, I believe, was the agony of what Washburn has called 'primal repression', 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.

I am still weighing in with how much I want to say about my personal circumstances because of course, such events, as Grof has amply shown, are woven into biographical incidence. The event was not dissociated from the human world of social relations nor "the intersubjective worldspace" (Wilber, 1995, p. 745) in its catalyzation, although it will appear to be in this fragment. I believe it came as a healing Grace in an attempt to restore right relations and a felt sense of kinship with the cosmos and its particulars; a condensed experience of sep-

aration 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 (in the Gestalt sense) the only way through for me as to reach out to something having given up 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 a moment of egoic terror and I had no idea that something might reach *back* - yet it did. Abraham Joshua Heschel, a Jewish theologian (and prophetologist), claims there is a play between *theotropism*: 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. 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 heart

beat 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 blue 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 and a mask of Death leapt out of the Sun to destroy 'my father'. I/he 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.<sup>4</sup> The awful being trampled 'my father/myself' into dust and oblivion again and again and again 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 at the death of 'my father'.<sup>5</sup>

*Die before you die – Muhammad*

Then I became slowly aware as if slowly waking up from the eternal sleep, after the dust had settled, it was as if I had lost all consciousness, 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. My poor keyboard can't handle its weight, its lightness, its Luminous Darkness. We are nothing but a breath blowing across the empty face of an endless Ocean of Night — benign, potent and utterly unfathomable.

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<sup>4</sup> Morphically 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 a drum in one hand and snake in the other and one foot was raised and the other was crushing my ego in the shape of a small male human. This was not the 'death of God' ala Nietzsche but perhaps something like the 'God beyond God' of Meister Eckhart. In gestalt terms it represents the dislodging of some very deep cultural introjects.

<sup>5</sup> With the gift of reflection I believe this was much less a personal father but something representing socialized religion.

*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*

And 'I' or 'me' 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 that filled all. I was drawn 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.

*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).*

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.

*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*

*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 - Bahulla.*

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 important). What happened next is unspeakable.

*Then I was enveloped by the divine Lights until all of me became light and a robe of honor 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).*

We lay together, against our rocks, in the Garden of Light in such sublime ecstasy and the heavenly being gestured towards my sexual being somehow releasing me from sin and error, our nearness lending understanding to me on the mystery of sexuality and its nearness to God. All was transmitted in a silent music 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 more vast than our universe. The Perfume of the Garden was like the gentle wave of a deeper unbearably sweet secret fragrance of the heart; as the smallest of flowers in the Garden 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 and I somehow understood all of this, as if it was an event agreed upon before 'coming into being' an ancient covenant to become the 'word made flesh' in the valley of time and mortality. And yet there seemed to be something 'behind' or beyond the being; a hieroglyphical geometric language. So while this reunion-spirit-gestalt was a complete end in itself 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 its overflowing, abundance and creation, its plenitude of honey, its beatifications, and cosmic benedictions but in the process I became so utterly transfigured that I became its twin. A perfect image in his likeness and light co-enveloped in such a

mystery that we appeared to co-creating or rather multiplying each other.<sup>6</sup> The being then took me to a special place and revealed a cup and we then sipped from it (our lips touching) ... 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 beedazzled keyboard

*[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*

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 blessed with 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 can't 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 and tasting of the incomprehensible mightiness of cosmic love we walked to the edge of Paradise.

*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).*

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<sup>6</sup> "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.

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"

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

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 God to liberate 'itself' into sacred form—The Ocean of Being poured into the drops.

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 mater - the world of mater 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*

That last page of this visionary book was that of a Holy Bird swooping down and across the ocean; effortlessly flying and in the midst of it all I heard a mighty '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, the signs of sacred distinction and divine differentiation. Having attempted to speak the of unspeakable, I will now attempt to locate this event in a religious tradition.

### 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 in fact the repository of a truer, and more metaphysically compelling form of Christianity (1982). Brown located Islam in the Prophetic Tradition or Abrahamic lineage (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-centric Papal/Roman Empire. I quote Brown;

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'" (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, 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 this Holy Roman Empire and, in the Trans-Jordanian matrix, what was born of 600 years of cultural ferment, was Muhammad’s *Islam* (1982). His authority was sealed by his recital of the Holy Koran and his Luminous Night Journey in which The Prophet 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, or perhaps potential, human-divine relationship? This question directs us, to contemplate a mysterious figure—the phenomenon (or personage) named as *Khider*—functionalized in the theological works of the French Islamic scholar and Persian Angelologist Henry Corbin (1969, p. 1971), Roberts Avens (1988) and more recently Tom Cheetham (2003, 2005) as the necessary Angel.

Brown, 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 Khider?" and 'What does it mean to be a disciple of Khider?' These questions are the legacy of Islam for the Western, post-Christian world" wrote Cheetham (2003, p. 104). And this question was taken up by one of the important forefathers of transpersonal psychology, Carl Jung, who claimed the figure of our 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.

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 Khider 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)<sup>7</sup>

In *Symbols of Transformation* (1946) Jung included one of his few serious acknowledgements of Islam (in his vast writings on religion, the feminine/masculine, art, culture, alchemy, symbols, myth analysis and psychology), by recounting the Quranic story of Khider and Moses (see Ahmad, 1999).<sup>8</sup> 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.

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<sup>7</sup> According to Hodgson Khider was identified with Elijah and had many shrines in the Syrian hills. Given the Quran accords Khider great antiquity, "it was not incongruous that his shrines dated back to pre-Islamic times and were sometimes shared with Christians (1974, p. 461)

<sup>8</sup> We will return to this oversight and its impact on transpersonal psychology in another article. Suffice to say that Jung's general disavowal or misunderstanding 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.

In *The Garden of Truth* (2007) Seyyed Hossein Nasr, an important scholar of Sufi mysticism and the perennial philosophy wrote that this mysterious prophet is associated with Judaism and Elias [Elijah] and “the Eliatic function of initiation and spiritual guidance”<sup>9</sup>. Secondly, Nasr says that the meeting between Moses and Khider 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 “Khider of the spiritual path” (p. 108). Perhaps the greatest of Persian poets Hafiz exclaimed, “where is the Khider of the path”? (p. 108), to these questions we will return: ‘who, what, and where is Khider, 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. During his Miraculous Night, Muhammad was spirited by the archangel Gabriele through a sequence heavens, culminating in an in an ecstatic, ego-annihilating encounter with the Absolute. It is an event that establishes the paradigmatic mystical pathway of 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 Sufi’s. They felt that his visionary event went beyond the Lotus of the Limit where human knowledge arrives at its

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<sup>9</sup> This statement seems to add weight to Jung’s insight that Khider pre-dated, and was incorporated by Islam. Indeed 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 descends in secret since many times. 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’ and prayed with them (Armstrong, 1992, p.138).

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 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 *Shayk* 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 2011, trans James Morris). 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 contemporary scholar of Sufi mysticism 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).<sup>10</sup>

As noted Henry Corbin was an important voice in the study of Islam, Persian mysticism and, in particular, in revealing a sophisticated angelology at the heart of the Abrahamic tradition. In his traditional metaphysics, wrote M. Ali Lakhani, "there exists a higher

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<sup>10</sup> 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

consciousness than our ordinary consciousness”, yet this is not a collective one (after Jung) but “one that is intensely personal” and “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 fi'llah* 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. This is known as mystical poverty of *darwish*—in this final station 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 “Spring of Life,” or “The Fountain of Life” to absorb the “Water of Immortality” (Corbin, 1969, p. 198), the Water of Light 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:

*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. And what I believe began then, was the *path of personhood*: a continuing path of narcissistic recognition, letting go, (Evans 1994) and the vulnerability of becoming more of a person. Indeed this idea is at the heart of this mystic path: 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); nor the secular psychological person that has the soul all caged-up in the Cartesian-ego (Hillman, 1975). Meeting the Angel is the fulfilment and birth of personhood enhanced by contact with a trans-personal Other.

In this form of spiritual realization personhood is not wiped out, as it is in some traditions (e.g. Loy, 1988, 291), rather personhood (transfigured) is vouchsafed as absolutely central - for it is *relationship* that is the ground of this cosmology.<sup>11</sup> 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 also revealed as *Deus Revelatus*. This un-

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<sup>11</sup> Loy wrote "God is God only in relation to me, but when there is no longer a "me" then the spiritual quest is over" and presumably relations are over as well.

derstanding of the Twin Angel finds a parallel in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* and the *Bhagavad Gita*.<sup>12</sup> 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, 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 acts that reveal "the hidden things" (p. 52) and that lead the soul to new states of being. It cannot be overestimated that the 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).<sup>13</sup>

The Sufi 'path of love' was immortalized by the famous Persian poet Farid' ud-din 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-

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<sup>12</sup> "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).

<sup>13</sup> 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).

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 which serves as an analogy of a Sufi sheik (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 Bahai Faith, Bahauallah, 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, as in Plato’s demiurge or world soul it was “capable of relationship” (Sherman 2009, p. 85) and there was/is the revelation of sacred distinctness 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).

This is what Corbin refers to as ‘dualitude’; not the duality in the Christian-Cartesian sense, or non-duality of Advaita Vedanta but a *sacred dualitude*; the sacred pairing of the human being and her Angel—to create a wholeness. 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) it follows in logic of this mysticism that it is imperative to bring into awareness our relationship with our “eternal individuality” ... “another person is attached to our entirety beyond the ego personality, a transcendent counterpart” (Avens, 1988c, p. 6). Latent in Washburn's dynamic ground an unfailingly gentle Person of Light.

### The Angelic Function

According to Islamic theology “God in the abyss of his essence is unknowable—the unpredictable, the incommunicable. The Face that the [*Deus*] *Absconditum* shows to man, the *Deus Revelatus*, is necessarily a theophanic figure” (Avens, 1988a, p. 68) and that figure is the Angel. 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 meeting the Holy Face.

This is not a movement toward dissolution in the uncreate of popular New Age religion (see Lahood, 2010b). 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” (kind of , 1988a, p. 69). In the claim made by many Sufi masters, “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,

Yielding or surrendering to the way of it is easy once your mind is clear. What people call surrender is actually a noticing. 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]. But you just notice what isn't, what's gone, what you can never prove existed in the first place—a sound, a name, a picture, a voice. You keep noticing, until finally there's nothing to surrender to. (Katie & Mitchell, 2007, p. 121)

So many have endorsed this neo-Vedantic non-dual mysticism that it must be taken seriously.<sup>14</sup> It might be called in Islamic theology “the *Tawhid* (meaning a certain legitimate way of knowing the unity of God) of the elite” and 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).<sup>15</sup>

Seen from the logic of our 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).<sup>16</sup> But this first sacred

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<sup>14</sup> 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 with 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).

<sup>15</sup> 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 defences one can encounter in the New Age (see Lahood 2008) where personhood, human needs, even love between persons can be seen as egoic illusions.

<sup>16</sup> This is, I believe the ground, on which non-relational transpersonal psychology grew (see Lahood, 2010).

step is followed by a second 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 one of the chief exemplars, along with Ibn Al-Arabi, 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 theophanisms. Then I saw god in the most beautiful forms, surging upon me from the world of mystery” (Avens 1988a, 74)—this was my experience.

The goal of our two-step orientation 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. Wilber 1980; Grof 1985). Rather, our goal is a relational, sensuous, and embodied spirituality, a “‘spiritual corporeity’ of Divine Presence rooted in Personhood” (Lakhani, 2009, p. 155) and 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 tells us 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. Ultimately, in Angel cosmology, our eyes becomes the eyes

through which God Beholds herself ... for ultimately, as primal-repression as dissolved, we understand that we are the ground of being.

The Angel is the true 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 this tradition) we will each 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). Each human has the capacity to become Demonic (unconscious) or fulfill themselves in their Angelicity (trans-conscious) and, because it is lived in the world (situational), the way of the Angel offers us unending possibilities for refinement and continual restoration of the Good in our earthly relations.

### The Angel and Narcissism

The 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 (Wilber, Engler and Brown 1986; Ferrer, 2002; Lahood 2010b). Tom Cheetham, a contemporary scholar of angelology and of Corbin's oeuvre, 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 aban-

done. 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).<sup>17</sup> Corbin believed that deciphering the Angelic function was a key to a secret that preserved the spiritual-person from this “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.<sup>18</sup> Thus, our self-enclosure through Corbin's ‘pseudomystical monism’, is to subjectivize reality; to devour the Other; you are only an extension of me, and only important in-as-much as you confirm my self-interest; “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

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<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, Tom Cheetham claims the figure of Jesus Christ for many Christians 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.

<sup>18</sup> The Angel cosmology is participatory (Lakhani, 2009) suggesting a subject-object reality as espoused by participatory thinkers (e.g. Reason, 2003, Ferrer, 2002, Heron, 1998).

outside of you to surrender to” (Katie and Mitchell, 2007, p. 121), absolute subjective monism.<sup>19</sup>

Opposite to this is another source of self-enclosure: *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 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 (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 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).<sup>20</sup>

## The Prophetic Seal

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<sup>19</sup> I find an interesting parallel to all this in the relational turn of contemporary Gestalt therapy, with its attention to the life of the ‘between’, its radical relationality, and its attempts to steer clear of both “extreme objectivism and extreme subjectivism” (Hycner, 1991, p.58 and see Lahood, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> The Angel can also show itself as the Divine Sophia and according to Corbin is very much a feminizing process (1969).

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" and this is a symptom of what he calls "*spiritual narcissism*, which is "pandemic in the human approach to religious diversity" (Ferrer, 2011, p.18).<sup>21</sup> 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 creeds 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 very much alive 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).

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<sup>21</sup> Authoritarian spiritual ranking seems to be born from a need of comparative status 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, 7). While I argue here for the merits of the Angelic 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 through the action of therapeutic democracy limiting the narcissistic potential seemingly inherent in the human condition (see Lahood, 2010b, 2013). To follow Jeffrey 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". (2005)

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, was of particular significance to the Sufi’s. They felt that his 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 mystical 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).

Bahau'llah, founder of the Bahai 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; the Sufi masters (lights) such as Ibn Arabi, or Jelaluddin Rumi. Bahau'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).

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). 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 Bahia Faith and Islam" (Fazel & Fananapazir, 1993).

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 yoga’s] can

know god, he argued – only the *bhakta* (devotee). He quotes from the *Gita* ‘only through the process of *bhakti* can one understand god” (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, 2000) (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 neces-

sarily 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.” (Lahood, 2009, personal communication) (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 annexed by the human ego (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 trans-personal 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 brings them into the realm of a pneuma-pathology.

### An Ocean with Many Shores

When it's 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-separating cage in participation with a “dynamic and indeterminate spiritual power” (2002, p. 133) we may enter an *Ocean of Emancipation* (2002, p. 145). This Ferrer calls an *Ocean with Many Shores*, mean-

ing there are a multitude of spiritual ultimates to be enacted rather than one monolithic perennialized Hindu/Buddhist enlightenment at the top of a ladder - as in Wilber (1995). This model serves to level the ranked playing field and paves the way for a more respectful inter-religious dialogue. I may now place the event I participated in respectfully alongside other enlightening events in the spirit of a comparative sacred science. The Angel freed from Wilber's ladder of consciousness schemata can re-establish its own shore, as a place to reside and deepen the encounter, and not be reduced to a psychic, subtle, or causal level to be transcended. The next step is not into non-duality (as in Loy, 1988, Wilber 1980)—rather the Angel consciousness is embodied and lived in the field of interpersonal relations and situations where our narcissistic processes are likely to be constellated, giving us never-ending opportunities for recognition, surrender and development.

Ferrer's *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory* (2002) is the pivotal work in the field and one that tipped the transpersonal movement more deeply into its participatory turn (see Lahood, 2007). His achievement is in taking perennialized transpersonal 'experiences' and revision them as participatory events - liberating them from egoic appropriation (2002). First Ferrer shows how the notion of a trans-cultural, unified spiritual ultimate—that all spiritual paths lead to the same cosmic ocean—is untenable. To do this Ferrer must adopt, for a while at least, a strong contextualist position (Katz, 1978): a spiritual ultimate, enlightenment, or endpoint must have a religious context (practices, teachers, textual study etc)—a raft—as he puts it (following the Dalai Lama), with which to achieve the ultimate state of consciousness and soteriology the tradition promises. Different liberations or enlightenments require different rafts to reach *distinct spiritual shore* (Ferrer, 2002, p. 147)—the Christian *apatheia* (freedom from passion) being qualitatively different from the Hindu *Moksha* (release from the world) or Buddhist *sunyata* (emptiness) or the Jewish mystic's *devekut* (cleaving to God). Thus the symbols, texts, teachings, morality and metaphor of tradition and culture all come into play -

guiding and entraining the human process into its contextual enactment of religious ultimates.

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However, Ferrer cannot simply stop here because to unbind the liberations bound-up in the perennial philosophy would leave him with only contextual mediation and the reproduction of the traditional religion's liberations (with their attendant problems e.g. ethno-narcissism). To bring true emancipation from what Heron calls "monopolar patriarchs" (1998, p. 76), Ferrer must allow into his OMS the possibility of new and novel spiritual shores—ostensibly as yet not enacted by the human community. To do this he must *now* (after using it to derail the perennialist project), somehow, overthrow the contextualist position and refute their strong thesis of mediation.

Caught between the *Charybdis* of the contextualist position (which potentially repress, marginalize or ignore "primary instincts, sexuality, interpersonal intimacy...creative imagination ..." (2002, p.152) and the *Scylla* of the universalist position (with its problems of ranking, narcissism and exclusionism) he turns to Grof's anomalous body of LSD research (Grof, 1972, 1985, 1989) to refute the contextualist position. Indeed the importance of Grof's research to the second act of Ferrer's thesis cannot be overstated. Ferrer's revisioning of the perennial cosmos and trans-personal psychology with his participatory OMS rests *entirely* on Grof's psychedelic research (Ferrer, 2002, p.149-151). This is because Grof's participants have provided data anomalous to the basic contextualist postulate (Wulff, 2000).

The perennialist or universalist believes there is a universal or core internal mechanism (psychodynamic, cognitive, neuro-theological, or transpersonal) that catalyzes such religious events (Wulff, 2000, p. 426). In opposition, the contextualist holds that mystical events can *only* be produced by cultural/religious *pre-experiential conditioning patterns* (Katz, et al., 1978). Buddhist sutra studies, teachings, transmissions and meditation prepare the Buddhist

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<sup>22</sup> see Lahood 2008 for a critique of Ferrer's OMS model in the light of hybridity and along these lines Mathew Segall (2013).

for an experience of "selfless tranquility" whereas a Jewish mystic is readied, not for unity or oneness with God (like the Hindu) but toward a more relational experience of the 'Throne of God', or a *meeting* with the Angel, or the secret names of God (Wulff, 2000, p. 426). Religious psychologist Hjalmar Sunden (1966) claimed that "Without a religious reference system, without religious tradition, without myth and ritual, religious experiences are unthinkable" (cited in Wulff, 2000, p. 426). Thus for contextualists transpersonal liberation *must* always and only be culturally mediated.

However, as suggested, Grof's LSD research can derail the contextualist position because people with no real interest in mysticism or spirituality, are able to participate in fields of information, mystical intuitions and encounters with mythic realms that they should not be able to according to the contextualist position. Grof's research shows that "LSD experiences could sometimes occur in a religious framework other than the experient's own" (2000, 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).

This was my experience—with some caveats. Unlike Grof's patients (using LSD under certain clinical protocols) mine was a spontaneous, reoccurring and concerted *series* of unveilings over a period of roughly 20 years (the meeting with Divine Sophia and the Lote Tree late

in my late 30s early 40s) which may suggest something akin to, if not exactly, the religiosity outlined by Corbin, Nasr and Cheetham, in other words, a mystical Path of Love under the guidance and protection of the Angel—as if I had followed in the slip-stream of the Prophets themselves without knowing it.

Ferrers' etic 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). He believes that these “enacted shores” function “Like trails cleared in a dense forest, spiritual pathways traveled by others can be more easily crossed” (p. 151).<sup>23</sup> 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 balanced 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)

According to Washburn (1988, 1995) "It is spiritual power itself that elects the times and places at which it will bare itself to the ego", this allows *intention* on the part of spirit.

Cheetham wrote something similar, "The Personal Guide is not chosen by the ego" (2003, p.

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<sup>23</sup> There is also Shurvardi's attempt to link the event to its earlier history: the idea that the Prophet Muhammad was following in the footsteps of the first Prophet Zoroaster and so on. It is in this trans-historical history that I feel comfortable in locating the event, rather than in any one of the theistic traditions. Hence I do not consider myself a Sufi.

106), it seems the imaginal Angel that does the choosing. Furthermore what we are discussing here, to use the event I participated in as a form of transpersonal data (e.g. Young and Goulet 1993), seems, from what I have read, to be significantly more comprehensive than Grof's patient's glimpses into visions of universal symbols or insights into Kabala teachings or meanings of Tibetan mandalas and so on. Mine was a series of disclosures, at first terrifying, shocking (in accordance with Washburn, 1995) and (seemingly) unsolicited and fulfilling all of the criteria of near-death-experience (in accordance with Ring, 1990) and deepening in charismatic and illuminative power till culminating with "the supreme form of manifestation of Absolute being, in this tradition, which is the presence of the Angel" (Voss, 2007, p. 6).<sup>24</sup>

If I follow the actual *emic* tradition - then I would have been initiated purposefully to act "upon the potential Angelicity" of other human beings and in a pedagogical function aid them in finding their unique Angel. For "if the soul attains to the 'Khider of its Being... then you can indeed do what Khider does " (Cheetham, 2003, p.106). So with the actual tradition there is regeneration in spirit (ala Washburn) but also a duty of pedagogical service.<sup>25</sup>

The point to which some of this is drawing, is that Ferrer, working from Grof's LSD research claims that certain transpersonal events can problematize the "strong thesis of [cultural] mediation" (2002, p. 150). I would claim that the mystical event I participated in strongly supports Ferrer's thesis and indeed Grof's research, although perhaps in a more comprehensive way given its reoccurring nature, its culture specificity and the complete mystical initiation it represents.

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<sup>24</sup> The aftershocks included an encounter with the Divine Sophia (an alabaster Face rising out of the shimmering Black Light encircled by a rainbow spectrum; and an ecstatic vision of the Lotus of The Limit - a great tree stretching throughout eternity in a vast world of heavenly blue blissful haze and high blue crystalline mountains —on each branch of the tree a thousand white robed Prophets.

<sup>25</sup> One of the dangers of the transpersonal movement's search for a universal map of consciousness, psychology and soteriology is that it dissociates the event from its cultural meaning.

Nevertheless, the event, while it is not culturally mediated through (*fana fi shayk, dikh, sama* etc) is still within Sufi culture (although perhaps more properly The Prophetic Tradition) - if only in the mystical tradition. This tradition has a clause that states that something intrinsically mysterious can happen in the form of Elijah/Khider or the Elatic function as *fana fi 'llah*. A transcendent 'anti-contextual context' so to speak. Taking a step outside of the literal, dogmatic and socialized religion there is still the potential for divine election - this is the emic position (of the people). For this is the function of Khider to free us from the servitude of the literal religion (Corbin, 1969, p.55). From Ferrer's psychological position we can say, 'Lahood reduced enough of his inherent narcissism and entered the Ocean of Emancipation accompanied by a transpersonal disclosure which, through some kind of resonance or accident followed the Footsteps of the Prophets to the Angel's Shore. On the other hand, Lahood says, the "final word in this case should go to the Prophetic tradition", 'Light upon Light God guides to His Light whomever He wishes'"

#### Investiture

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 be 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 which 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 become's 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 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 Khider—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, I was also, to use to use Attar’s language, invested in the way of Muhammad by the invisible guide. Elijah/Khider is known as “the master of the masterless”, which means the mystery was not transmitted through a religious context; as through a human Shayk, rather, I was invested through direct contact with the Being of Light and was clothed in "a garment of light" (purple jeans/white shirt, 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. 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 (Wilber, 1980; Grof, 1985) and participatory-turn (e.g. Heron, 1998, Ferrer, 2002) and I have remained, in my own way, a disciple of the Angel Holy Spirit largely through the practice of collaborative inquiry and transpersonal psychotherapy.

Ocean without Shore.

Henry Corbin asked, “who or what is Khider and what does it mean to be his disciple." In other words’ who or what comes after the Prophets. But “pursing that question” the 'Great Master' Ibn Al' Arabi, who is both revered and condemned in Islam, and who above all else

was a disciple of Khider, 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 don't know exactly what he meant by this but according to William Chittick, in his participatory account of Ibn Arabi's teaching, "The human soul is open-ended, an ocean without shore" (2008, p. 254). Or as Tom Cheetham wrote, that it is the “Khider of your being” who, standing at the edge of the cosmos releases us from the fixed; the dogmatic; and the literal ... the cosmos as symbolic of that which is hidden (Absconditus) this inner meaning leads to “a flowering of the world” (2003, p.126).

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 spiritually narcissistic. 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 experience with The Angel Holy Spirit was impossible; unexpected and utterly miraculous. My world was turned inside out (see Cheetham 2003) as a new cosmos opened itself up to me and I to it. The Angel is a person/archetype—who steps beyond the dogmatic, he or she is invested with the spirit of freedom and liberation beyond control and the power of the conventional religions. This is perhaps why it could audaciously manifest in the far South Pacific for the geography of the soul is not conventional geography.

To be a disciple of Khider in this age, and after many years of reflection I can profess to being that, is to be on the lookout for others whom through the Angel shines or to engage with others so that the Beauty of their Angelicity can. To keep plunging into the Ocean without Shore (if this be a metaphor for open ended co-created spirituality) with others so engaged is perhaps one possible future of religion and it can therefore be imaged as a deeply *relational* spirituality.<sup>26</sup> "The basic characteristic of this religion of the spirit that it will be not

<sup>26</sup> I have found a balance between charismatic collaborative inquiry and contemporary gestalt therapy (Lahood, 2013) coupled with ritual breathwork (Lahood 2007) to be a useful practices in service of this trans-humanistic interpersonal religious impulse.

only revelation of God to man, but also a revelation of man to man [or woman to woman] (Avens, 1988a, 70) 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). In other words a cohort of charismatic citizenry (after Heron 1998) that is "moved to join in a higher life" with other integrated and individuated persons (Washburn, 1995, p. 246). This future religion will concern itself with the 'Angel of the between', and the *Deus Revelatus* (as civilized cosmic citizens) gathered in mutual-care, respect and responsibility, to co-create an open-ended interpersonal spiritually—to quote the poet Rumi:

When that anxious, self-protecting imagination leaves,  
The real cooperative work begins.<sup>27</sup>

Beyond our anxious everyday narcissistic defenses, spirituality along with living, loving and learning—will become cooperative, relational and participatory. In the same way the Vietnamese Buddhist teacher Tich Nat Han claimed "the next Buddha will not be an individual but a community", we could envision the next Footstep in the Prophet Line to be a collaborative and communal flowering; a deep co-inquiry into the immanent life divine. Is the reality of true radical peer relationship between the humans-as-theophanies (the human Angels) a step yet to be taken? I believe so and this is my answer to the question posed by Corbin for surely Khider is freedom and dignity for all (and the whole book of nature). The poet Hafiz said

A  
hunting party

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<sup>27</sup> Coleman Barks (2001, 245).

Sometimes has a greater chance  
Of flushing Love and God out into the open  
Than a warrior  
All  
Alone<sup>28</sup>

### Behold The Angel

One way to resurrect the Angel is to choose to practice seeing the Other in a participative mode of presence in "an imaginative sympathy between subject and object" that can be called prayer. In our cosmology the Divine Being is not fragmented but wholly present in each instance, individualized in each theophany... to meet the Other in mutual Presence is a kind of attention that "is intensely relational" sensuous and embodied and a response to "the prophetic summons to experience divine love and beauty" (Cheetham 2003) ... through Beholding the Other as the Face of the Beloved. Theophanic reality is based on the realization of our unique personhood - its psycho cosmology based upon transfiguring Angelification:

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 cosmic ground (1995). How the drops of water then engage and commune with each other is my interest. What the ethics of embodied divinity? What happens to

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<sup>28</sup> Daniel Ladinsky (1999, p. 26).

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?

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