

PATHISM

Finding God in the Cosmos

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DEDICATION

For those who have stood fast in the face of small-mindedness and for refusing to let any man, or group of men, impose their mortal limits upon the unknowable majesty of the divine.

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PROLOGUE

Put simply Pathism is the rejection of the belief that any man or woman alive has the answers to the big questions. Pathism is about never ceasing to seek a higher knowledge, but acceptance that the mysteries of creation are infinite and ultimately unknowable as a whole. Pathism embraces the teachings of historical prophets but rejects dogma.

It is a concept of spirituality that understands everyone's personal path towards communion with the divine will be different, but that those journeys can share core principles.

Pathism does not seek to remove from people ideals they were raised with only to replace them with wholly new notions that are set in stone. Raised Christian, Jewish, or Muslim? Buddhist, Hindu or Baha'i? Pathism does not ask you to toss out the teachings that you have learned

from your parent faith, it instead asks you to peer through the veil of dogma and superstition built up by priests and priestesses over countless centuries. Pathists are encouraged to brush aside elements that have been devised as little more than a means for powerful men to control the lives and fates of others.

First and foremost to being Pathist is this: A fundamental belief that the divine nature of the universe, of God if you will, cannot be confined within the boundaries placed upon it by man. It is the beginning, the end, the incomprehensible oneness of all creation.

It is my sincere hope that you take something positive from this book, and remember as you read that Pathism has no set scripture, for such a concept goes against its very essence. These are the words of a man who cries out for the spiritual healing of the world and the tearing down of systems that seek to shackle the majesty of creation with their own feeble imaginations and to fool people into believing that only *they* can provide salvation.



ORIGINS

Religion, faith, or belief, call it what you will chances are that you were indoctrinated into some form of it or another from an early age. Most of us are. Our spirituality is not something that is allowed to develop naturally like many of our other opinions and positions. Like many of you I have tried reconciling my own personal beliefs with those of the theological system into which I was born and found it virtually impossible. For a while I tried abandoning religion completely, yet I found that path to be almost equally as unfulfilling as pretending to believe in things that made no sense to me.

Perhaps it is because of that early conditioning

that we carry a learned behavior, a craving for spiritual community. Or maybe it's something else, an inborn desire of mankind to seek out a truth higher than itself. Whatever the cause of this phenomenon the result is the same; millions of people who cannot come to terms with "concrete" religions which were forced on them in childhood, yet find no solace in simply turning their backs on spirituality as a whole.

That is the beginning of Pathism; a desire to understand this need for spiritual community and the intent to create a community that can help us in our quest to touch the divine. It is the hope that we can reclaim the insights of our ancient ancestors while simultaneously harnessing the wisdom of the modern era.

The Path is one to peace, to love, to understanding, to personal revelation, and to a future in which we are free to indulge our spiritual inclinations without sacrificing our intellect or the ideals that define us as individuals.



PRECEPTS

Without a core set of principles no belief system can exist. Pathism does not attempt to break from this tradition, as bucking tradition simply for the sake of doing so serves no more purpose than does adhering to dogmatic practices that have no merit. These precepts, however, are minimal and presented in a fashion that is intended to reflect only the barest of Pathist concepts, as the belief system itself is intended to be open to not only interpretation but to personal inquiry.

The Four Precepts

- One likely cannot comprehend the true nature of the divine. Instead revel in the awe of its mystery.
- The divine either exists or it does not. The magnificence of the universe is no more or less wonderful in either scenario.
- One who claims to know divine will knows only what he or she wishes that divine will to be.
- Search for truth in all things. No answer given will be as satisfying as one that is revealed through personal enlightenment.



ELABORATION ON THE PRECEPTS

- One cannot comprehend the true nature of the divine. Instead revel in the awe of its mystery.

One of the core constructs of most world religions is that the belief system in question has found a way to either humanize or at least neatly wrap the divine into a worldly vessel which is more easily digestible. Zeus was a god who looked like a man and had the desires of a man. Yahweh is oft depicted as a grandfatherly elder with a long white beard. Further still the god of Abraham takes human form as the revolutionary rabbi Yeshua (Jesus) and thus becomes infinitely

more accessible to mankind by having lived and died as one of them.

Quetzalcoatl, the Aztec god of wind and learning, is depicted as an anthropomorphized feathered serpent. Vishnu, of the Hindu faith, appears as a blue-skinned human figure with four arms. Similarly many of the thousands of Hindu incarnations of divinity are depicted as either some variant of man or animal. The Kami of Japanese Shinto belief are often depicted as human-like beings. Anubis, the Egyptian god of the afterlife, took the form of a man adorned with the head of a jackal. The list goes on.

Even entities not directly claimed to be divine, but rather the servants of the divine, almost always follow this pattern. The angels of Judeo-Christian faith are described as similar to men but with heavenly feathered wings. The guardian of the Greek underworld, Cerberus, took the form of a three-headed dog, a variant of a real-world animal that every person alive is familiar with.

Why do all of our deities and their servants take the form of people, animals, or other elements of nature? The answer is self-evident; it is

because *we exist in nature*. Even in our modern lives, cocooned away in our sterile apartments and bombarded with technology and the lights and sounds of a man-made world we are still a part of nature. Are we not ourselves a construct of the natural universe? If that is the case then does it not follow that anything we in turn create belongs to nature as well? It is a modified nature, surely, but that does not change the fact that we exist physically in a material plane. No matter the form it takes, left in its original state or altered by the hand of man, everything around us is the exact same thing that we ourselves are constructed from; star stuff.

We are seldom aware, as modern day humans, that our ancestors lived for many tens of thousands of years in simple tribal arrangements. Let that sink in for a moment. The fact is that the vast majority of our past consists of the years in which we were biologically modern humans, capable of speech and toolmaking, but living without permanent settlements, agriculture, or written language. It was only after the end of the last ice age that our species began to experiment with agriculture and land management. Through learning the skill of domesticating plants and

animals we could for the first time in our existence live in truly permanent settlements where many generations would be born, grow old, and die. Like our physical bodies, our views on the divine evolved and changed with our concepts of society. The divine evolved from spirits that controlled or influenced parts of the natural world like the weather or the day/night cycle, becoming instead “gods” who possessed those same abilities. The view of gods and goddesses as human or animal-like beings persisted, but just like the humans they ruled over they began to organize themselves into more structured institutions, or as we know them, pantheons. The sophistication and complexity of these pantheons grew in proportion to the sophistication and complexity of human society and it continued this way throughout the classical period.

As we can observe through the lens of history the evolution of spiritual belief and human society are tied inexorably to one another. We developed on the savannah, took shelter in trees or caves; natural forces were something beyond our comprehension and therefore became to us something that could only be understood through a spiritual lens. As our cultures began to

settle in small nomadic tribal villages our view of the divine once again adapted to fit our “new nature”. If man could live this way and organize himself into rudimentary societies then surely too could the mystical elements of the world. Spirits of wind and spirits of fire gave way to anthropomorphized “gods” who could instead wield these elemental forces at will. We understood that if we angered our friends or our relatives that they would shun us or perhaps even seek vengeance upon us. These same cause-and-effect relationships were then ascribed to the gods, for surely it was the only way to explain why they would at times bless the people with plenty while at other times make them endure terrible hardships.

As human existence turned from one focused solely on survival to one that afforded leisure time man was granted the necessary hours of the day to begin to ponder the universe, the gods, and the meaning of existence. The roots of what was to come next was founded amongst these earliest of philosophers. They were not the direct cause of, but rather a symptom of, the surging human interest in less material and more abstract concepts.

This desire to explore abstract concepts led to the development of religious concepts that were likewise less concrete. The earliest forms of monotheism, namely Zoroastrianism, worship of the Aten as the sole god of Egypt, and the god of Abraham, often broke with tradition and the beliefs of neighboring cities and states by worshipping a less well defined and more abstract concept of “God”. Even these new forms of thought, however, could not hold the human predilection to ascribe real-world attributes to divine forms at bay for long. Due to a combination of this human tendency, as well as pagan and polytheistic beliefs from nearby cultures bleeding back in to monotheistic societies, the notion of truly “incomprehensible” divinity did not have a long run at all.

The Abrahamic faiths are a prime example of this effect. It is not widely known, nor accepted, that in ancient times belief in the God of Abraham existed in close proximity to the worship of other competing deities. It was a generally accepted fact of existence at the time that different nations and different peoples each had their own god or gods. So chaotic was this system that even Yahweh himself was ascribed

the name Ba'al in some of the oldest biblical texts despite the fact that we now know the deity Ba'al to have actually been the god of a competing religion that existed around the time of the birth of Judaism. This "cultural bleed" from pagan and polytheistic faiths manifested in Abrahamic faiths in the form of beings such as angels and demons. Later this effect would allow the followers of Yeshua of Nazareth to deify him as "God made flesh". Many centuries later, the intense influence of Greco-Roman beliefs, worked in to pacify the naysayers who would oppose conversion as Christianity was adopted by the Roman Empire, would result in a virtual pantheon reminiscent of demigods known as saints.

It is within us to desire to connect with the divine, but it seems that we all too often fall into the old habit of trying to envision the divine as part of our natural world. Therein lies a paradox. The divine, if it indeed exists, is a part of our natural world, but it is something so incomprehensible that the one dimensional roles we cast it in do nothing to help us come to terms with it or become one with it. Rather it simplifies the concept and only pushes us *further* away from

making peace with the reality that it is something beyond definition.

As you will read later in this volume the assertion is not that the divine should never be conceived of in worldly ways, as conceptualizing divinity in terms we can understand can at times be useful. What we should not do, however, is *confine* the divine to such limited manifestations.

Pathism asserts that we should never stop questioning, never stop learning. Nor should you throw your hands into the air and despair that you will never understand the nature of the divine. Instead you should be accepting of the likelihood that you never truly will. Rather than feel frustration at the inability to define the divine through human concepts we should take comfort from the fact that the universe is awe inspiring, virtually incomprehensible, yet it works according to the laws of nature and shall continue to do so for all time.

The universe is as it should be.

- The divine either exists or it does not. The magnificence of the universe is no more or less wonderful in either scenario.

Theists will tell you that their god most definitely exists because that is what is written in their holy texts. Atheists will tell you that god absolutely does not exist because no scientific evidence proves that existence. In this book you will be introduced to many concepts that are rooted in Buddhism. That is for good reason, as Pathism is in some respects (philosophically) a western adaptation of Buddhist thought. One however that also welcomes the wisdom of Abrahamic faiths, of indigenous Animism, and many other belief systems.

Buddhism teaches a concept known as “the middle way”. The origin of which will be touched upon later in the book but suffice it to say that The Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, lived two lives (metaphorically speaking of course). In one of those lives he was a prince, sheltered from pain and death and despair and never knowing suffering. Upon being confronted with the reality of the world he fled into the wilderness and began a life of extreme poverty,

hunger, and deprivation in an effort to understand the suffering that he could not comprehend. Neither path fulfilled him though, and it was only when he came to the conclusion that there must be a “middle way” that he was able to achieve enlightenment and escape the cycle of rebirth and suffering.

In Pathism we accept the concept of the Buddha’s middle way, not because we accept the Buddha’s concepts as concrete, but because it represents a common sense approach to life and to understanding the universe. In this vein, then, neither the theist nor non-theist views can be accepted as absolute truth. Why is this? That is because Pathism tries whenever possible to avoid absolutes. Is there a God, a Divine Architect, or an ever-present life force that permeates the cosmos? Perhaps. That cannot, no matter how much Atheists wish it so, be disproven. Likewise, much to their chagrin, Theists cannot prove its existence either. Remember, we operate off of tangible and verifiable evidence as the only semi-absolutes (even those are not absolutes, as scientific knowledge progresses and changes our understanding). We do not point to ancient documents as “proof” of divinity’s existence, nor

do we point to the *lack* of evidence as “proof” that the divine does *not* exist. It either does, or it does not.

The difference between a Pathist and a Theist or an Atheist is that we are accepting of the fact that we are not all-knowing beings. We accept the awe inspiring complexity of the natural universe; whether it is the creation of a higher power or the result of pure happenstance. In either scenario it is every bit as miraculous.

Revel in awe at creation, for it is beauty made manifest.

- One who claims to know divine will knows only what he or she wishes that divine will to be.

There is no shame in ignorance, only shame in refusing to acknowledge your ignorance and change your views in accordance with new evidence. Pathism is not an innately proselytizing system of belief. It does not seek out others to convert them from their current ways, it only presents an alternative where free thinking and personal growth are the objective, rather than

adherence to outdated doctrine that does not grow and change with human understanding. Pathism is a living faith, one that accepts new ideas and new discoveries readily, as what good is exploration of the natural world if the lessons learned are not heeded?

One of the most sacredly held beliefs of those who follow The Path is the rejection of ideologies that extol the virtues of servitude to dogma that has supposedly been “revealed” to humankind by the divine. The divine does not reveal itself to prophets or priests, at least not in any fashion that can be clearly understood by the human mind. That is to say that we do not reject the notion that the divine can be glimpsed, simply that any worldly interpretation of such an event by a mortal man would be no more than that, a personal and imperfect interpretation.

No man, be he commoner or king, can lay claim to be the sole purveyor of the wisdom of God.

- Search for truth in all things. No answer given will be as satisfying as one that is revealed through personal enlightenment

The Buddha himself is famously quoted as saying something to this effect, though it is improperly credited to him and is actually a misinterpretation of the Kalama Sutta. So while it may not be a mainstay of Buddhist thought it mostly certainly is one of the Pathist way. As the author of this text I will say it bluntly:

“Question everything, that which I speak, and that which all others speak.”

For too long religion has relied on the crutch of blind faith. That is not to say that Pathists do not have faith, of course we do, we have faith that the universe exists as it should and shall unfold as it should. What we do not, however, condone is the absolute suspension of logic and common sense in order to force the mind to accept concepts that go against the reasoning that we were so gifted with. For whether it came about through divine direction or by mere happenstance the human mind is capable of complex thought, problem solving, and deep introspection, and to discard its most powerful facilities so willingly is an insult to the creator, to the natural process of evolution, or to both.

The Path is a guide, a friendly hand, not a scowling face, for those who deviate from what has been dictated as “the only way”. For as the third precept teaches; no man can know the will of the divine, and if he believes that he does he is only deluding himself into thinking so. Therefore there is no “one way”, as all of us are on a journey. A journey that will lead every man and every woman down their own unique path, but it does not have to be a solitary one. Two people cannot hold hands while walking down separate trails in the forest, but they can still call out to one another, reassuring their companion that though their paths diverge they are still together in the wilderness.

True and profound understanding is not something that is suddenly bestowed upon any living being simply for performing a ritual or adhering to a set of guidelines. It is something that requires a lifetime of dedication and personal growth. The path to understanding is knowledge, and knowledge is gained only by a passion for learning. Spend every moment learning more about yourself and about the world that you live in and only then will you find that you are closer either to the divine nature of

the universe, or to the higher understanding that exists within yourself.

There is no right way, save for rejecting the easy answers and facing the difficult truths.



ONE BELIEF

Despite Pathism's infinitely diverse methods (paths) to communing with the divine nature of the universe it must have at least one core belief shared amongst all adherents. For without such a belief it would be an alliance of personal faiths, and not a singular belief system unto itself. This belief, along with the four precepts, makes up the foundation of Pathism.

Belief in the likely divine nature of the cosmos; singular at its core, all-pervasive in its nature.



DOES THE DIVINE EXIST?

Presented to you is a question that has been and shall be debated throughout the ages. Most take the path of least resistance. Yes, there is a God and I know all about him. Or, no there is not, because there's no real evidence that he exists. I think, personally, that it takes a more secure and confident intellect to concede a simple fact, "I do not know."

That is another phrase that you will see repeated in Pathist thought, the notion that "I do not know" is not treated with disdain or frowned upon but rather celebrated. Like the Buddhists that contemplate mortality and accept the impermanence of all things we are comfortable

with acknowledging that we are limited creatures and that not everything is within our grasp. Surely science will continue to advance and what is encompassed by our sphere of understanding will grow in the years, decades, centuries and millennia to come, but being okay with not knowing something is a good first step toward finding inner peace.

That is, of course, not to say that resting idly in ignorance is the way of The Path. As is spoken of in the precepts learning new information is vital to the spiritual growth of a Pathist. It is simply that once a matter has been investigated thoroughly and no conclusion can be found we are secure in the fact that it might be something that we cannot currently understand. The quest for knowledge never concludes, and daily life should be an endless opportunity to try and push the boundaries of what we know, but that when we lay our heads upon our pillows at night we should sleep soundly; acknowledging that some things are yet to be known, but that tomorrow will be another chance to reveal the mysteries of existence.

So does the divine exist? The real question is “Does it matter?” All one has to do is look out

of their window at the wonders of the world outside. A sunset. A butterfly. The comforting touch of a human or animal companion. The stars at night and the views of the cosmos revealed to us through science. All of these things are miraculous in their existence. Be it the design of a Universal Architect, the subconscious will of an omnipresent Life Force, or the random chance of nature alone...none of these possibilities lessen the sheer awesomeness of the universe in which we live.

Some Pathists will lean toward the idea of divinity, others will lean toward the notion that we simply exist in a fantastical universe created by little more than mathematics, still others will find reality to be something in between. That is what sets us apart, we refuse to fall into the trap of “all or nothing”. There is a personal truth that must be discovered about the divine, and whether that divinity exists as something natural, or something that would be labeled by most as “supernatural” the simple fact is that the universe itself is awe-inspiring simply by way of existing in the first place.



WHAT FORM DOES THE DIVINE TAKE?

Herein lies a radical departure from most religious or spiritual traditions save for a few like Unitarian Universalism or certain variants of Pantheism. Most of the traditional faiths maintain a fixed perception of their deity, deities, and related spiritual entities. Firstly, to reiterate an earlier point, The Path does not *require* the existence of any spiritual constructs whatsoever, it only mandates an openness to the possibility of things that are beyond our current level of scientific understanding.

Thusly Pathists do not seek to define any uniform perception of the divine. Assuming that

it does indeed exist it could take one of many forms:

- A singular divine architect which created existence but which does not interfere with its creation
- A singular divine architect which created existence and remains present and interacts with its creation
- A pantheon of separate divine entities
- Natural spirits, each acting as parts of a singular divine force
- A divine force that permeates all things
- A divine force that is the embodiment of life itself, a sort of shared energy that links all living things

There are of course many other forms that divinity could take. Presented here is only a short list of the most common perceptions of the divine. As a non-concrete faith Pathism allows for virtually any notion of God that an adherent finds the ability to personally connect with. Our prime goal is to find peace with uncertainty and to have faith that the universe exists as it should. Within those constraints the variations allowed for are almost limitless.

Some Pathists may find the concept of a

traditional singular “God” figure which created all things and is present in daily life to be the form that allows them to most fully connect with the divine. As Pathists that is our Primary Challenge, to accept that this is how a particular person might best identify with the divine. Likewise some Pathists may find no connection to divinity whatsoever, and would traditionally be labeled “Atheist”. What they do, however, take from The Path is the philosophical and psychological elements as well as the acceptance that though they may feel no personal connection to the divine they are still open to the notion of its existence.

Similarly other Pathists may find spiritual connection through nature spirits, personal gods or goddesses, reconstructed forms of ancient deities, or any number of variations of combinations of other forms of belief. There is no singular vision of God or the divine presented in Pathism just as there is no concrete belief in either its existence or its lack of existence. Our is a faith of free-thinkers, kindred souls who seek to probe the nature of the (seen and unseen) natural universe in order to find personal revelation.

As the author of this book I will present my own personal notions on what I believe some of the likely aspects of the divine to be, but never will adherence to my own personal vision be a requisite for anyone to follow The Path. As the Fourth Precept demands, question all things regardless of the source. Your perception, or lack thereof, of the divine nature of the universe is yours alone to determine. You may share your concept with others of course, as we are a community of thinkers, but it must always remain an individual's choice whether or not to agree with your interpretation. To force one's personal perception of the divine upon someone else is a cardinal violation of the spirit and intention of Pathism.

To commune with the divine nature of existence, whether it be based in the spiritual or entirely in the realm of physical science, is ultimately a personal experience.



WHY SEEK THE DIVINE?

Adherents to traditional world religions could rattle off a laundry list of reasons that one should choose to seek God. More frequently than not those same adherents will also gladly provide you with a list of reasons that their particular faith is the only true one and that choosing another path is simply not an option.

Perhaps, for such a contentious issue, it would be easier to lay out the reasons that we as Pathists do *not* seek the divine:

The four exceptions

- Because we, as humans, are somehow fundamentally flawed and require redemption
- Because we require the approval of a creator being
- Because we fear punishment from a vengeful god
- Because we wish divine favor for personal gain

Pathists seek knowledge of the nature of the divine and connection with that divinity for two primary reasons; knowledge and growth.

We are here for a reason, at this crossroads where we have decided consciously to make a break with traditional theology and traditional anti-theism. We share a suspicion that there is more to the universe than what can be plainly seen and measured by science but are too rational to casually throw our endorsement behind blind faith and ancient documents of questionable provenance.

I, as the author of this book, strongly suspect that rather than the rare outsiders we might suspect ourselves to be that we might indeed make up a not inconsequential percentage of the human population. Recent studies typically place the religious “nones” in the United States at between 20 and 30 percent of the population with that number growing year after year. Those who identify as Atheist typically run somewhere around the 3-4% range with Agnostics making up a slightly larger percentage at around 4-5%. The rest of the “nones” being composed of people who say they are not religious or do not believe in God but also do not label themselves as Atheist or Agnostic.

More still identified with a specific religion yet claimed they did not believe in God. Worldwide these numbers vary greatly by country, due mostly to either state promotion of, or restriction against, Atheism. Making up nearly one quarter to one third of the population by those numbers alone I can only surmise that there might exist an even larger number of people who would be open to the notion of a faith that while it provides a sense of identity and community does not either require nor bar the

belief in a supreme being or a particular version of one.

My use of statistics is not meant in any way to suppose some innate “success” that Pathism might enjoy, as numbers of possible adherents is not relevant nor should Pathism in any sense be practiced as an evangelical faith. It would be counterproductive to The Path’s true purpose. In reference to our original question, “Why seek the divine?”, the numbers are provided to make the point that a very large and growing percentage of the human population are unfulfilled by the current major belief systems. Why is this the case? I believe it to be due to the “all or nothing” methodology employed by most faiths. One either believes in a certain set of beliefs or feels that they simply “do not fit” and must seek spiritually elsewhere. This can lead to “church hopping” in which an individual tries many different theologians trying to find one that aligns with their own concepts and morality. This process, however, more often than not ends in disillusion with the entire notion of spirituality and leaves folks having to choose either Atheist or Agnostic as a blanket term.

This is unfortunate for two reasons. Firstly we

honor and respect the standpoint of our brothers and sisters who are true Atheists, meaning those who are absolutely content with the certainty that the universe exists without any divine component. Secondly, it can leave these people, like many of us, longing for that sense of community and that sense of a common identity that religion gave us.

I myself was raised Roman Catholic. My wife, the Assembly of God. Two very different versions of Christianity but yet we both ended up on the same path long before we met one another; becoming disillusioned with our faiths and then trying a new one. Each time we were met with yet another impassable barrier to reconciling our spirituality with our moral compass. In the end we resigned ourselves to simply not being religious at all. In this way we carried on for years before finally deciding that if no faith existed that could be made to fit to modern moral standards that we would create one for all of those in the world who felt like us.

So why do Pathists seek the divine? Some do not seek it out actively at all and are satisfied with allowing the universe to reveal itself through natural progression. For others of us it is

because we feel a deep connection to the universe that seems to have no logical or scientific source. In our previous “birth faiths” this might have been described as the Holy Spirit, Christ Consciousness, Buddha Nature, the Brahman, or other similar concepts.

Though following The Path does not require one to seek communion with the divine nature of reality many of the practices which will be outlined later in this book are based around exercises aimed at increasing inner peace and mindfulness, a process that is said to strengthen one's connection to the divine. Speaking from personal experience I will say that these practices can indeed lead to powerful experiences that seem to hint at the existence of a spiritual presence that science cannot yet explain. Is this an external divine force, a divine essence that exists within ourselves rather than without, or something else entirely.

The First Precept tells us that we cannot comprehend the true nature of divinity, yet the Fourth Precept calls on us to question everything. These two concepts may at first glance seem to be at odds but a closer examination reveals that they are not. As mere

human beings we may very well not possess the facilities to fully understand the divine, but as Pathists we also strive to be at peace with that fact. This does not mean, however, that we do not seek to enlighten ourselves through personal experience. Perhaps we cannot ever truly understand the truth of the universe, but we do that which gave rise to us a grave disservice if we do anything less than make use of our full capacities attempting to do so.

Make no mistake, the endeavor of seeking to commune with the divine nature is not an easy one, and is one that only rewards the practitioner in direct proportion to the amount of effort put into the act. Be that as it may the attempt itself can be an opportunity for not only spiritual but also of psychological transformation. One that is well worth the undertaking.



DO WE NEED A CONNECTION WITH THE DIVINE?

Spirituality is a very personal thing, and though it may not be talked about as freely amongst most major religions, variations in levels of devotion and faith exist within those congregations as well. Many priests, more than you might think, will admit that some small part of them doubts whether God exists at all. Likewise it is not surprising to find that one of his parishioners has absolute faith and never wavers for a moment in her convictions. This is personal variance.

The so called “God Helmet” created by Stanley Koren and used in experiments by Dr. Michael Persinger, a neuroscientist at Laurentian

University in Sudbury, Ontario, is a device which magnetically stimulates the brain's temporal lobes and in many cases subjects have reported angelic, otherworldly, or even god-like presences. The scientific community, of course, was quick to disregard the (admittedly) anecdotal evidence reported by test subjects as little more than aberrant brain activity or overactive imaginations. Likewise, the religious community would prefer to ignore the matter altogether. If our perception of a higher power and phenomenon like near-death experiences can be explained away by neuroscience, which will obviously attribute our brain's workings to Darwinian evolution, that does not fit very well into their belief systems.

Of course what appears black and white on the surface is actually an entire spectrum consisting of subtle shades of grey when peered at more closely. If the "God Helmet" or similar experiments in the future can prove that stimulating certain parts of the brain evokes a spiritual response does that truly preclude the possibility that other spiritual experiences are "all in our heads"? Certainly not.

Our eyes are organs evolved for seeing, our ears

ones for hearing. Is it beyond the realm of possibility that parts of our brain, either through evolutionary accident, by design, or some combination thereof, developed the ability to be in tune with a divine nature that permeates all of reality? If we subscribe momentarily to the notion that God is the universe itself and is therefore interwoven into all things, then being part of us would we not have a mechanism for sensing our connection with it?

Most systems of belief seek to convince non-believers one way or the other that they are correct. This is a concept that Pathism does not include. I may present ideas to you, or you to me, and the only requirement is that we be willing to entertain those ideas rather than dismiss them out of hand for we accept the fact that on a cosmic scale we are truly tiny things and that to be so sure of the nature and/or will of the universe is a mind-bogglingly arrogant thing for us to do. So, how much we *need* the divine is in and of itself a subjective question.

If the divine is woven into the very fabric of being and we ourselves are part of it then the answer is a resounding “Yes”...as without it we would be incomplete. If it is not then the answer

obviously defaults to “No”. These of course are answers only to the most basic interpretation of the question. The amount that we *need* a connection to the divine, in a psychological sense, is another matter entirely. One man may claim that he *needs* love and affection in order to survive despite the obvious scientific truth that we know that to be a fallacy. The man needs oxygen, water, and food. Those are his material needs. His need for companionship is a psychological need. Yes, he may be able to *survive* without it, but he may also feel that survival is not enough and that in order to truly *live* his psychological needs must be met.

So to reiterate; if you are here, reading this book now, I think it likely that you feel that you *do* need some form of connection with the divine. If that were not the case then a life of simple, uncomplicated, Atheism would be able to provide you with the fulfilment that you require. You feel that drive, whether it be purely instinctual or a product of your childhood indoctrination into religion, to seek out something greater than yourself. The problem, however, is that until now you have run into one frustration after another in trying to find a method of enlightenment that fits with your

free-thinking ideals.

This is the part where I must tread softly, for I do not wish in any way to insinuate that Pathism is *the only way*, as that in and of itself violates the spirit of 'The Path. I will say only this; those of you who, like me, wish to continue to grow in a spiritual fashion without the limits imposed by most “concrete” faiths 'The Path may be one of the only ways that can work for *us*.

Everyone's spiritual needs will be different, and to try and fit one's particular square needs into only a handful of round holes provided by most modern day faiths can at times feel like an exhausting venture; neither content to give up on communing with the divine, nor willing to compromise your integrity to fit in. This is the position that far too many of us have been placed in for far too long.



CONCRETE VS NATURAL RELIGION

There are, in terms of religious traditions, two main schools of thought. The first being what I refer to as a concrete faith. A concrete faith is one whose religious practices and beliefs are (mostly) set in stone. These are typically older faiths that were built up around a set of sacred documents or oral histories, passed down over many generations and through the ages becoming a set of unchanging fundamental pillars upon which the faith rests. The second is that of a natural faith. A natural faith is one that tries to embody a “living tradition” that evolves and adapts as human knowledge and social structures change over time.

Examples of Concrete Religions:

- Judaism
- Christianity
- Islam
- Hinduism
- Bahá'í

Concrete religions are also known as “revealed religions” to adherents of Deism. They are thusly called because they depend upon some nature of the divine having been revealed to man through divine revelations or interactions. They often prominently feature prophets who proclaim that they are tasked with delivering godly messages to the masses. Most of you will be familiar with a concrete faith. Many of you will have been indoctrinated into one from childhood, as concrete faiths worldwide have far more followers than do natural faiths.

On the positive aspects of concrete faith there is the comforting notion that divine will has indeed been revealed and that all one must do in order to live a life in accordance with the wishes of a higher power is to adhere to the faith’s rules and practices. Some find great comfort in this, of that there is no dispute. Where problems begin

to emerge for the free-thinker, however, is when one begins to dig into the actual history of a concrete faith. One need only to look at the Hebrew bible. In the earliest writings there seems to be at least two distinct deities, El and Yahweh. How can this be? It could be debated endlessly but all evidence points to a simple answer; it was written down over several generations and as early Judaic belief evolved.

At this time, when oral tradition was being transcribed into written documents, the Hebrew faith was still a natural or living tradition to some extent. In fact some could make the argument that there are no *truly* concrete faiths. Did Christianity not change to incorporate the traditions of the northern and western Europeans as they were converted? Did it not change again to better fit the peoples of the new world? So to some extent even the concrete religions are susceptible to influence and can grow and change in order to remain relevant. This, however, is usually a long and arduous process and is more tied into the evangelical nature of many such religions.

When you wish to add a new group of people into your faith you make small allowances in

order to accommodate them. Some will disagree but I find this methodology to be hypocritical by its very nature. Why wish to separate someone from their native belief system, have them adopt yours, only to allow them to thereby change the supposedly immutable nature of your faith?

However disagreements in rationale aside there is much to be gained by studying the concrete faiths of the world. At the core of most of the concrete faiths lies an inborn desire to see mankind achieve a more “god-like” state of peace and harmony. The often chaotic grab-bag of philosophies in these faiths have been misconstrued time and time again to justify terrible misdeeds but those past transgressions should be looked upon as the work of evil men, not as representations of the nature of their religions. Make no mistake, the great concrete faiths of the world have made enormous contributions to the world as we know it and as Pathists it is our duty to both learn from their mistakes as well as acknowledge the good that they have done for humankind.

Many of us will have different feelings in regards to our birth-faith, but it is our mission to recognize wisdom when we see it and to learn

from it. Very few would say that the Ten Commandments of the Bible or the Ten Disciplines of the Hindu faith are not sound advice by which to live. The teachings of Yeshua of Nazareth extol the virtue of loves and forgiveness. Admirable qualities by anyone's measure. The Path teaches us that to turn our backs on knowledge is to deny ourselves the enlightenment contained therein. It hurts no one but ourselves. Dig into the traditions and principles of the concrete faiths. One does not have to accept the purported infallible nature of the documents in order to benefit from the wisdom contained within ancient scripture.

Examples of Natural Religions:

- Deism
- Pantheism
- Taoism
- Pandeism
- Animism
- Shamanism
- Paganism*
- Unitarian Universalism*

Natural religion was the earliest form of spiritual

belief held by mankind. Though there are countless individual faiths they share a common element; they do not ascribe to the notion that the divine has revealed itself to humanity or that it has passed down specific laws, practices, or made clearly defined expectations of human beings.

So many variations of natural religion exist or have existed that it would be impossible to list them all. Mostly there is an acknowledgement that there is indeed a spiritual side to the otherwise mundane physical universe. This divinity can manifest as elements of nature itself, as a pantheon of gods who influence natural forces, as ancestor spirits, and countless other forms. The predominant feature, and the one that sets it apart from concrete faith however, is that there remains a great mystery to the universe that no man can claim to fully understand.

Pathism falls firmly into this second category. The divine nature of the universe has not consciously revealed itself to us. We are students, disciples of its teachings. We are scientists, probing the truth of existence. We strive for ever greater knowledge with the acceptance that we

will never comprehend it in totality.

* Paganism and Unitarian Universalism are included in the list but it should be noted that within each faith there are different individual beliefs which can overlap more with a concrete faith than with a natural faith.



MODERN NATURAL FAITHS

Since the most sacred principle of Pathism is an open search for knowledge I would be remiss to not include some basic information about other natural faiths that are increasingly common in modern times.

- Deism - The belief in an impersonal god. A creator which set up the natural laws of reality and then stepped back. This god does not intervene in the universe because it was so perfectly designed that there is no need to.
- Pantheism - A belief that God and the universe are one and the same. That all things are divine as they are all parts of

God. To understand the universe is to understand God.

- Pandeism - The concept that the creator of the universe was at one time a separate entity but that after creation it merged with the universe and now exists as the divine aspect of the physical realm.

I myself for a time fluctuated between Deist and Pantheist beliefs. Like the concrete faiths, however, I eventually found them to be too constricting in their own rights. My acknowledgement of the possibility of a divine force cannot be coupled to one particular form. I am open to nearly *any* possibility, therefore while I find Deists, Pantheists, and Pandeists to be kindred spirits I cannot agree with their belief system entirely. Again, “I do not know.” is our greatest affirmation of faith in God/the universe.



PATHISM, TO ME

The first part of this book was an introspective into faith and how humanity relates to it as well as a brief introduction to the core principles of Pathism. This second part, however, is something entirely different. By now you should be familiar with the concept that Pathism is a personal journey, a path that will wind differently through life for each individual. I have decried the practice of forcing one's particular views upon others but have also advocated the sharing of one's ideas so as to present concepts to others that they may not otherwise have considered.

This, then, is the part of the book that I explain to you my own personal version of Pathism. To be a Pathist means to accept the Precepts as a

way to personal enlightenment. Nowhere does it follow that in order to consider yourself Pathist that you must subscribe to my own personal views on spirituality, regardless of any perceived contribution by myself as a progenitor of the faith. Vanity is irrelevant, truth is key. My ideas are presented simply as such, *ideas* that you may embrace, coopt, or reject entirely. I do feel strongly in relation to the concepts that I have developed, and I encourage you to embrace them if they make sense to you, but it is not my place nor anyone else's to force you to walk a path that does suit you.

As mine belongs to me so does your Path belong to you.



THE ALL

I am open to the possibility of the divine, in fact I feel it to be *likely*, yet I do not swear by it whole-heartedly because I do not have the conceit to presume that a mere human can understand all that there is to the universe. It is my opinion that we should be humble, and know that we are but a small part of such a vast creation. Likewise, however, we should not minimize our own miraculous existence. For whether we exist due to direct divine creation, the result of natural systems designed by the divine, or by simple scientific coincidence the fact that we are here and that we have the capacity to question our own existence is truly profound.

So then, when I speak of the divine and seek to understand it at some point it becomes apparent that a name for it would make such dialogue easier. Instead of many words I can use one, one name to encompass many. Early humans discovered this and they gave names to their gods. We, however, do not name the divine to give it a more human-like character to which we can relate. We name it as Pathists, primarily, to give us a singular reference to the divine aspect of the universe. Nothing more, nothing less.

I propose a simple designation, one that can be remembered by anyone and translated with ease into any language of the world. The All.

What is my conception of The All? This is the part of the book where I am supposed to be giving you my own personal views on things. From this point on I will leave it implied that I do not proclaim to know the nature of the divine, but simply that I am providing you, the reader, with my own views on what I feel may be likely.

- I believe The All to be an immutable force of reality itself. It neither *created* the universe nor was created *by* it, or inversely

did create the universe but subsequently became a *part* of its own creation. It is one and the same with existence; all existing in an eternal cycle of death and rebirth. It exists in two states: the latent, which encompasses all matter and energy in the universe, and the active, which is the energy of life itself.

- Does it have its own consciousness? Possibly, but likely not.

- Can it affect the natural world through prayer or meditation? I am uncertain. It is possible that if it is an all-encompassing force that focused conscious thought could affect it in certain ways that we do not understand.

- Does it require worship or adoration. Most likely not. We are it and it is us. We do it the most justice by simple existing as is intended and working with the capacities we were granted to better ourselves.

- Can it manifest as spiritual entities that directly interact with human beings? In a physical sense I would think not, though perhaps through a spiritual connection to our conscious minds the appearance of such beings is not completely impossible.

- Is it God? This is a question that comes

with two answers; yes and no. There are too many interpretations of “God” to be able to provide a solid answer. This is something that will be addressed by each individual’s Path.

This is my concept of The All. It will likely change in the future, as new ideas and new evidence comes to my attention. That is a defining characteristic of The Path. It is not set in stone and at time it meanders around a bit, diverging, merging again, but ultimately heading in the same direction: enlightenment.



WELL OF SOULS

One thing that no faith or belief system can escape talk of is what happens after death. I thought long and hard before writing this book if I should even bring the matter up but since I am presenting my own personal views, and not demanding the same views be held by other Pathists, I believe I will weigh in on the subject.

For me, personally, I cannot find the rational for a multi-plane existence which is a common belief in many world religions. From the Grecian underworld to Christian Heaven, Norse Valhalla, or the Wiccan's notion of Summerland it all seems a bit too influenced by the hand of man for me. Again, as a Pathist I believe that no one knows what truly awaits and that your vision

may be more accurate than my own, but still I find the idea of paradise realms or punishment zones to be something of an oversimplification. The notions of spirit realms that exist as transitory places, as life energy moves from one form to another or as a mere construct of our own psyche, does not seem outside of the realm of possibility however.

That is the beauty of The Path. If your personal enlightenment leads you to a concept similar to Valhalla then by all means embrace what feels true to you. After all it is your own spiritual growth that we are concerned with.

As before I will outline what has come to represent truth for me as part of my own spiritual quest. Feel free to take or discard my opinion as you see fit. If, however, my ideas form the basis of a revelation for yourself then I welcome the chance to be a part of that for you. My own human tendency towards hubris does not escape my attention. I relish in the thought of being a teacher or a mentor, but never would I wish my views to be something made into concrete teachings that cannot be deviated from.

- Imagine in your mind's eye a giant blue sphere. It's size is unknowable partially because there is no point of reference but also because it does not exist in any physical realm. You may imagine it out amongst the star-backed blackness of space as I often do. It glows faintly with a gentle blue aura and almost inaudibly hums to the sound of OM.
- Now remember, this is only a thought construct.
- Imagine if you will that this glowing blue sphere represents the "living essence" of The All.
- From its surface there are tiny, almost unnoticeable, specks of light that come and go.
- This is the Well of Souls.
- Imagine that you die and the part of you that makes up the immaterial, your soul if you will, leaves your physical body behind and goes to join this pool of energy.
- As the energy that once comprised your living essence joins with it something special happens; the drop becomes the ocean.
- Now, a new life comes into the world. A part of this sea of life energy departs and

something else happens: the ocean becomes the drop.

- No single “soul” is self-contained.
- Imagine pouring a handful of sand onto the beach. You could reach down and grab up another handful but would it be the exact same one? Of course not. When your sand joined the sand of the beach it intermingled and never again can they be truly separated.
- This is my vision of reincarnation.
- We are reborn time and time again. Some parts remain, others change. Every life is unique yet retains elements from the past.
- In this way we are all separate, yet all one.

If you are familiar with eastern thought, Hinduism most notably, you will recognize similarities between the Well of Souls and the Brahman. This is not by accident. Through the mandate of seeking knowledge from all sources available I have constructed this personal vision with a concept similar to the Brahman in mind as it was the notion that resonated the most with me. Thus is The Path; seek truth whether it be your own or the work of another. Shun the ego and embrace the thinking of others when appropriate.

Now of course I brought up the topic of afterlife earlier in this chapter and am no doubt at this point required to at least chime in with some minimal input on the subject. Yes, the Well of Souls addresses the basic concept of life, death, and rebirth...but to what end? Buddhists and Hindus would say that the ultimate goal is to escape the cycle of suffering by attaining enlightenment. Abrahamic religions would say that the ultimate goal is to live a life worthy of God and to ascend to the Kingdom of Heaven in order to bask in his eternal love. So what sayeth the Pathist? It may be a bit of a letdown but I think I'll stick with the tried and true "I do not know."

Some may believe that enlightenment and the revelation of the true nature of the universe will bring with it an escape from the death and rebirth cycle. Others may believe that a special paradise awaits those who live their lives in a just and kind fashion. In probably the most unsatisfactory element of Pathism I will admit this; The Path is about a satisfying journey, not its destination.

But ultimately, lying on one's deathbed, in those final moments where the cares of the world begin to slip away as the realization that very soon they will no longer be of any consequence. Someone will ask, "Where will you go when you die?" and you will be able to smile, knowing only that you are about to return to the universe, and respond "I do not know, and I am okay with that."

*Be there another life may we cross paths
once again.*



THE GOD-CHILD THEORY

I would like to put forward an interesting proposal. I propose that the divine, God, or The All, does indeed exist. Bear in mind that I am not talking about divine revelation, as I argue that the divine does not directly reveal anything to anyone. What I suggest, instead, is that the very reason that so many of us have felt this divine presence (typically in the midst of deep meditation or prayer) is because it exists within all of us and always has.

The words of Jesus Christ himself proclaims:

- Luke 17:21 - And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation. Neither shall they say, Lo

here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.”

It is clear that he is stating that the “Kingdom of God”, the divine peace of being one with The All, does not exist as a specific place but rather as a state of mind attainable by all people. In fact there are many valid arguments for the theory that Yeshua (Jesus) traveled to the east in the years missing from the New Testament and learned the ways of Buddhism from the great masters there. His teachings mirror those of Buddhist thought in almost every aspect. Sure, details are changed around in order to better be accepted by the target audience: 1st century Jews. If one thinks this unlikely then I say look to centuries later when the Catholic church, in an attempt to ease Romans into the new state religion, allowed many aspects of their old faith to make its way into their version of Christianity. The teachings of Buddhism, adapted for a Jewish congregation, makes a whole lot of sense as to why Yeshua’s teachings varied so greatly from the vision of God found in the Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible.

But I digress. I mention that the Buddha taught us to seek enlightenment from within and that

Yeshua of Nazareth preached similarly that the Kingdom of God was within because I believe that they both understood something fundamental about the divine that has eluded the average person throughout history.

I propose that The All is both the beginning and the end, yet simultaneously unending. That it is the sum of all space, time, energy and life that exists. Further I put forth the idea that each time the universe passes through a creation cycle The All is reborn as a thing that does not understand itself and that life is the inevitable consequence of The All trying to understand itself. We are, in essence, the “fingers of God”. Each living being, each creature which draws what makes it truly “alive” from the Well of Souls does indeed have a purpose here in the material world and it is the purpose of being a “divine probe”. Falling back on the more anthropomorphic notion of a deity let us assume that each time it is “born” it, like us, knows nothing of itself. It must slowly work to explore the possibilities of its of existence. *That* is the purpose of life. We are all individual, yet all one. Together we make up the living desire of the universe to understand itself.

Here's where my theory gets even more interesting. What if these death and rebirth cycles that exist within the universe are the direct result of the universe, of The All, finally understanding itself and coming into consciousness. It would be a moment in which all life, everywhere in the cosmos, is elevated to a universal plane of thought where we finally realize that we are all just parts of the same whole and in that instant "God" exists in the form of an actual self-aware being. The moment is fleeting, however, as the newly awakened "God" now realizes that there is nothing left to discover. Then, either through intentional action or through some natural consequence of this sudden "God-Consciousness" the universe is reborn in order to facilitate the entire process all over again. Or possibly there are multiple universes (of which scientific evidence continues to mount daily) and that this newly aware "God" creates a new but separate universe in which the process can continue. Divine procreation perhaps?

As I've made clear before these are simply my ideas on the nature of the universe. Both personal opinion as well as further scientific data

may easily change these perceptions in the future but it definitely provides something to ponder.

It is an intriguing thought; that we are but the instruments of an infant universe discovering its own potential.



THE MORAL PATH

Being a faith with a near-contradictory reason for existence; providing community and structure that many of us were raised with, but also one that extols above all things free thinking, inclusion of a list of moral guidelines was something I considered for some time before deciding to put it into the book. The truth, however, is that most of us can agree on some very basic principles of morality and that for those who prefer the structure that guidelines provide it can be a type of “social glue” amongst community members.

Therefore I have compiled a list of common sense things that one following The Path should try to do, in order to better themselves, and try

to avoid, in order to prevent themselves from hindering their spiritual growth.

Virtues

- **Non-violence:** One should only engage in physical altercations to protect one's self and one's loved ones, in which case it should still be avoided unless absolutely necessary. For violence is counterproductive to spiritual enlightenment.
- **Compassion:** Having empathy for others is an essential part of letting go of one's own ego, a process necessary to truly commune with the divine. Compassion also encompasses kindness and generosity. Letting go and putting others first (within reason) can be a positive part of diminishing the ego.
- **Tolerance:** Accepting the differences of others, primarily those which are beyond their ability to control.
- **Wisdom:** Primarily the wisdom to accept new knowledge despite the fact that it contradicts your preferred world view or something that you already believe strongly.

Failings

- **Pride:** Insisting upon one's personal beliefs despite overwhelming evidence or allowing one's ego to interfere with the virtues of compassion or tolerance. Pride can also prevent one from owning their own failures, which is unhelpful and only feeds the ego.

- **Treachery:** Whether it takes the form of corruption in business dealings, unfaithfulness to one's relationship commitments, or aggrandizing one's own exploits for personal prestige deceit does not lend itself to spiritual growth but rather hinders it.

- **Envy:** Part of The Path is learning acceptance. Coveting the material possessions or accomplishments of others is nothing more than focusing on your perceived lack of achievement instead of working *toward* that achievement. Envy also encompasses greed, which is probably the one true "evil" that all men and women can agree upon. Rid the world of greed and we free it from the shackles of suffering.

• **Indecency:** Failing to be at least moderately polite or maintaining at least a minimal amount of social decency shows disrespect for other people. You will never be able to mold yourself to everyone's moral expectations, nor should you worry about trying to do so, but common sense decency provides you with self-esteem and the self-respect essential to spiritual growth.

• **Ignorance:** Willfully participating in or promoting ignorance does a disservice to not only yourself but to all mankind. Ignorance should be faced with a gentle, but unwaveringly firm, hand and corrected whenever it is encountered. Many will reject truth, despite evidence, so do not waste breath forcing knowledge on those who wish to wallow in ignorance, but always be at least *willing* to offer enlightenment.

Pathism is a unique and personal road to the divine, so no, these guidelines are not offered up as a means to bask in eternal reward or avoid eternal damnation, as I believe those to be flawed concepts. Think of a practitioner of The Path as a man stranded on a deserted island. He

can work hard to better his circumstances (follow The Path) or choose to wallow in self-pity and refuse to do anything about his situation (not follow The Path). There is no “punishment” for not doing the work other than not improving his own existence. Likewise if he chooses the more difficult path, the one of hard work, he can build himself a house and better his life. This is not a reward in the typical sense, but simply a result achieved through the effort that he put into it.

Pathists follow the same general rule of spiritual growth that Buddhists do; you get back what you put in. You can choose not to, and nothing terrible will befall you, or you can choose to work hard and benefit from an awakening that brings peace into your life and helps you to comprehend the vast universe in which we exist.



WORSHIP OR REVERENCE

With a faith like Pathism this can be a surprisingly tricky issue. Some of us gravitate more toward an unknown force at work in the universe (The All) while others will gravitate more toward the traditional form of a deity or deities, even if they are only symbolic manifestations of The All.

In my years of study, both of eastern and western religious traditions (primarily Christianity and Buddhism) I can tell you that though the two practices may at face value seem diametrically opposed, this is far from the truth. In fact it is the early indoctrination into these religions and the accompanying “malaise” that comes after many years of participation in

mindless and repetitive rituals that instead often stunts the very spiritual growth that the practitioner is seeking.

Take for example a middle-aged Catholic man and an elderly Buddhist woman. The man may know his prayers, he may know the mass front to back, he may know every single ritual but he partakes in them as part of habit instead of focusing on the meaning that was originally attached to them. The old Buddhist lady, she too does her daily rituals and recites her Sutras but they have become habit. She is no longer using them as a tool to work toward enlightenment but instead as merely a tradition.

Now, let's examine what would happen if each of these individuals performed the prescribed observances with the proper focus:

- The middle-aged Catholic man humbles himself before God in prayer. What is he actually doing? He is letting go of the ego, his own pride, and thereby opening his heart and his mind to something beyond himself.
- The old Buddhist lady strikes her bell and recites her Sutra while focusing on

mindfulness. She is not “humbling” herself per-se, but what she is doing is also letting go of her ego and attempting to become in tune with the universe around her instead of being overwhelmed by her own conscious thoughts.

In this way we see that both Judeo-Christian prayer and Hindu/Buddhist meditation serves (largely) the same purpose. To focus the mind. To diminish one’s ego. To open one up to a connection with the inner-divinity that resides within all. Christians would call it the Holy Spirit. Buddhists would call it “Buddha Nature”. Whatever the term that is used the reference is the same, the divine nature that resides inside all living beings.

As a matter of personal preference I prefer the term “reverence” in relation to The All, as it is something of awesome profoundness but also something we ourselves are a part of. If, however, your personal growth benefits more from a sense of “worship” of nature or of manifestations of The All then it is not my place to say that your path is wrong.



RITUAL

Ritual is a slippery slope that can lead to a loss of the true meaning behind itself. To many of us ritual will seem almost a necessity yet to others it will carry little or no significance at all. Therefore it is with a word of warning that I present a few basic Pathist rituals that may be used as you see fit. Always remember that private prayer or meditation will lead to the most spiritual growth and that when participating in ritual attempt at all times to be mindful of the meaning and purpose *behind* it. If that meaning is discarded and replaced with simple repetition then it loses all significance and no longer serves a useful purpose in our quest to commune with The All.

Rituals for Cleansing

- **(Alleviation)** In seclusion, preferably in a natural setting, build a small fire and sit by it while you write down on small scraps of paper the things that you wish to release from your thoughts. They can be worries, regrets, people, incidents, or anything else. Meditate or pray for a short time to center yourself before removing the scraps and focusing on them intensely. Allow yourself to ponder each thoroughly and do not be concerned if the thought object stirs intense emotion, as this is actually the point of the exercise. Allow your feelings to build, while remaining thoughtful as to why you feel the way that you do, and then as the emotions reach crescendo toss the scrap into the fire as you exhale your breath and release the feelings you have been experiencing as a wave of energy that ripples up your spine electrically and leaves you in peace with a vocal exultation “I release you!” Repeat for each thought-object, or “construct” as we will call them here.

- **(Passage)** Similar to a Christian Baptism this Pathist cleansing ritual can be

performed any time there is a need for a clear “dividing line” between the past and the future. Alone or with others go to a body of water in which you can immerse yourself. There you can speak, either to yourself or to others, about what motivates you to leave the past behind you and begin anew. Then, dip yourself, or have someone else dip you, into the water, submerging entirely for just a moment, before arising, taking a deep breath of fresh clean air, and taking note of the clear transition between the moment before and the moment after the passage.

• **(Revealing)** The Catholic practice of confession is not without merit, so long as it is not abused as an attempt of being absolved of all evildoings without consequence. So it is in a similar vein that this third ritual is fashioned. It can be conducted between two travelers (see glossary) in confidence if necessary, but preferably between a group of travelers. Confession of a particular deed, which can be anything that the confessor feels they need to put out into the universe, should be spoken to the fellow practitioners or to the group. If the confessor prefers the topic to be ended

at that point then he or she should raise a hand at the end of their last sentence. If they do not it is considered an open topic and advice can be offered. After any advice has concluded the mentor (see glossary) or a member of the group should touch the confessor's hand comfortingly while proclaiming, "The universe and those present honor your courage. What is done, is past." and the group can say in unison "What is done is past." At which point the matter should be spoken of no more and the group should move on.

Rituals for Consecration

- **(Devotion)** Should one feel the need to express a specific commitment to following The Path I recommend this simple ritual. Amongst those that the traveler feels comfortable said traveler should sit upon either soil or stone, bare feet touching the ground beneath so as to feel connected to the natural world around her or himself. If possible those in attendance should form a circle around the devotee. The devotee should proclaim, "I seek to follow The

Path, accepting that it is ever-changing and that mine shall be different from all others.” The group should observe a moment of silence for reflection then end with a recital of “Our paths cross, our paths diverge, but always we move forward toward oneness with The All.”

- **(Sanctification)** Should a Waypoint (see glossary) be built those who invested their time and energy into its construction may wish to mark the occasion of its completion. Such a ceremony should be basic and without an overt amount of ritual. A simple lighting of candles and a few words spoken about why the site was built should suffice. Celebration, in the form of the communal sharing of food, after the consecration is advised as it promotes social unity.

Rituals for the Departed

- **(Requiem)** A memorial service for a departed traveler should not be a solemn event, however a modicum of restraint and respect should also be shown, rowdiness should be avoided. A photograph or other

likeness of the departed should be prepared and brought to the place of remembrance. At the meeting site, which can be as simple as a park or back yard, memories of the departed should be shared cordially and then at an appropriate point a candle should be lit and a moment of silence observed as thoughts focus upon the flame of the candle. As it says in the funeral service in the *Book of Common* “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” The photograph should be lit and those in attendance should be mindful of how the smoke rising from it symbolizes the departed’s return to the universe through the carbon cycle.

• **(Remembrance)** The daily lighting of a candle or a stick of incense placed in a bowl with some form of medium (sand or rice) along with a photograph of the departed. A prayer or moment of remembrance can then follow. The candle or incense can be snuffed or allowed to burn out on its own.

Rituals for the Strength through Adversity

- **(Pillar Ceremony)** The very ancient custom of “laying on of hands” has been proven to have some positive effects that are firmly rooted in actual science, namely the release of oxytocin and the blocking of the stress hormone cortisol in the brain. I therefore propose a simple ritual wherein an adherent to The Path, most likely someone in need of comfort and strength from others due to stressors or illnesses in life, kneels to the ground (or sits on the ground/floor if kneeling is uncomfortable) and then allows others to place their hands upon his or her shoulders, head, and neck for a few moments while everyone contemplates silently and attempts to put forth positive energy.

Recitation

- Bearing always in mind that the recitation of prayers or chants can be one of the areas where meaningful spiritual practice can most easily turn into mindless repetition, I will nonetheless lay out a few basic chants

and prayers that I have devised as scientific evidence has shown that frequent sessions can activate the brain's frontal lobes, which may help the mind to be more calm and less reactionary as well as more capable of dealing with outside stressors.

- Recitation should be practiced at least once daily, for anywhere between 5 and 30 minutes, but adapt the practice for whatever suits your lifestyle.

- Simple recitation exercises have been shown to be most beneficial when the chanter is keeping track of his or her activity. It is for this reason that I suggest the use of medicine beads. Feel free to use Buddhist prayer beads (Mala), which most commonly come in 18, 27, 54 or 108 beads. Likewise Catholic rosaries will work just as well, as do any other form of prayer bead from any other faith. Pathist prayer beads are called a guidestone strands and are created to hold either 10 or 20 beads. The preferred configuration is a strand-style that, when used during recitations, is counted from beginning to end and then starting again at the beginning, signifying the never-ending nature of The Path. Guidestone strands can, however, be

fashioned so that the first and last beads can be interlocked to form a bracelet or necklace. No distinct fasteners should be used on each end, however, as this breaks from the notion of the end and the beginning being identical to one another. The ten-count style is used for very practical reasons, ten-counts are easy to remember and work well with recitations and breathing meditation.

Chants

- Keep in mind at all times that chants are a simple recitation device useful for focusing and calming the mind. The words or sounds are less important than the practice itself. I present below a few chants that have a pleasant rhythm to myself but don't be afraid to create your own. Again, I find a 10-count repetition (up to however high of a number you wish to go) to work best but figure out what works for you.
- This chant is all about teaching your body and mind the difference between a tensed and a relaxed state. Once you have mastered it you will have an easier time

switching yourself consciously into a relaxed state. Began with an inhalation of air while making a “eee” sound with the air entering your throat. Tense your hands into a loose fist as you do so. Focus your mind on things that make you anxious or worried. Then, with your lungs full, switch your thoughts to letting go of those worries and with a (relatively) sharp movement exhale a “haa” sound as you unclench your first, open your fingers. You are releasing those thoughts into the ether and experiencing a moment of peace. Despite any spiritual overtones this practice is actually very similar to one taught by therapists dealing with patients who are having a difficult time learning to relax.

- This particular recitation is for dealing with panic or panic attacks, which generally result in, while simultaneously stem from, a disassociation with the basic reality around you. You become locked into a cycle of thought and counter-thought. The cycle breeds more panic, the thought cycle increases in speed, and the loop intensifies. Therefore, the next time you feel your emotions spiraling out of control try this: “It is impossible for me to be alone.” (take

a deep breath and consciously note the temperature of the air and any smells that it carries), “I am a part of the universe and it is a part of me.” (take a deep breath and touch something physical near you. it can be your clothing, the chair on which you are sitting, or any other solid object. Note its qualities consciously such as texture and temperature). “Time is the river that steers me ever forward.” (take a deep breath then open your eyes and focus visually on something tangible. Consciously then acknowledge its color, its shape, and its distance from you.) Repeat until you feel more grounded with reality and can (hopefully) give your panic time to subside.

- Vedic texts speak of “Aum” as a cosmic sound, with my personal favorite interpretation being “mysterious and inexhaustible”. It is a simple sound and can be chanted while exhaling and is incredibly easy to keep track of your repetitions.

- Amá Nahasdzáán, Azhé’é yá (mother Earth, father sky). This one is translated from Navajo. It does not work as well for breathe practice but is better used for grounding. I prefer to recite it while sitting

on the ground with my hands touching the Earth or a piece of stone.

- Other chants taken from other religions are fine too, so long as they work for you and you can identify with what they are trying to teach you.

Prayer

- This prayer is for stressful or painful situations where you may find yourself naturally gravitating toward fear. “This burden is not mine alone. My pain belongs to the universe.”

- An affirmation prayer reflecting upon the concept that we exist in divine image. “The All is one. I am one with the All. Neither may time touch us, nor stone break us. In The All’s image I am spirit everlasting.”

- A note on the above prayer: Do not confuse the notion of being an immortal spirit in the image of The All with *being* The All. Being a part of God does not make you God, and taking this notion too literally can work *against* you, as it can feed the ego.

- A prayer for when you are feeling depressed or in some fashion inadequate. "I am broken yet I am whole. I am neither and both. Though my state may change in elemental fashion I never cease being a part of The All."
- A prayer for when the world seems too much to bear, and you need desperately to visualize your existence in some fashion that gives you strength. "I am the rock, shaped by the river; the turbulent waters of life flowing over me. They shall make me smooth, but never budge nor break me."
- Another prayer for troubled times, a reminder that whatever happens you will always move forward. "Life is a river that carries me forward. Should I choose to struggle I dwell within moments that are beyond my control. Let them instead be swept away by the current, as it carries me toward new moments and new experiences."
- And finally a prayer for humbling one's self, a practice that helps to release the ego and allow for true introspection. "Mother Earth, Father Sky. I bow before that which I do not understand. I bow before the wicked and the righteous. I bow before all

creatures regardless of size, for I am small in the vastness of the cosmos. I speak no truths absolute, nor refuse evidence given to me in good faith. I relinquish myself to God who is The All.

- Prayers taken from other religions are fine as well, Pathism doesn't ask you to lose that part of your identity. Find the ones that fit your notions and ideals and use them as spiritual comfort.

Humbling or Prostration

- The Abrahamic tradition of turning one's self over to God, admitting that you are weak and flawed, and acknowledging God's greatness is something that may not come naturally to many of us, and that is why some of us are here. I, for one, disliked the practice for many years until I realized that such practices are (psychologically at least) very similar to eastern practices of diminishing the ego and attempting to someday attain "ego death", or the complete eradication of the very ego that keeps us closed minded, arrogant, and presumptuous enough to say that we

understand God, The All, the cosmos, or the very nature of existence itself.

- The Dalai Lama said, “Attachment is the origin, the root of suffering; hence it is the cause of suffering.” He is, of course, speaking of many forms of attachment, but for this portion of the book we are talking about our attachment to the “concept” of who we are, our ego. It is a learned part of our existence, and learning to un-attach yourself from it is a vital part of getting closer to the pervasive divinity of the universe. Countless books have been written on the subject, so I will be brief, and get you started down this path.

- Analyze your thoughts and your actions, their purposes and motives. When you identify one that stems from the ego it will be apparent, as it will be selfish in nature, or seek to make you feel better about who you are. These are thoughts that we all have, but simply acknowledging them, their actual intent, and where they stem from, allows us to step back, laugh at how petty our own thoughts can be, and let them float away into the ether.

Shrine building and Talisman creation

•I started this section of the book with a warning about allowing yourself to fall into the trap of rituals becoming habit, and from habit comes apathy, and from apathy no spiritual seeds will sprout. So it is with renewed vigor I warn that items such as shrines and talismans, while they can be helpful to the user, are very easy things to allow to pass from serious thought into mindless ritual. Remember what they *stand for* and what your goals are, otherwise we're treading into territory we came here to escape.

•Shrines are a simple idea. They can be dedicated to a spiritual leader who inspires you, a particular incarnation of The All (a god or goddess for example) or just about anything else. To keep them simple I suggest little more than table or small shelf upon which you can place effigies of what or whomever the shrine is dedicated to. You can place on it photographs, carved figures, or whatever else will be the focus of the shrine. Sit for a few moments a day in front of it and light a candle or burn some incense. Perform some recitations

while focusing on the subject of the shrine and what it means to you, and how it can help you grow in your spiritual practice. Don't feel obligated to keep it around forever though, that whole thing about avoiding mindless ritual...if you feel your shrine has outlived its purpose then dispose of it in whatever respectful manner that you see fit. Remember, letting go is a powerful tool!

- Talismans are the type of thing I would pretty much warn folks away from entirely, with the exception of when they are fully conscious of what it *is* and what it is *not*. A talisman, any object that you have imbued special spiritual value upon through whichever means you feel appropriate, is *not* magical. It will not bring you luck with the lottery or bring down any favor from on high. What it *can* be, however, is a useful temporary psychological tool to help you through something you are dealing with in your life. If your talisman is supposed to help you be brave in the face of a bully, maybe it can...if you remember that it's simply a passing mental aid. Let it help you be strong in your time of need, but remember that its ultimate utility is as a

device that you are trying to overcome the need for. When you finally do dispose of this talisman it will stand as yet one more example of something that you've learned to let go, and through letting go have become stronger and ever closer to attaining your spiritual goals.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What is the primary purpose of Pathism?

A: To create a compassionate and supportive community of free-thinkers that do not identify with the concrete beliefs of mainstream religions. Pathists can range from highly spiritual individuals to those that might otherwise identify as atheist. First and foremost what binds us together is our desire to communicate new ideas, our openness to possibilities, and our desire to pool our talents in order to make a positive impact on the world.

Q: Does Pathism have a holy scripture?

A: No. Words are simply that, ideas written upon paper. Pathism has texts, but it rejects the entire

notion of dogma and therefore the concept that writings can be infallible.

Q: What does Pathism make of the holy texts of other religions?

A: Pathists do not rule out the concept that some of them may have been divinely inspired, but believe that anything written and edited by human hands is inherently flawed and therefore can in no way be taken as the infallible word of the divine. There are, however, extremely valuable lessons to be taken from the Torah, the Christian Bible, the Koran, The Vedas, and many other such documents. Therefore we study them for wisdom that may be applicable to our daily lives.

Q: So Pathists don't believe in *any* scripture being the infallible word of a higher power?

A: Absolutely not. Scripture is just that, documents, and often of questionable provenance. Even if a particular work was divinely inspired Pathists do not believe that it can be counted as "infallible" as it was written down, edited, and copied by the hand of man. Pathism teaches adherents to question all things and to never stop questioning.

Q: Do Pathists believe in God?

A: Pathists believe in the likely possibility, but not absolute certainty, of the divine nature of the universe.

Q: What about the God of the bible?

A: Pathists do not believe that any one particular faith has *ownership* of the concept of God. We believe that all world religions inevitably believe in the same divine force, and that debate over particular gods being the *right one* or not only serve to further divisions between the men and women of the world.

Q: Do Pathists have faith?

A: Absolutely! We have faith that the universe exists as it should and that we should marvel at the beauty and complexity of creation. We have faith that The All surrounds and permeates everything and that by looking within ourselves we can find our connection to it.

Q: Do Pathists believe in heaven? What about hell?

A: Some call it the Kingdom of Heaven, others would describe it as Nirvana. There are thousands of interpretations of eternal peace but they all share a common thread: the desire to

reach a state where there is ultimate acceptance and understanding of the world and the ability to bathe in the presence of God. Pathists generally do not believe in this as a *physical place*, but rather a *state of being* in which our natural connection to the divine can be fully realized and that by becoming one with God we can come at last to a state of perpetual peace. As to the concept of hell, the answer is no. Pathists believe that so-called "punishment" is merely a construct of organized religion designed to force the fearful and ignorant into compliance. Pathists see the divine force of the universe not necessarily as good or evil, as those are human concepts, but instead as all-accepting and that it will grant its infinite compassion to any person who will make an attempt to better his or her self and attain spiritual enlightenment.

Q: What is Pathism's stance on historical religious figures such as Jesus, the Buddha, Krishna, Mohammed, etc...?

A: Pathists welcome the enlightened ideas of any who present them and therefore have a deep reverence for figures that sought to teach a better way to the world. We do not, however, ascribe divine status to them. We believe in the possibility of divine inspiration, but caution that

earthly interpretations may always be subject to distortion.

Q: Do Pathists believe in souls? What about eternal life?

A: Most Pathists do believe in some sort of "divine spark" that exists as an inherent part of all living things. As to the question of eternal life, most Pathists believe that if the essence of what we are continues after death that the most likely scenario is that of reincarnation. We are part of creation (and therefore God), so we can never be destroyed, only move from one state of existence to another. Like God, since we are created as *one with God*, we have no true beginning and no true ending. The spirit is eternal.

Q: Does the temple expect me to donate a portion of my income on a regular basis?

A: No. Pathists do not believe that the divine needs money and assert that anyone who tells you otherwise is only looking to line their own pocket. The temple does engage in charity causes (primarily feeding and clothing the homeless) and if you wish to contribute to those it is totally up to you. We also sell paperback copies of our books (as we cannot afford to give them away for free) but the ebook versions are free and will

always be free. We also sell prayers beads and other assorted items, but they are sold basically at cost and any profits that are generated are put towards charity work. The temple will never ask for a penny from anyone just for being a part of the community.

Q: What about sin and judgement?

A: Foremost, Pathists do not believe that humans are innately flawed or require any kind of redemption simply for existing (i.e. original sin). Further, we believe that doing kind deeds only to avoid eternal punishment does not make you a good person, it simply makes you a *manipulative one* and also a very *foolish one*, for if there is judgement by a higher power such meager attempts at trickery would not fool an omnipotent creator. Pathists believe that the only spiritual punishments we experience are those brought on by ourselves, by our apathy and lack of spiritual growth. Lastly Pathists decry the use of such threats of judgement by mainstream religions as a means of exercising control over their followers, a deplorable act of manipulation. When one chooses wicked actions there is no “register” of his or her misdeeds, rather, that person is simply pushing themselves

farther from the path of communing with the divine nature of the cosmos.

Q: What does Pathism say about violence and war?

A: That violence should only ever be a last resort for defense of one's own life or the lives of loved ones. Love and understanding is the answer that holy men throughout the ages have tried so desperately to teach to us and their words have fallen largely upon deaf ears. Honoring their teachings, ours is a path of peace.

Q: What is Pathism's view of greed and worldly possessions?

A: The Path advocates a simple and sustainable life. Not one of outright poverty of course, but of sensible moderation. Greed begets greed, and greed is the root of all evil. We subscribe to the notion that a life without the encumbrances of excess wealth is one more suited to spiritual growth.

Q: Where do Pathists believe humans fit into the natural world? Are we set apart from other creatures, special, and free to do what we wish with the Earth?

A: We believe that humans are a part of the natural world, but *only that*. Our intelligence may allow us to contemplate the nature of the divine more thoroughly than other creatures, but the complications that come along with such intelligence may also hold us back from being at peace with the divinity of all creation as well. The Earth is a sacred gift, and it is our duty to watch over it.

Q: What is Pathism's stance on equality of the sexes?

A: The Temple of the Path teaches the innate equality of all people, regardless of gender. It places no particular expectations or restrictions upon a person due to their gender or gender identity. Likewise we strongly support gender equality public policy.

Q: What is the Pathist stance on homosexuality?

A: In nature sexuality is not binary, it is a fluid part of existence. Therefore Pathists, who believe that the universe exists as it should, feel that it is necessary to accept all aspects of the natural world. Sexuality and/or gender identity pose no moral quandaries for a Pathist. We support public policy that promotes acceptance of our friends in the LGBTQIA+ community.

Q: What is the temple's stance on abortion?

A: We believe that life is sacred, and therefore do not actively *endorse* the practice of course, but also do not chastise or belittle women or couples for their choices. Ultimately the choice is a personal one, and in some situations may very well be the correct one, that is not for any of us to judge. Pathists therefore stand up for women's' right of choice, and even more importantly advocate for access to contraception and sex education to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

Q: Does Pathism have any kind of strange customs for dress or personal grooming?

A: No. The Pathism was created with the intent of being free from those kinds of peculiar requirements. It should not be up to arbitrary rules of clergy to dictate how people live their lives. Pathism does teach a “middle way”, meaning that we generally encourage moderate dress, nothing super flashy (that only feeds the ego and hampers spiritual growth), but also allowing for a sense of personal style. As to personal grooming the temple does actually have a stance on the subject. It is a right, but not a requirement by any means, that any Pathists may

let his or her facial and/or body hair grow out in its natural state if they so choose and that anyone (employer for instance) requesting they shave it may be informed that it is part of your religious beliefs to have it in its natural state.

Q: What is the temple's views on alcohol and drug use?

A: Everything in moderation. Pathists feel that we are in good company by admitting that, like our ancient ancestors, the occasional use of mind altering substances may actually have a positive effect on our spiritual growth. Pathists are also compassionate and concerned for their fellow humans, however, and strongly support institutions that are in place to help those with drug or alcohol problems when they are seen as having a negative effect on an individual's life.

Q: This isn't some kind of cult is it?

A: One of the primary teachings of Pathism is to question *everything*, even Pathist teachings themselves. So no, by its very nature Pathism is immune to the type of fanatical devotion often seen in cults. Further, it does not impose strict rules of dress, behavior, or even belief.

Q: What is the meaning of the compass rose in relation to Pathism and why do Pathist pendants have a hole in the middle?

A: The compass rose was chosen as it symbolizes a journey, but one undertaken with some semblance of planning rather than an impromptu and solitary one. The hole in the center of Pathist necklace pendants is there to remind Pathists that divine light is ever-present, and comes from within. It symbolizes the dichotomy of our faith; we seek that which has always been within us. We seek answers, knowing that all questions cannot be answered.



GLOSSARY

Traveler - An adherent to Pathism. Another word for Pathist.

Mentor – A person who has shown a desire to be an active member of the Pathist community in as such that they seek to help others find their own path. Other suitable terms for such persons are: minister, matron, and patron.

The All – The Pathist concept of “God”. A singular indivisible cosmic energy that has no beginning and no end, is the spark of creation and also one and the same with it.

Waypoint – A term for a rudimentary Pathist temple.

Guidestone Strand – A simple set of Pathist meditation beads.



CONCLUSION

This book was created to serve as a beginning, not as an end, to a new paradigm in spiritual practice. It will *never* be complete and it will *never* be infallible.

The hope is that you have come away with something positive that you can incorporate into your everyday life. You may never actively seek to be Pathist, and that is okay. However, if the words of this volume have spoken to you on a personal level and you wish to explore a potential connection with like-minded individuals you can reach out through the official website of the Temple of the Path.

www.pathism.tk