

## **God as Essence**

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I was brought up, in a Muslim community, with a belief in God. There was a strong emphasis on the teachings of God, but I remember that I could not accept at face value what was taught to me. I felt that I needed to find out for myself what the nature of reality was, whether it was God, and what the true nature of God was.

At the beginning of my spiritual journey I became aware of the experience of what I now refer to as the "essence" of the human being. There was an arising within, experienced intimately and directly, of a living presence, a palpable feeling of a living, self-aware truth. For many years now, this presence has revealed itself within me as pure spiritual qualities, first the differentiated qualities of its presence, which include truth, awareness, spaciousness, love, compassion, joy, and contentment; then its undifferentiated pure presence of Being, which revealed the various subtleties inherent in its experience, both within and beyond concepts.

Soon after the beginning of my spiritual journey, I recognized that this presence exists, and is true, for every human being; that it is the essential nature of everyone, and, hence, it is independent from any one person's history or life circumstance. Essence is something we are born with - our birthright. Essence is not something we have to work toward, for it is what we truly are. Therefore, a spiritual path is really one of removing the obstructions that disguise this essence.

This presence is a practical, day-to-day kind of experience, not something abstract or otherworldly. It has an innate intelligence that is beyond anyone's mind. At first I didn't exactly think of it as God, although I may have thought of it as the God within. Eventually, this presence revealed itself to be the inner nature of everything, and I began feeling more and more that this living consciousness, this pure essence of being, was God. I called it Truth, Reality, Being, or God.

In my experience, as I open myself to seeing the truth of who and what I am, God is a truth that reveals itself on its own. It is independent from anyone's mind or preferences, and has always existed and always will exist inside each of us. God, for me, means experiencing the totality of all existence in its true nature and condition. This means perceiving the unity of all that can be perceived, all that can be seen, at all levels of reality, including all beings and everything that appears in experience. With God, nothing is separate from anything else. By this I don't mean a scientific interconnectedness, but rather only one and single presence. This unity has perfection and beauty to it.

My experience is that we are all "one being." There is no separate individual experiencing God. This conception of God means that my experience of myself as a separate individual does not truly exist. This does not mean that I am God, but instead, I, like everyone else, am part of the presence that is alive and conscious.

God can be seen in His beingness and God can be seen in His essence. They are slightly different, although they are inseparable. Beingness means actual nature, physical actuality of existence, perceived existence of God or the God presence. This is the totality of all that exists, all the universe including my physical body, your physical body, the telephone, the room, the air, the light, the sound – all as one reality, one presence, one body that is pure consciousness, intelligence, and love. But that one reality has an essence, an inner nature. I call it the essence

of God. This is the absolute mystery, the dazzling beauty that is beyond existence and nonexistence, the timeless source of everything.

To truly find God, truth needs to be found independently from the opinions of others. The truth has to be found in our hearts; it has to be totally personal, totally in our inner aloneness. God is our inner core and is the core of everything. It is also the true guidance, which is always guiding us. If we are really interested in the truth we will find our own answers, because the truth reveals itself to the sincere heart as the guided unfolding of one's essence.

Usually, what I teach is an earnest personal inquiry into the truth of one's experiences, the truth of one's mind, the truth of one's consciousness, and the truth of reality. My experience is that reality is self-revealing. If we open ourselves to it, it will reveal its secrets to us. By sincerely inquiring about our experiences of ourselves and of the world, the resulting understanding itself will be the ever-expanding self-revelation of the mystery of existence.

The process of opening up to the God presence is a continuing one. I don't think of myself as having arrived at the final, ultimate truth. I feel that my experience is still limited and probably always will be, but will continue to grow and change. I do not see my experience of what God is or how to reach God as necessarily the final or the only way. I don't claim that kind of knowledge, nor do I know if anyone can. To me, that kind of knowledge is something that reveals itself over time. I do know that the moment essence is recognized as one's being, one's essential nature, and experienced as such, a radical transformation occurs. One's life and experiences of God will never be the same. No longer will God be experienced as something we were taught to believe in, but rather as something we can truly experience each moment of our lives.

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