

Finding Common Ground: A Module for Holding Spiritual Conversations with Skeptics

Invitation to Finding Common Ground

Welcome to the world of Finding Common Ground!

We invite you to begin an amazing journey. It is a journey for the cautious and the bold, the young and the old and all who are in between. We all know that we are firmly rooted in the ground that is our material world, and yet we wish to explore the concepts of existence that go beyond these material needs and actually matter far more than our daily life. This exploration is a “spiritual conversation”. Finding Common Ground provides an organized way to travel this road. It has sessions on various intriguing topics that can be discussed inoffensively by a group of individuals from diverse religious backgrounds – and, especially, with no religious background at all. The attitude here is one of learning from one another without judging, and in doing so although we may not agree on everything, we can not only agree to disagree but might well find a large amount of common ground.

Organization

You should find the following:

- Big-picture context on what Finding Common Ground is trying to do, and why we think it is needed
- Recommendations for how to tutor a Finding Common Ground session
- An example of Finding Common Ground sessions for an audience of highly-educated skeptics
- A rubric for creating Finding Common Ground sessions on your own

What need is Finding Common Ground intended to meet?

In our society there is a need for spiritual conversations. In the past this need was often met in churches, synagogues, temples and mosques – that is, within the context of formal religion — but for many people formal religion is neither effective nor necessarily desired. Whether or not it takes place within a religious context, this sort of dialogue is spiritually enriching and helpful to all concerned.

What is a spiritual conversation?

Our working definition of a spiritual conversation is “a conversation about something that is important to its participants, where spiritual and ethical principles are used to set the context”. The spiritual and ethical principles can be explicitly religious, but need not be.

What are some barriers to having effective spiritual conversations?

One barrier is that spiritual conversations aren’t something that most people regularly practice – in other words, most of us simply don’t know how.

Another barrier involves religion: there are misunderstandings among people of different faiths, and misunderstandings between people with and without religious faith. Among these misunderstandings are that people of different faiths find different holy books to be authoritative. People of no religious faith don’t consider the holy books to be authoritative, and instead rely on science and logic.

And this isn’t even to mention that people don’t necessarily understand science, and that people of no religious faith might have some inaccurate ideas about religion, and that people of religious faith might have some incorrect ideas about their own religion and the religion of others.

How does Finding Common Ground try to overcome these barriers?

- Finding Common Ground explicitly describes the goals of spiritual conversations
- Finding Common Ground is explicit (and hopefully realistic) in its assumptions about its participants
- Finding Common Ground begins with the common ground held by initiator of the spiritual conversation and its other participants

What does Finding Common Ground assume?

Finding Common Ground does not assume that the participants in a spiritual conversation are seeking religious enlightenment. Finding Common Ground does

assume that, if the construct of a “spiritual topic” is defined sufficiently broadly, every participant will be interested in holding spiritual conversations.

What are the goals of Finding Common Ground?

The goals of Finding Common Ground include empowering its participants to be able to identify spiritual principles, to discuss them, and to apply them to their lives. Of note, its goals do not include anything—directly or indirectly—that encourages its participants to join any particular religion (or, indeed, any formal religion at all). This facilitates conceptual clarity, and allows everyone to focus on the task at hand without distraction.

What common ground does Finding Common Ground assume about its participants?

Finding Common Ground takes as its initial common ground The Golden Rule—even if people differ on how well it can realistically be practiced, and precisely how it should be practiced, and how society should be organized to facilitate its practice, everyone agrees that they would like others to treat them in accordance with that rule. The Golden Rule is also grounded in science—one of the lessons describes its role in the social evolution of humankind. The Golden Rule is also the spiritual basis of all religions. Interestingly, then, one of the first insights that participants might gain is that one thing about which everyone agrees is the spiritual basis of religion.

*Matthew 22:36-40: “Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?”
Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

The things about which people might disagree are extensive—among others, the existence of God, who should be considered a Prophet, what form the formal aspects of religion (if any) should take, whether the advantages of formal religion outweigh its disadvantages, and so on. None of these points of disagreement affect how The Golden Rule can be applied in the lives of actual people.

In short: the way we propose to overcome the above barriers is to start with something that's important and that everyone agrees about, and then organize spiritual conversations around that.

What topics might you discuss?

The topics should primarily be based on the interests of your target audience. For example, some topics that might be proposed to an intellectual target audience include:

- Unity of humankind
- The Golden Rule
- Is God dead? Belief in an age of cynicism
- The creative spirit and the arts
- Understanding current events: is the world going to Hell?

How might you discuss these topics?

Use a broad definition of "spiritually oriented." Everyone has a spiritual side, if you count things like an appreciation of the arts, beauty, ethics, desire for the happiness of others, etc.

Identify relevant spiritual principles. The distinction between religion's unchanging spiritual basis and its temporary forms is important to make, and will often be new to the participant. Start with the spiritual basis if you can.

State the ground rules ahead of time (in other words, let the participants know what to expect).

Begin with an introduction to the topic by the initiator, in order to set a positive tone.

Begin with areas of agreement, but don't avoid areas of disagreement.

When you encounter areas of disagreement don't argue. For example, civic engagement is well and good, but most political debates are pointless since there isn't anything that can immediately be done to change laws or government policy. Nor will people agree on the background facts. Some questions that might be asked before engaging in an argument include:

- Is the question important?
- Do we agree on the background facts?
- Is this something that requires action by me (which I can control) or by others (which I can't control)?

One of the roles of the facilitator is to discourage argument.

Interestingly, an example of a disagreement that can't be resolved with facts is anything pertaining to the nature or existence of God.

This assertion that the existence of God can be neither proven nor disproven is challenging to both theists and atheists. It's challenging to theists because they'd like to believe that God's existence is scientifically provable, even though this is inconsistent with the religious tenet that God is unknowable. We aren't living in the Middle Ages, where "scientific" proofs of the existence of God were taken seriously. (Spiritual "proofs" aren't proofs in the logical sense of the term, although some people are open to them. They might instead be called "spiritual experiences" or "personal testimonies.")

It's equally challenging to atheists, who appreciate the defects in the "scientific" proofs of God's existence, and assume that's all there is to the story.

Most philosophers agree that the existence of God is a "non-falsifiable hypothesis"—that is, a statement that can neither be proven to be true nor false. Radical atheists such as Richard Dawkins believe that they can rebut the arguments for God's existence advanced to date, but don't realize that arguments were mostly developed during the Middle Ages or otherwise reflect the inherently limited conception of God that we as human beings are bound to have. All one needs to do – and, indeed, this is what religious writings actually

do – is to stipulate that God is beyond human understanding. Not to mention that it's impossible to prove a negative.

Once we stipulate that nothing about God can be logically proven it's easy to agree to disagree—in fact, what we're having is a conversation where no one knows anything with certainty.

What religiously-inclined people generally believe is that, even though we can't learn anything about God directly, He has sent Prophets with teachings that emanate from God. Whether that seems true to you or not is a question not for the mind, but rather for the heart.

How do I teach?

Once you have become familiar with Finding Common Ground and wish to try teaching it as a class, it is important to know that the teacher is simply one who guides the group, acting more as a tutor to those who are in the group rather than the traditional role of a professor who instructs a class. The concept is accompaniment on the spiritual path. It involves much more listening than speaking. It involves more questions than answers.

The mode is an attitude of learning, with no individuals dominating the class. It is facilitation of communication and most importantly finding the common thread of love that unites the group.

What is a module?

A module is a series of conversations tailored to a particular group (or audience). The conversations are termed sessions, and a session could either be completed in a single meeting or extend across multiple meetings. The conversations might or might not result in subsequent action by the group (for example, a service project).

Summary: steps in curriculum design

The steps in developing a Finding Common Ground module are:

1. *Describe the salient characteristics of the group that will be using the module.*
For example, for the intellectual target audience a salient characteristic is that they are skeptical of religious claims.
2. *Considering the above information, create a list of topics.*
3. *For each topic, produce a summary that might be used to set the context.*
Identify relevant quotations – these should be derived from a variety of sources, if possible.
4. *Determine how the session should be organized.* For example, an intellectual target audience likes to speak rather than listen, and much of the challenge is to maintain a positive focus and avoid argument.

Some example modules follow. These modules are designed for a highly-educated audience – for example, university faculty members and students – who are skeptical of religious claims. Often, a characteristic of this audience is the tendency to assume that if any claim on the part of religion is demonstrably false then all such claims must be false. For example, an audience member might encounter a fundamentalist Christian who asserts that the creation story in Genesis is literally true (actually, there are more than one such story), find that to be utterly inconsistent with the geologic record, and thus jump to the conclusion that every claim Christianity makes must be false. This tendency implies the need to proceed with great care.

The Golden Rule

Background materials:

The story about the scientific support for The Golden Rule runs more or less as follows. The intellectual and social evolution of mankind occurred together. Among others, intelligence was needed for social skills – for example, differentiating between people who could be trusted and those who couldn't be. In general, the more ethical and trustworthy people advanced. Similarly, the societies with a higher level of organization thrived – this also depended on ethical behavior among its participants. Good mothering is required for an animal whose young are helpless for such a long period of time – dependable fathering supports good mothering. Love and reciprocity are required. The most succinct statement of love and reciprocity is the Golden Rule, and that's the spiritual basis for religion. There was natural selection (both at the level of the individual and the society) to not only be selfish, but also to be loving and cooperative. In other words, there was natural selection to follow the Golden Rule, and the tendency to do so is deeply embedded in our psyches. The Golden Rule is a fundamental organizing principle of human society.

Moreover, all major religions, and many philosophers, have described the Golden Rule in more or less the same terms:

Buddhist: Put yourself in the place of others and harm none nor have them harmed.

Jewish: That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is explanation. Love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

Christian: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Muslim: None of you truly believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.

Quotations:

- I do think that there is such a thing as human nature, and that the things that we have in common are perhaps greater than the things that divide us. (Salman Rushdie)
- Human nature is potentially aggressive and destructive and potentially orderly and constructive. (Margaret Mead)
- Science reveals that human nature is greedy and selfish, altruistic and helpful. (Michael Shermer)
- Man's nature is not essentially evil. Brute nature has been known to yield to the influence of love. You must never despair of human nature. (Mahatma Ghandi)
- Nothing in human nature is so God-like as the disposition to do good to our fellow creatures. (Samuel Richardson)

Questions for discussion:

- What makes it easy (or hard) to follow the Golden Rule?
- What should you do when others don't follow the Golden Rule?
- Is it really possible for others to follow the Golden Rule consistently?
- Is a belief in God necessary in order to follow the Golden Rule?
- Why do you think the statement of the Golden Rule is so similar across religions?
- How can children be taught the Golden Rule?

Unity of humankind

Background materials:

Not long ago (150,000 years, according to some estimates) all humans lived in Africa. Various migrations then occurred, humans colonized the entire planet and, to a greater or lesser extent, until quite recently those humans lived in relatively separate but interacting groups. As per evolutionary theory, those groups evolved to meet local conditions – for example, those who lived far from the tropics developed whiter skin, those who engaged in cattle farming developed a tolerance for milk into adulthood, etc. From the perspective of evolution these differences are minor: humans are a single species.

A somewhat related idea is that of separate “races” of humans, perhaps intended to track those (relatively) separate groups within which we previously lived, and typically identified by physical characteristics such as skin color. Race is more of a social concept rather than a scientific one, sometimes but not always used with ill intention. In fact, the selection pressures on all groups of humans were essentially the same – for example, favoring high degrees of intelligence – and there is no scientific reason to suspect any differences in average intelligence across races (to the extent that races can be accurately defined and intelligence accurately measured). There is much more variation within any racial group than across groups and, indeed, as a fundamental principle of biology and evolution, variety and diversity is an advantage rather than a disadvantage.

Questions for discussion:

- Apart from racial harmony, what are some other elements of the unity of humankind?
- How would the unity of humankind feel to you?
- What can you do to advance the unity of humankind?
- Why might it be important to recognize the unity of humankind?
- The background materials describe the scientific rationale for the unity of humankind – what is the ethical and religious basis for the concept?
- What does the expression “unity in diversity” mean to you?

The arts

(A right-brained session designed by a left-brained person)

Background and preparation:

The arts are a universal expression of the human spirit. Ask each of the participants to bring a picture, or a song, or a poem, or some other artistic expression that moves them.

Begin the session by sharing these, and discussing why the participants are moved.

Questions for discussion:

The following pictures are considered “iconic” – that is, the picture represents an idea, or an event, or a feeling, or something else of importance.

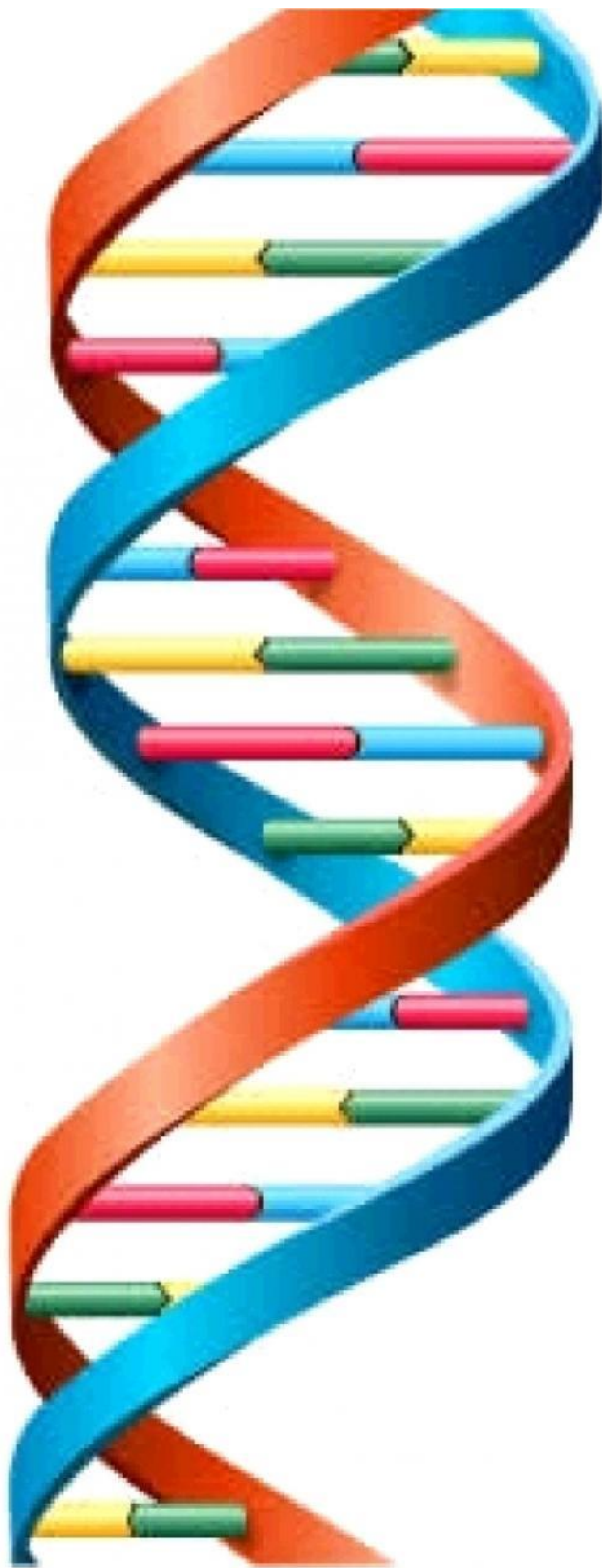
- What do these pictures mean to you?
- What pictures are iconic for today’s world, and why?











Yellow < A

Green > T

Blue C

Red G

Current events: Is the world going to Hell?

Background materials:

One way to understand current events is that we are observing two processes that are taking place simultaneously. (And, indeed, that these processes are interrelated). The first process can be termed the destruction of the old world order. The second process can be termed the birth of the new world order. Both processes can be understood within the context of the social evolution of humankind.

Once humans evolved out of the hunter-gatherer lifestyle, there was competition between villages. Whether or not this competition was violent – which it often was – some villages survived and others didn't. The villages that survived had, among others, social cohesion and efficient use of technology, which led to a surplus, which in turn supported soldiers who could protect the village and attack other villages. Village leaders whose power was legitimate were more effective than those whose power wasn't, and those villages whose leaders were supported by priests were more legitimate than those whose leaders weren't, and that's part of the evolutionary support for religion as a social institution. It was dog-eat-dog, and only the strongest villages survived.

Villages grew to tribes, tribes grew to become nations, but always there was competition, and always there was violence, and always strong rulers were needed to protect the nation from other nations (even though soldiers were expensive, and rulers stole from their people, and rulers got in the way of the development of the rest of the people). This is the model of competition, and violence, and xenophobia (us versus them), and why people behaved that way in the past is perfectly understandable. (That is, if you didn't behave that way you probably didn't survive.) This way of thinking is behind much of what we see in the world today.

However, as the evolution of humankind accelerated, humans became increasingly powerful. Humans multiplied, science advanced to the point where our use of resources threatens our existence, and armaments expanded to the point where we could easily destroy the world. Under these new circumstances, nations can't really go to war with one another (except for the underdeveloped ones), individualism won't work (because if we don't curb it we'll destroy the planet), and all the old beliefs and

arrangements that used to work in a world of relatively weak competing nations don't work today. What we are seeing is the failure of institutions (which can't be fixed, as they are based on unsound premises), and also a distrust of institutions (for example, the government and the clergy) which are part of the problem, and, indeed, a more general distrust and cynicism that we're going about things the wrong way (which we are). But, unfortunately, the old world order has the power, and the guns, and runs the governments, and quite probably things will get worse before they get better. In any event, most of the bad news that comes across our computer screens ultimately comes down to the death throes of the old world order.

The other process is the birth of a new world order. The ultimate principle is the unity of humankind. An example is the internet – now that everyone can communicate with everyone else our similarities are more obvious. Science is global, music is global, it's easy to travel to anywhere in the world, information is becoming global, commerce is global – the more people interact with one another the more obvious it becomes that there isn't any such thing as "us" and "them". The environmental movement is global. The masses prefer peace to war. In all likelihood, the new world order won't look anything like its first halting steps, but it's coming. To some the news can be understood as the birth, development and gradual unfolding of this new world order.

Quotations:

- The world is very different now. For man holds in his hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty, and all forms of human life. (John Kennedy)
- I most sincerely wish that the world in which we live be free from the threat of a nuclear holocaust and from the ruinous arms race. It is my cherished desire that peace not be separated from freedom which is the right of every nation. This I desire and for this I pray. (Lech Walesa)
- God is dead. (Friedrich Nietzsche)
- God must have been on leave during the Holocaust. (Simon Wiesenthal)
- It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity. (Albert Einstein)
- Since Hiroshima and the Holocaust, science no longer holds its pristine place as the highest moral authority. (Jonathan Sacks)
- If the people cannot trust the government to do the job for which it exists – to protect them and to promote their common welfare – all else is lost. (Barack Obama)

- How lofty is the station which man, if he but choose(s) to fulfill his high destiny, can attain! To what depths of degradation he can sink, depths which the meanest of creatures have never reached! (Baha'u'llah)

Questions for discussion:

- Select an event from the news – for example, a terrorist attack. To what extent does it represent “old world” thinking? How does (or how could) we respond with “new world” thinking?
- What are examples, from the national news, of the old and new world orders?
- What are examples, from your own experience, of the old and new world orders?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of participating in old world institutions – for example, partisan political campaigns?
- What can I do to hasten the advance of the new world order?
- Give an example when you have lost faith in an institution. How did you behave? What was the result?

Is God actually dead? Belief in an age of cynicism

Background materials:

More than one cartoonist has drawn the tombstone of Friedrich Nietzsche and written: "Nietzsche is dead -- God". For what it's worth what Nietzsche actually wrote was this: "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. Yet his shadow still looms. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives; who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves?" He also wrote: "In every real man is hidden a child that wants to play" – that one I understand. And also: "The surest way to corrupt a youth is to instruct him to hold in higher esteem those who think alike than those who think differently."

Nowadays, when people say that God is dead they probably mean that science has debunked religious explanations for various natural phenomena (e.g., the creation of earth, the creation of man), and holds promise that everything can eventually be explained through materialistic means.

Questions for discussion:

- Given that the existence of God can't be proven, what's the point of religion?
- Did science kill God by demonstrating that the way that humankind developed is neither miraculous nor as described by the holy books?
- Is it rational to believe in God?
- Is it rational to disbelieve in God?
- If religious authority is suspect, and thus the idea of an ultimate reward and punishment, why should we behave ethically?
- What elements of religious practice are superstitious and what elements are not?
- The attached short story ("Letter of Apology" discusses – among others – the apparent rift between science and religion -- what is the author trying to say?)
- What does "belief in an age of cynicism" mean to you?

Letter of Apology

By Greg Samsa

Dear Jesus:

I don't know what address to put on this letter of apology. When I was a child my parents would tell me to put a letter to you under my pillow, and even if it was there the next morning you'd have read it during the night. But then again, that pillow is the same place they told me to invoice the Tooth Fairy.

I sincerely apologize for reading the Bible but never really noticing you. Of course I could make excuses. All that stuff in the Old Testament about the Garden of Eden was self-evidently nonsense, as was Noah's ark, as was the parting of the Red Sea, and The History Channel pretty much has figured out that those were mostly tribal myths, although there might also have been a really big flood or two back in the day. When part of a book is self-evidently nonsense your temptation is to assume the same about the rest. I must have been reading the Bible with my mind rather than my heart.

I doubt those miracle stories the Gospels tell about you are entirely true, either. I suppose miraculous things are possible, but it's in the nature of tales to become taller on each retelling, and the people who were telling the tales thought physical miracles were important, and The History Channel figured out that the first of the Gospels wasn't written down until at least a generation after you had died, and so there was plenty of opportunity for exaggeration. Not to mention that hundreds of years later some leaders of the church got together and decided which stories they would keep and which ones they would drop, and over time the stories kept changing to fit the picture of you that people had inside their minds.

What I should have realized is that you don't care about physical miracles – that's in the Gospels plain and simple. The only reason you healed the sick is because they asked you to, and you were a very compassionate person who had compassion for them. Having sickness unexpectedly turn into health is unlikely but not impossible – that's

something I've seen happen with my own eyes. That stunt with Lazarus didn't happen as described, though, nor were you physically raised from the dead, either. Impossible isn't the same thing as unlikely.

So much of the Bible is so hard to wrap one's mind around. The Old Testament stories are exaggerated to the point of nonsense – I'll tell you for a fact that if Moses had actually parted the Red Sea and had a stick that turned into a snake and could strike a rock and make water come out I wouldn't have second-guessed him for 40 milliseconds, not to mention 40 years, and neither would anyone else.

All those letters from Paul seem to me to be saying that the test of faith is to believe something impossible – namely, that you were physically raised from the dead. Faith is the ability to believe in something unseen, not in something untrue. Paul helped start the rift between science and religion, and I don't read anything in the Gospels where you asked him to do so. Not to mention that The History Channel explains that the Gospels were also a sales pitch, and the people who wrote them were all in on a physical resurrection.

So much of what Paul writes seems to be about building a church, and even though churches do lots of good things they do some bad things, too, and at the end of the day a church is a human institution, and I doubt you were all that interested in churches. But maybe I'm reading the Bible with my mind rather than my heart.

The New Testament describes you as some sort of miraculous figure, and that's distracting, and they seem to suggest that you were out to build a church, and that's distracting – as I read the Gospels it seems to me that what you were mostly asking people to do was to love one another and to treat one another well and to spread some good news.

Not to mention that if those Old Testament stories were literally true then what you were asking us to do was to love one another, and if those Old Testament stories weren't literally true then what you were asking us to do was to love one another, and so what actually happened doesn't really matter, and when we argue about what actually happened what we aren't doing is loving one another.

The History Channel has figured out that the Gospels were written from shreds of stories that were circulating about you, and the sources were similar but not identical, and some of the Gospels were written down after the others – not to mention that the later things were written down the more exaggerated the stories became. It isn't quite like looking through the mirrors at the fun house, but when I read the stories it feels as if it's at least as much about the writer as their subject, and it comes down to "this is what I thought I saw when I met Jesus" or, perhaps more accurately, "this is what I thought I saw when someone told me about something they thought they saw when he met Jesus".

Part of the distracting thing about what people thought they saw is that some people thought they saw a man, and some people thought they saw God, and some people thought they saw a son of God, and some people thought they saw the only son of God, and the people who wrote down the Gospels put in their two cents' worth, and then the people who did the translating and the editing put in their two cents' worth, and I'm not really certain what any of those names mean, and I don't think most other people are either, but that hasn't stopped folks from arguing about it ever since.

Whether you are a man, or God, or the son of God, or the only son of God, you must realize that we'll take what you say and screw it up. You only wrote in the sand, and so much of what we chose to write about you was what we imagined we saw.

When we tried it the other way people wrote down everything Muhammad said, and he wasn't even dead before the meaning of his words had been forgotten, and people were so hungry for power that when he was on his deathbed they wouldn't even hand him a pen so he could write down the name of Ali as his successor, and Muhammad must have known that we'd screw it up.

Perhaps Adam was the first man in history to receive the call of Prophet-hood, and it must have been a very lonely world for him, because there wasn't even a word for what he was, and perhaps he knew that no matter how eloquently he taught all that would remain from his time on this planet was a fable about an apple and a talking snake.

And yet:

When I ignore the miracles, and just read the part of the stories where you speak, and even though the different versions of the same story don't use exactly the same words, the person who is speaking is quite obviously the same man, and that person speaks with the same voice in all the stories, and what he says is profound and beautiful and heavenly and true, and even 2,000 years later it gives me goose bumps to read it, and it is as if I am sitting at your feet. I am sorry that I so often read the Gospels with my mind rather than my heart.

I love this:

“Teacher: what is the greatest commandment in the law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Compassionate teacher: what I understand is that the law (or, indeed, a church, or the outward form of religion) can be a divine creation or a human one. Whether it is divine or human depends on the amount of love, which is the inward form of religion. You showed me the pure spring from which all else is derived. That truly is a miracle. Thank you.

Author's notes

One evening I was meditating about Buddha. It is well known that He was enlightened, and that He always behaved with kindness and consideration and compassion. The word Savior isn't the first one to come to mind – for most people, it's something along the lines of kind or compassionate instead. Savior is the word that many people attach to Jesus.

The substance of what Buddha taught – not to mention the actual words – is mostly lost to the ravages of time and to translation and to superstition. Some people say that

Buddha taught that the physical world is an illusion, and some people say that Buddha taught that there is no God. I suspect that what might actually have been said is that we have a physical nature and we have a spiritual nature, and the spiritual nature is the higher one, and so in that sense the spiritual nature is real and the physical nature not. I suspect that what might actually have been said is that we can't know God, and that what we do instead is to worship something that we imagine, and the thing that we imagine isn't real. But: who knows for certain?

I wondered to myself what it would have been like to sit at the feet of the compassionate Buddha. And that's when Jesus spoke to me across the sands of time, and I realized that His compassion was the same, and I realized that the stories from the Gospels were reports from people who had sat at His feet, and even though those stories weren't quite eyewitness accounts if I read the Bible with my heart I can take a seat in His garden any time I like. I realized that sitting at the feet of Buddha would have been the same.

I realized that not only could Buddha be called Compassionate Teacher, but Jesus as well. I realized that not only could Jesus be called Savior, but Buddha also. I realized that Jesus and Buddha and all the others have exactly the same heavenly qualities – and that they do so regardless of what we imagine we see.

It is one thing for my mind to think that the Prophets all taught the Golden Rule, and that the spiritual basis for each manifestation of the one religion of God is the same, and that what differs is only the social laws which are updated to keep up with the times. It is quite another for my heart to recognize that Jesus has all the compassion of Buddha, and Buddha all the authority of Jesus.

When I recognized this I thanked God, and my meditation ended.

