The Perennial Philosophy

By Hank Wesselman PhD. - February 7th, 2010 - 2 Comments

The perennial philosophy is a worldview that has been embraced by most of the world’s spiritual thinkers and teachers. The American philosopher Ken Wilber has written about it in his book Grace and Grit (1991), in which he calls the perennial philosophy “universal” because it can be found in virtually all cultures across the ages. Wherever it is found, it is essentially the same. This is really quite amazing as there is virtually nothing on which all people agree.

Wilber offers seven points that he considers to be most important, and so following his (considerable) lead, allow me to draw upon his shared wisdom and list them here for our consideration with my commentary.

Point Number One: Spirit exists.

This is an absolute given. This is the message of the mystics, whether we conceive Spirit to be an impersonal, transcendent and remote off-planet father-god who has good days and bad days, or whether we perceive Spirit as a personal, immanent and omni-present Force or Presence, whose primary (and only) expression is love.

Second Point: Spirit is found within.

All the great spiritual teachers across time have revealed in their teachings that Spirit, and by association?God?is not somewhere “up there.” Rather it is found within everything everywhere including ourselves. This essentially pantheistic perspective reveals that Spirit is transpersonal, yes? and yet it is also immanent.

It is through the visionary window that each of us may make connection with our immortal, transpersonal aspect, our Oversoul. And it is through our “god-self” that we may enter the “supernatural” realms of the spirit worlds or The Dreamtime, as the Australian Aboriginals call it.

We do this every night when we are asleep and dreaming. The trick lies in learning how to do it while we are awake. Hence my frequent reference to the shamanic method, an easily learned way to access our Oversoul and through it, the sacred and unseen realms of spirit.

You’ll also note that I put the word supernatural in quotes above. This is because this realm is not really super-natural at all, but rather it is the world of “things hidden” as opposed to the world of “things seen.” It’s quite simply the other half of the world we live in. And it’s not supernatural; it’s natural.
In addition, the modern mystic perspective reveals that Heaven is not somewhere “out there” or “up there”? It’s right here, right now, and it always has been? and this means that the direct experience of Heaven is, was, and forever will be, accessible to us all, no matter who we are or what we believe in, and all the time.

**Point Number Three:** Most of us have no idea that this is so because we live in a world of unrelenting distraction that creates separation.

This is the great challenge provided by our endless stream of glittering gadgets, from television to computers, from video games to ipods. Yet this challenge is also offered to us by some of the archetypal forces that are in relationship with us.

One of the most well known among these (as well as the most maligned) is the angelic force known as the Master of Illusion? the one that the Sumerians called Enki, the Persians called Ahriman, the Buddhists call Mara, the Babylonians Baal, and that the Judeo-Christians and Muslims call Satan.

Allow me to put in here that the Master of Illusion is not aligned with the archetype of evil. Not at all. Those who know affirm that this transpersonal force is actually one of the organizing intelligences?one took on a very specific job in order to be of service to humanity. It is its function to weave illusions and virtual realities that ensnare and captivate us, keeping us distracted so that we never find out who we really are, what this world is really all about, and what our place within the great mystery of existence actually is.

And by the way, this is also about Hollywood, the internet and the media as well. It?s about endless, meaningless sporting events, the sitcoms, television miniseries, and unending movies presenting the dark side of the human psyche to us as entertainment, including the game shows and news commentators whose job it is to entertain us? to captivate us, and (ostensibly) to inform us.

Yet this is and was and forever will be the challenge that the Master of Illusion has extended to us, and in the process, it has created separation. And it is through this experience of separation that we experience the world as dual?as us versus them? or whatever ?the other? might be.

Separation, quite simply, is an illusion, and this in turn reveals that Satan is actually a threshold guardian. When we see him for who and what he is, the game is over and we turn off the TV, the cell phone, the mindless surfing of the internet or gaming in virtual reality? and in doing so we pass the test? and then we?re free. It?s really about freedom? isn?t it?

**Original Sin**

Now? since we have brought up the issue of separation, we could also mention the Christian concept of Original Sin.

History reveals that this was an out and out fabrication, an illusion created by a political schism between the Eastern and Western branches of the early Christian church in the third and fourth centuries. (See historian Elaine Pagel?s book Adam, Eve and the Serpent as well as Tom Harpur?s The Pagan Christ for edification.)

It was during a fateful meeting between these two powerful political forces at the council of Nicea in 321 AD that the cryptic Garden of Eden myth was transformed from a symbolic story of liberation into the
condemnation of Original Sin.

You see?from the shamanic perspective, Eden is actually the shamanic Lower World?the dream world of Nature from which humanity emerged. Adam and Eve are mythic symbols of the first sentient man and the first sentient woman, and together, they represent the dawn of human self-awareness.

The tree of life in the garden is the axis mundi, the transpersonal link or passage that connects the three levels of the Dreamtime?Lower, Middle and Upper Worlds. And the great serpent is regarded in virtually every culture as the archetype of superior knowledge and wisdom.

In giving the apple to humanity, the great serpent offered us the gift of knowledge, and by association self-awareness. But to whom did this archetypal force offer the gift?

The Women! And whom did the women elect to share the gift with? The Men!

The church fathers couldn?t handle this in the 4th Century?hence they created a myth that demonized both the great archetype of wisdom, the serpent, as well as the women of power and knowledge, who were condemned for all time for their ?original sin? of accepting the gift? and we in the Western world have been dealing with this one for 1700 years.

But I digress?

To return to our consideration of the perennial philosophy, the inside message of point number three is that we are all living in a fallen or illusory state (both self-imposed as well as inflicted upon us by church and state and culture alike in the form of false belief systems) and this is the cause of our pain and our suffering. This brings us to?

Point Number Four: There is a way out of this state of delusion and confusion?

In considering this point, we could observe that hundreds of millions of concerned citizens in the Western world today are totally confused as to what is or is not going on, what is or is not important, as well as who they are and what they are supposed to be doing here.

This confusion has been enhanced and furthered by the false beliefs created and spread by our politicians, our organized religions, as well as by the media who serve them (not to mention the Master of Illusion). From the perspective of the perennial philosophy, it could be observed that the politicians, our religious leaders and the media are working hand in hand with that archetypal force, although most don?t know it, nor would they ever admit it, because they too are ensnared in this state of delusion and confusion.

What is important to say here is that there is only one way out of confusion and despair? through the direct, personal experience of Spirit.

This alone?not ceremony, not prayer, not meditation, not political caucus, not belief nor faith in God or in Jesus as our savior will lead us there. The direct experience of Spirit alone leads us into personal transformation. But?

Point Number Five: We have to choose it?
The power of choice is a function of our egoic self, our mental soul aspect. If we choose to accept the call to adventure and take this path? if we choose to transcend belief and faith and directly experience things as they really are? and if we choose to follow this path to its conclusion, the end result brings us into the direct experience of Spirit that, in turn, leads us into the irreversible vortex of personal awakening, known in the East as enlightenment.

But we have to choose it. This is not about sinking back into our comfortable belief systems and faiths that can be greatly sustaining in the short term because if we do, not much happens to change our lives for the better in the long term.

**Point Number Six**: When we choose this experience, it brings us inevitably toward the liberation that marks the end of our pain and suffering, delusion and separation?

It also conveys to each of us the experience of authentic initiation.

This path is the hero’s journey, and that journey is always and forever the same. We will talk about this in a future article posted under Shaman Wisdom.

This brings us finally to:

**Point Number Seven**: Having successfully completed our version of the journey, we ascend to the next level of our soul’s evolution to become world redeemers.

At this point, our primary goal becomes the alleviation of pain and suffering in the world, and we then live and act differently from the more ordinary people. We think and feel and speak from a place in which the practice of compassionate action on behalf of all sentient beings becomes our all-consuming task.

At the moment that we achieve this level, we step up to become more highly evolved souls in service to our colleagues, friends, and family members, and even humanity at large, all those who are still entrapped in Samsara?the world of illusion?assisting them so that they may step up to the next level in their own personal evolution as souls traveling across eternity.

This is not about missionizing the ignorant, the unready and the unwilling. It is not our job to inflict the experience of self-realization upon others, because it simply doesn’t work that way. The experience unfolds in layers for those who are prepared, for those heroes who are ready, willing, and able to assume the chase.

Our great Hawaiian friend Hale Makua was fond of observing that the negative polarity of the priest/priestess/missionary is zeal.

The negative polarity is not necessarily bad although it certainly can be. The negative polarity is where we learn our own life lessons. It is also here that we learn that nothing can be accomplished on behalf of ourselves or others when we are in the negative polarity.

In the positive polarity, the practice of the priest/shaman/mystic is, and forever will be, about compassion? and about compassionate action, thought, feeling, speech, and relationship with ?the other,? whoever and whatever the other might be.
It is only in the positive polarity, not the negative, that the spiritual teacher or practitioner can be a healer or a teacher by example, and thus a world-redeemer.

This is the Bodhisattva path on which exalted souls walk?those who have completed their evolutionary cycle as embodiments and who are ready to step back into eternity and return to the Source? to the One? yet who choose to postpone their own salvation so that they may return again and again, coming back into this world of pain and suffering in order to be of service to all those still stuck in their stuff.

The ?perennial philosophy? is a term that was coined by the philosopher Count Leibnitz, a panpsychist who knew from direct experience that Nature is God.

When we as individuals come to realize this as well, we must accept the fact that we are and forever will be, part of Nature. This means that when we abuse Nature in any way, shape or form, we abuse God? and by association, we abuse ourselves as manifested and embodied aspects of the god-essence within Nature.

Understanding this allows us to know the absolute truth that all of reality, including all of us, our souls and our consciousness, our animal and plant colleagues and our earth, water and air are actually aspects of The One.

And yet it is true that The One is also experienced as The Many?that it is immanent yet also transcendent, existing within every moment and at every level of reality, from amoebas and worms to eagles and human beings, from rocks and oceans and rivers to stars and galaxies and universes.

The One is, and has always been, formless and non-dual, as well as the Source of the dream from which the manifested All has emerged, including ourselves. It is The Light Beyond the Form, and The Formless beyond the Light. Yet it is when it is expressed into our world of form that the One becomes dual.

With warm thoughts?Dr Hank

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