

INTRODUCTION

During the last ten years, a spiritual renaissance has migrated from India to nearly every corner of the world in the form of the oneness teachings. These lessons have helped millions of people understand that the Second Coming of Christ is an internal shift in perception, a recognition that a divine spark exists within every human being. Each of us can spiritually awaken, or reach a higher level of awareness, when we grasp that everyone is a piece of individualized consciousness that binds all creation. This is the core idea of the oneness movement.

When people move into this field of consciousness, or

into oneness, it is a beautiful thing to watch. Often, they are unaware of their surroundings because they are bathed in a state of bliss and joy; they temporarily become weak at the knees and often need support to walk for a short period of time. You see light emanating from their faces. I've experienced this myself, but also witnessed this many times in others. For spiritual teachers, such experiences affirm their greatest hope and deepest desire: that God exists and is active in our lives, and that once we discover truth and experience divine love, we will be permanently changed. We feel illuminated and see our potential. And then it's not much of a stretch to believe that the entire planet can change...and suddenly, it seems effortless because we know we are an extension of everything.

However, living this truth is an entirely different matter. After the realization or workshop, when we advance to the next round of self-development, we meet an entirely new set of daily challenges that come with being an embodiment of truth. How do we make sense of what we know after having felt one with all creation? With God? Can we go home, watch a movie, eat a pizza, and still be spiritual? The short answer is yes, we can. The oneness teachings help us learn to love ourselves and each other, and just get more out of every experience. We begin to appreciate the present moment with a sense of overwhelming gratitude. There is more joy in everything.

The oneness teachings are for everyone

The teachings pertain to knowing oneself within the broad scope of human experience. These simple but deeply spiritual lessons are grounded in science, psychology, the New Testament, and the Upanishads. They are based upon the joy of being and the strong sense that God is near, present

in nature, and within us. They have helped thousands get to know the Divine. They are practical and dogma-free. Dogma has left many in the West spiritually barren, because it cannot provide an actual, live experience of the Divine Presence and because it accumulates around Jesus's teachings like a dense fog. For many spiritual seekers who are interested in the mystical dimension of Christianity, the oneness teachings open up new insights about their faith. That's why the teachings and the retreats, which have a big experiential element, are appealing to Westerners.

On a personal note, what led me to the oneness teachings was my emotional suffering associated with a family member involved in addiction, not a search for a peak mystical experience, nor a search for proof that God existed. I had plenty of faith, yet after twenty-five years of spiritual journeying—of personal growth, self-analysis, and different kinds of spiritual processes with both Christian teachers and Indian masters, who also transferred divine energy to me through the head and broadened and healed me on multiple levels—I still suffered. I functioned, saw the value of the present moment, and acknowledged all life was God, yet I still felt disconnected. Life seemed black and white. I could not heal myself, and had no inner peace. Despite a commitment to healthy living, exercise, positive thinking, and prayer, this internalized stress continued to manifest in several physical illnesses. I learned that some traumas reside in the energy layers of our bodies, and determined that, without some sort of mystical help, I would be unable to let go of the past.

At this point, I remember wondering what it would feel like to crawl inside the heart of God, as the mystics described, and feel the Divine Presence. It is one thing to intellectually understand God is at work in your life, but to feel this

energy and merge with it, even for short periods of time, is an entirely different matter. We are experiential beings, and capable of communion with God, yet we don't know how to commune with him because he seems so remote and we "fall asleep" spiritually. We desire restoration to wholeness, yet do not remember we are already here. The tiniest atom cannot be left behind, nor be outside of this magnificent whole, yet we do not see it, because our past mental programming and experiences get in the way.

A series of serendipitous incidences steered me to several oneness retreats in the U.S., then later Fiji and India, where I deepened my connection with the Presence and my understanding of the oneness teachings. I showed up, began to learn about grace, and apply it in my own life. It revitalized my interest in Jesus and awakened my heart so that my relationships with people, food, work, and nearly everything else improved. Although nobody from the oneness community made any promises about enlightenment, about awakening into a state of oneness with God, or about having any mystical experiences, the energy work the oneness guides offered in concert with the oneness teachings were just beautiful. They were practical and progressive, but not meant to be a quick fix. Rather, they were just a way to enrich our point of view and heal ourselves. Only then can we heal others and our world.

Flavored with elements of yogic spirituality, the oneness teachings include practices that can help anyone experience the same profound connection to the Divine that a mystic feels. They are enjoyed by everyone—not just Buddhists, New Agers, Muslims, or Jesus lovers—because the teachings speak to our potential to realize our unity with God. When Jesus looked deeply within for this truth, and experienced his own awakening, he realized he was an expression of

this unity and knew all people had the same potential to live in this divine dimension. Like Jesus, we must look within ourselves and learn to reveal God through our own humanity. There is an openness that is joyously ours when we revitalize our connection to each other and experience an energy exchange with the universal life-force we call the Presence. Expressing this higher-level consciousness is the highest form of love, which gives each experience meaning and substance. This is the definition of conscious living.

If you feel congested by certain aspects of the church experience or even wounded by the idea of Christianity, or if you are among those who are simply curious, you can still read this book. This teaching is not meant to sell “oneness trips,” or encourage you to seek mystical experiences in order to heal your troubled mind and heart. I could never promise that you and I will both come into contact with the Presence in the same way, nor would I suggest we should even travel on the same spiritual path. Rather, this book encourages you to love and know reality at a very deep and connected level, rather than seeking a psychic or peak experience. And whether you keep Jesus close in your heart, reexamine his ideas from a safe distance, or feel you don’t need Jesus at all, it does not matter. The oneness teachings are not contradictory to the Christian faith, but are interfaith, like a universal wireframe in which you, the webmaster, can drop images and text to create your own unique spiritual homepage. Of course, God hosts your page, which is always flavored with your own ideas and belief system.

At this time in history, we are observing the birth pains of a world civilization striving for a new way of being, one that wants support from a new, shared consciousness, one that respects individuality but recognizes the same divine light lives in everyone. Today, people already sense an

urgency to shift their perceptions, but they can't articulate why they need to change, only that every sphere of human existence, whether it is education, politics, science, or medicine, seems to be accelerating, and something needs to be done. Most of us are eager to find a tidy path to the eternal truth—the Hindu Sanatana Dharma, or the eternal principles of righteousness that uphold the universe in ways that help us better understand life. Since the oneness lessons are sensible and contemporary, they can show us a practical way to live with more wisdom, maturity, and self-reflection through this period of planetary growth. Not only do they speak to our acceleration into a new world without divisiveness and separation, but they are also grounded in the oneness of all things—oneness in nature, oneness of matter and consciousness, and the indivisible relationship between human being and God.

Looking East expands our spiritual understanding

However you find your way to the kingdom in your travels and contemplations, I will unequivocally say that India, with all her contradictions, monks, temples, and thousands of images of the Creator, has always pointed my attention inward when I'm seeking a relationship with the Divine Presence. A great spiritual wealth exists in India. Religion seems less important than a willingness to find a direct, personal bond with All That Is. Whether you're inhaling incense during a Homa, making a holy pilgrimage, or visiting through the writings of gifted gurus and yogic masters, there is something in India's numerous wisdom traditions that both enriches and rejuvenates your unique communion with Spirit. No matter what you believe, India will offer you a wide variety of spiritual guidance to

expand your ideas about who God is and what Jesus was here to do.

As a unity-minded Jesus lover and a nonliteralist, I don't buy into the concept of original sin. I believe Jesus was both human and divine; he's an example of humanity's potential, not the exception. He assured each of us that we could rise to the same level of consciousness through effort, reflection, and loving God supremely. I don't think spiritual evolution is a reward for subscription to a correct belief system. But for many people, it has been difficult to reconcile the whole gist of traditional Christian dogma and "churchianity" with his guidelines for living as presented in the Gospels. In this respect, discussions of metaphysics, mysticism, or grace, which we can gain from Vedic philosophy and Indian yogic commentary, make his teachings clearer.

As an extraordinary teacher of the divine law in all manifestations, Jesus gave us the ideal principles by which we can govern our lives in the sight of God. He was a reflection of God the Father in creation and evolved his consciousness to become one with God himself. He offered us the keys to unlock our awareness of our own divine spark, our God-self, which is perfect in every way. Because we are all individual sparks of divinity who spiritually awaken at our own pace, there is no eternal damnation or hell, and certainly no innocent child is born in sin, doomed in the afterlife if they don't accept Jesus as a personal savior. Like Jesus, the yogis teach that there is nothing to be saved from, other than our own erroneous thinking, negative conditioning, and belief systems that create a wide variety of nasty realities and suffering during this lifetime and others.

We get lots of opportunities to fix ourselves, which is the good news I missed in church school. Because our Christ consciousness is latent within every soul on this planet, all

people are capable of achieving the same level of enlightenment and mastery as Jesus. Life is guaranteed to improve when we decide to see the good (God) in everyone and consciously apply his lessons. Life's great when we choose to elevate ourselves from our son-of-man consciousness—our physical body limited by sensory boundaries—to a state of unity with God, a state that is blissful and filled with love, light, and optimism. In this way, our shared destiny is to become Christed or Christ lighted. All of us. And being saved means that, when we finally rise to meet our God-self and a higher state of conscious awareness, we break the cycle of suffering and are illuminated by inseparable unity with all creation.

Life is an interfaith dialogue

I departed from the traditional Sunday ritual because I wanted to figure out what the mystics and sages have said about these truths and how to work with them in our everyday lives. I wanted to search for a deeper and more substantive meaning of the eternal truth, but I couldn't find it in the Bible until I read beyond it. Paramahansa Yogananda, a yogic master and preeminent spiritual figure of the early twentieth century, was fully attuned to the infinite Christ consciousness. He led people of all faiths to a deeper understanding of the Bible and Jesus. His work was a celebration of the powerful message of the Gospels and was a triumphant merge of Eastern and Western ideas, from the Bible to the Bhagavad Gita and Nag Hammadi. He wrote extensively about his personal realization of the Divine, and encouraged us to deeply contemplate the New Testament with regard to our human interaction in all matters, stressing our intimate relationship with God and with each other. Along with many other modern Hindu saints and Christian mystics, such as Ramacharaka, Kriyananda, Sri Yukteswar,

Lahiri Mahasaya, Meister Eckhart, St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Teresa of Avila, Yogananda moved us toward a more mature and reflective spiritual search. These mystics and saints urged us to rediscover the symbolic language that structures very complex ideas. Contemporary teachers, such as Thomas Moore, David Wallace, Steven Hairfield, Russill Paul, Andrew Harvey, Joseph Campbell, Wayne Teasdale, John Shelby Spong, and many others have taught us how to examine scripture on many levels, from the historical and cultural to the metaphysical, and explore the rich messages that help us create balanced physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual lives.

I decided to do the same and expand my thinking. I read outside my own theology and spiritual perspective, including the prolific teachings of today's self-help writers, modern-day monks, ministers, former priests, and psychologists who understood the major ideas of both spiritual traditions. I studied for many years, got a PhD, attended religious classes and the seminary, wrote books, taught, and reflected upon my own life journey.

After examining other scriptures, such as the Gita and the Vedas, I was led to the wisdom in the noncanonical and Gnostic gospels. I even read the opinions of those who rejected such thinking. But, overall, I found two thought-provoking ideas that repeatedly migrated between the holy works and popular literature of Eastern and Western scholars: (1) we are bound together by our unity and shared abilities, and (2) God is omnipresent and exists within every individual. I find nothing contradictory about those ideas, only an invitation to find oneness in this shared expression we call life.

As someone who has built a happy and peaceful spiritual nest with Indian yogis and Christian mystics, both modern

and ancient, one thing is apparent to me after my many years of study: Jesus never wanted religion to be an exercise in elitism or dogmatic fundamentalism. Nor is lifeless secularism the answer; rather, Jesus invites us to embrace a spirituality that empowers and sustains us from our very souls, where there is ample room for free choice and faith. Truth, as he taught, was for everyone, from the meek to the magnanimous, and God's glory is so great it should not matter how one communes with God in one's heart. For some of us, there appear to be elements of Christianity and its tenets that neither illuminate nor seem welcoming to many groups because of their emphasis on exclusivity. To me, a religious practice ought to make a person feel whole and nurtured, not trapped and unable to express his or her own brand of uniqueness. Faith and an emotional attachment to a religion ought to be balanced with reason and create space within individuals so they can grow personally.

The more unity-minded I become, the more certain I am that humanity's true church is a state of consciousness in which we realize divine potential within every child of God. Writing, research, meditation, prayer, yoga, and teaching constitute my unconventional spiritual practices today and are part of my "church" wherever I go. It's my way of life. As my husband lovingly reminds me, I am in church all day long. I have become completely annoying to live with, as I frequently point out some connection between an aspect of everyday life and its possible deeper meaning. At least once a day, his eyes roll and he tries to get away when he senses my urge to point out an Upanishad or New Testament lesson in a TV commercial or at the market ("You know," I casually say, "this piece of bread reminds me of something interesting..."). Oh well. I'm still learning patience and lightheartedness from him, so I suppose it's a good trade at the end of the day.

Grace flows through all aspects of your life

Through my studies, I slowly came to know that the Divine Presence was fully at work in my life. It was like grace notes in music. I recognized that even days filled with banality or suffering had value and held moments of grace. In a musical piece, grace notes are those light, tiny accents that embellish the principal note. They are ornaments to a larger note or sound, and help create the beauty of a raga, jazz, or classical piece. Intuitively, when we learn to hear our own experiences as a musical expression, both joyful and despondent, and also see grace beautifully drawing our attention to what's really there, we are hearing and seeing life as an intricate and harmonious creation designed for our benefit and evolution. Jesus, the great example of the Christ, or the God-reflection in humanity, showed us the way to be in communion with life as a total sensory experience. He also showed us the value of mental, spiritual, and emotional balance. He demonstrated wholeness, a way to live in conjunction with the unity of God. Wholeness is an idea that never ceases to impress me. Even in front of the bread counter.

Birthing ourselves to a higher order

We need to broaden our intellectual parameters, rely on common sense, and strive for personal and spiritual growth in order to preserve future generations' quality of life. There is no greater reason to awaken than this, as our world culture seems to be falling into a deep abyss filled with hatred and misery. Every individual must accept his or her own divinity, know they are one with God, and transform himself or herself accordingly. We can no longer sustain our personal and world relationships without recognizing

the omnipresent intelligence in every particle of creation, and this intelligence includes what we see in the mirror. Spiritual transformation first occurs within, when we act in accordance with self-love and acceptance. Only later can any positive vision be manifested externally in the form of peace and goodwill toward everyone. Until humanity sees itself as a reflection of Spirit and rises in consciousness, we will never rise to our true potential. These tasks are essential for our survival as a species.

Linking with the divine presence

As any spiritual guide or teacher worth their salt will tell you, the teachings of Jesus the master are owned by all humanity. Those lessons can help us probe into the darkest and most uninspired corners of our lives and find hope. But his statements may seem multilayered and cryptic, and need to be carefully unpacked if we want to understand their richness and gain insight into what makes humankind tick. Even if you look at tiny pieces of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John (plus the noncanonical gospel of Thomas), the passages carry vibrations of purity and truth that leap out from the text, despite the numerous translations. There is definitely something in there worth reading, but for most people, the eternal truth is hard to find in the Bible. That is why I believe modern spiritual seekers need a blend of teachings to best understand Christ consciousness and how to achieve it. Consequently, the concepts discussed in this book form a big roadmap toward our own unique human-divine experience. No single program, sacred text, or organized religion can fix us; no self-help process, philosophy, or belief system can be all-encompassing and facilitate world peace.

Today, if we want to understand enlightenment, Jesus's spiritual practices, and his higher streams of consciousness,

or even the magnitude of God's grace, it's helpful to spend time with people who direct our attention to the experience of unity and are alive on the planet today. Reading sacred texts is very different from feeling a real link with God and the cosmic vibration in such a way that we want to continually pursue this connection in our every expression. In the East, they say a level of spiritual mastery is passed from teacher to student by the teacher's physical presence. Masters or avatars transmit energy to seekers, elevating them to levels of awareness they could not obtain on their own. Therefore, we are lucky to encounter teachers such as Sri Amma and Sri Bhagavan, founders of the Oneness University in India, whose lessons on separation, the ego, and our connection with each other as human beings have enriched my own perspective on life over the past five years. These spiritual teachers have incarnated on earth to awaken people to the nature of their divine self. They will invite you to meditate with them and link to their consciousness, simply for the sake of elevating your own. They want you to feel God's presence, not theirs. If you don't want them to be your gurus, it doesn't matter, because what they are interested in is your desire to evolve your consciousness. They are like energy elevators, and help you get a little closer to your own experience of the Divine Presence.

Bhagavan's mission of eliminating suffering and encouraging people to understand the unity of all things has been in concert with deeksha, or the "oneness blessing." He views this transfer of Divine grace as an important step to God-realization. Likewise, Amma offers healing blessings and comforts the masses like a mother. They see deeksha as a way for God and human to come together and relate. Bhagavan has always seen everyone as spiritual seekers and welcomes any wisdom tradition that helps individuals love

God more deeply. And if you don't have a tradition, it's still okay. In his eyes, everyone has the potential to flower into the divine human they already are. God is active and ever present in those who are deeply sincere and drawn to divine grace, and, as Kriyananda says, it's nice to have someone who has been empowered to assume the job of guiding you out of your fixations, born of ego consciousness, to perfect your self-realization.

Personal teachers are not unique to Eastern traditions; in the Eastern Orthodox Church, which is as ancient as the Roman Catholic Church, this person is your staretz, a living spiritual guide, your personal link to Christ. Likewise, the Bhagavad Gita says, "One moment in the company of a saint can be your raft over an ocean of delusion," so attuning your consciousness to a saint, a guru, or an awakened one who is free from ego consciousness and fully aware that God is the sole reality is one way you can awaken to your bitter or unproductive mental tendencies. You can then heal yourself and reach upward toward more spiritual goals in life. For me, receiving Bhagavan's energy through his blessings, and also receiving his energy through other blessing givers, began to redirect my brain molecules and reawakened my interest in Jesus. It has been odd, but also supremely fulfilling, and has taken nothing away from my own faith.

For these reasons, and for Bhagavan's lessons as given to me by the oneness guides who studied with him, I am eternally grateful. These guides want us to go deep within to explore our suffering, see reality for what it is, and open our minds to a new way for humankind to exist. It is an abstract vision, but one that resonates with love and honesty, regardless of our personalities or politics. Bhagavan has always been controversial, and he will probably remain so, but he visualizes life for every individual without any

separation from God. In my experience, liberation from the concept of separation has allowed me to fully explore a more loving bond with God and, as a result, has enhanced every one of my relationships. I am extremely fortunate to have so many teachers who have challenged me to discover this simple truth.

Because of the healing and guidance I received from the Oneness University guides, I've rediscovered my own faith as a lover of God, and often can't decide what to call myself. Some days, I'm a suburban mystic with Hindu undertones, other days, a unity-minded, deeksha-giving Christian. Thankfully, however, in the worldwide oneness community there is no need for such labels or names. We are the same family, seeking higher-level consciousness. Religious labels seem to negate the very essence of what oneness or unity attempts to convey, as a Buddhist, Hindu, New Ager, Pagan, Muslim, or Christian will elevate the collective consciousness by his or her alignment with Buddha, Krishna, the universe, the Goddess, Allah, or Jesus.

Humankind already shares a set of unity teachings. These are not owned by anyone or any organization. They are simply there and bring us to the center of our faith and personal truth. Today, the Oneness University's guides, as well as Amma and Bhagavan, want you to love God for the sake of loving, because it is much easier to love another human being when we learn to love the Divine Presence and regularly see God within. They want you to open your heart, have an immense feeling of connection with others and the natural world, and perceive reality as it is, without the conditioned filters and unceasing interpretations of the ancient mind. Essentially, that is their mission. If you embrace this point of view and open up to your own potential, whether you got it from Sri Amma Bhagavan, Jesus, or the

mailman, it doesn't matter. It just means you have made the shift to awakening, and birthed the Christ consciousness in your being. Once it is delivered, you can expand from there. And it's a beautiful process.

Your spiritual growth begins now

Above all, know that your journey never begins where you want to be. It starts exactly where you are today, in this moment. All you need is the desire to grow in consciousness and open yourself to new possibilities. Dr. Steven Hairfield, author of *A Metaphysical Interpretation of the Bible*, once said a teacher merely confirms the essence of what you know. That's true. I cannot teach you anything you don't already resonate with. All I can do is share my stories and know that, by doing so, I'm moving my own journey forward and walking beside you on yours. Because I am raising my vibration, and because my words are present in your thoughts, I am helping you elevate your consciousness through these teachings. This thought pattern, along with the blessing that is included energetically in every copy of this book, will translate into some form of learning. Thus, this book is not meant to be one of those usual self-help guides to enlightenment, but rather a gentle nudge to point you toward ways to expand your heart and mind. Your true awakening will be a result of your own genuine lessons, discoveries, experiences, and perspectives on life.

No matter who your mentor may be or what your wisdom tradition is, after reading this book you may find that the Christ-self is none other than the Atman or the Spirit that dwells within you. It is the image and likeness of God in which we were all created. This realization alone gives you greater power to reclaim yourself and will enrich all areas of

your life. There is no better or bigger reason for realizing the unity of all beings.

I am deeply honored to be of service to you during your process.

Om shanti and many blessings,

Reverend Dr. Charlene M. Proctor

Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

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