

## Chapter 2

# The Whole Page of REALITY

Picture in your mind a large blank piece of paper. Call that paper "REALITY." If we were to use Taoist vocabulary, we could call it "The Way" – not the particular way that you or I might live our lives but the Eternal Way, The Way It Is, or The Way It Moves.

If we use Muslim vocabulary we could call it "Allah." "Allah" means "The God." The core teaching of Islam proclaims, "There are no gods except The God." This teaching might also be stated as: "There is no reality except The REALITY."

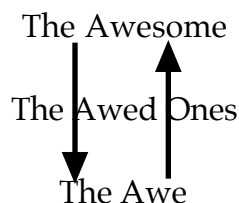
So understood, this teaching is much more profound than commonly noticed. Each of us has a slightly different view of reality, but our individual sense of reality is not REALITY. There is no reality except The REALITY. Each culture has its own very different way of approaching REALITY. There is the Oriental approach, the Sub-Asian approach, the European approach, the Arabic approach, the Black-African approach, the Native-American approach, and others. But none of these approaches to reality are REALITY. There is no reality except The REALITY. There is not your reality and my reality and someone else's reality, there is just REALITY.

In Christian heritage this Master REALITY is divided into three subparts. These three subparts do not fracture the Oneness of REALITY; they are best understood as three faces of the one experience of the ONE REALITY. In the first book of this series, *The Call of the Awe*, I described in some detail how these three faces can be understood as: the Awesome, the Awed Ones, and the Awe itself.

The Awesome is REALITY experienced by a human being as outward encounter. The Awesome is that Mysterious Otherness seen to be operative in the Big Bang, in the flaring forth of all things, in the unfolding stages of the cosmos, in the origin and evolution of life on this planet, in the events of human history, and in the daily happenings of each individual life.

The Awe is REALITY experienced by a human being as an inward state of awareness. Awe is what is happening inwardly when the Awesome is encountered outwardly. Inward and outward are one happening, but the conscious core of a human being experiences each experience as having two faces: the outward encounter and the inward appropriation and response. In our deepest awareness, we can experience that these two faces are one. REALITY is objectively Awesome, and REALITY is Awe bubbling up inside. No Awe is experienced except in the presence of the Awesome, and no Awesome is experienced unless some human experienter is filled with Awe.

The experience of REALITY has one more face – namely, the ordinary member of our species who is encountering the Awesome and is filled with Awe. This face is best pictured as a two-way motion: (1) The Awesome moving through the surrounding natural and social processes, then through the inner personal and natural life of the Awed Ones, and on to the innermost depths where Awe occurs and (2) The Awe moving outwardly through the natural and personal life of the Awed Ones, through all the surrounding social and natural processes, back to the Awesome. Here is a diagram to help us hold that image in mind.



The Awed One is no superbeing but only Jesus of Nazareth (or you or me) standing before the Awesome and filled with Awe. The Awed One is also Siddhartha Gautama standing before the Awesome and filled with Awe. Siddhartha is the Awakened One or the Buddha only because this ONE REALITY has taken him in. And Jesus is the Awaited One or the Anointed One or the Christ only because this ONE REALITY has taken him in. And you or I find our home in our own Essential Humanity only because this same ONE REALITY takes us in.

The Jesus we find in the pages of the New Testament is a literary figure, a symbol for the full realization of being the Awed One. It is also important to note that the teachings of the New Testament do not put Jesus on an inaccessible pedestal, but claim that all those ordinary human beings who follow in his wake can also be the Awed Ones who stand before the Awesome and are filled with Awe.

Similarly, the Buddha, in the heritage of Buddhism, is a literary figure, a symbol for the full realization of being the Awakened One. It is also important to note that the teachings of Buddhism also claim that all those ordinary human beings who follow in the Buddha's wake can also become the Buddha, the Awakened One.

Whether we use the term "Awakened" or "Awed" or simply "Spirit," we are attempting to say with fragile human words what we mean by "Essential Humanity."

In classical Hinduism the Awesome is commonly called "Brahman" and the Awe "Atman." The Hindu phrase "That I Am" means Brahman (That) and Atman (I) are united. Hinduism and Buddhism have focused on inward states of being and the personal experience of essential realization. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have focused on relationship, on the two-way motion between the Awesome and the Awe, the "I-Thou" relationship that defines the Awed Ones. Both ways of symbolizing this primal experience have their own magic, their own gifts to the healing of our estrangements and the realization of our Essential Humanity.

The main point I want to make with these references to prominent religions is this: there are many religious approaches to REALITY but the REALITY they approach is ONE mysterious, surrounding, and indwelling actuality. A second crucial point is this: contrary to the view of some secular sociologists, every society has need of religious practices. The social process of religion is an inevitable part of human society; it is no less essential than economic processes, political processes, or educational processes. When an economic system has become corrupt, we do not propose to do away with all economics. When an educational system has become corrupt, we do not propose to do away with all education. Similarly, corrupt or dysfunctional religion does not recommend the abandonment of religion; it is a challenge to create vital religion.

Vital religion is a depth approach to REALITY. When religion is dysfunctional or seemingly absent, something else is functioning as a substitute for religion. Various forms of communism have functioned as quasi-religions. Various forms of capitalism have functioned as quasi-religions. Various forms of nationalism have functioned as quasi-religions. Various forms of psychology have functioned as quasi-religions. Various forms of humanism have functioned as quasi-religions. I am using the word "quasi-religion" to mean a set of beliefs purporting to connect us to REALITY but attempting to do so without connecting us to Mystery, to the Awesome, to the Awe, to the essential humanity we experience in being the Awed Ones.

Awe is not a sideline in human life. Awe as wonder or reverence for life is central for the effective living of human life. Awe includes Trust of the basic structures of being, Compassion for every being, and the Freedom to act in ways that are innovative beyond all current imagination. A quasi-religion does not adequately manifest these qualities. A quasi-religion is a failed attempt to fill the gap left in a given society by the abandonment of functional religion.

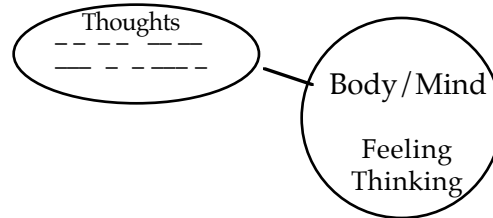
Dysfunctional religion deserves to be abandoned, but a fully vital society requires that dysfunctional religion be replaced with vital religion.

The function of vital religion is to assist human beings to access their Essential Humanity, their Awe-filled, Trust-filled, Compassion-filled, Freedom-filled actual being. My aim in this book is to show how Essential Humanity (understood as the Awed Ones) is the foundation needed for envisioning an appropriate society for our times and for building effective strategies that can move humanity toward a practice of such society.

As we will see, human society must be perpetually reenvisioned and perpetually built and rebuilt. The appropriate next society is not a rational ideal to which we will one day arrive. An appropriate society is Spirit taking form, but this sociological form is never synonymous with the Spirit that sired and birthed it. Spirit or Awe is the REALITY-established Essence of each individual person. In each and every generation, groups of persons who have, in some measure, realized their Spirit Essence are thereby challenged to build appropriate society. I will be exploring what appropriate society might be for this generation and how such appropriate society can be built. But first, I must clarify further what I mean by "Essential Humanity."

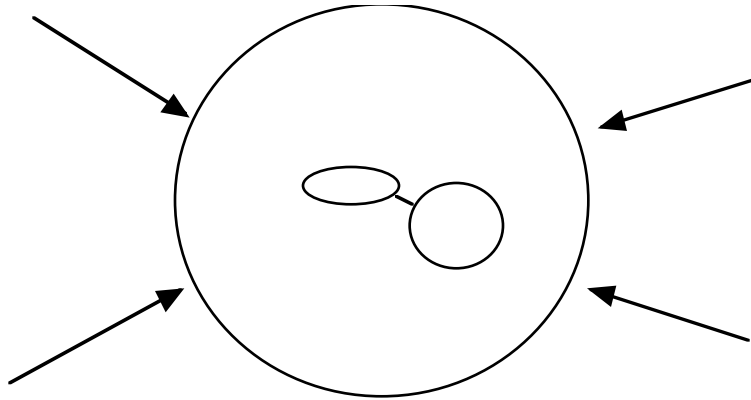
### The Finite Human Person

Let us return in our imagination to that whole, blank sheet of paper which we entitled "REALITY." Upon that sheet of paper let us draw a picture of the individual human person. Each person is a finite body/mind complexity who has sensations, desires, emotions, and other bodily feelings. In addition, each body/mind does some thinking. It is natural for the mind to think, but the thoughts themselves are a step removed from the natural reality of the body/mind and its feelings. I will picture the thoughts of the mind as words within an oval, like those we see in cartoon strips.



This picture reminds us that **thinking** and **feeling** are both natural processes and thus part of our authentic biological being, but **thoughts** are symbolizations, reflections, abstractions about life, not life itself. Thinking helps us increase our consciousness of REALITY, but thoughts are not synonymous with the REALITY they point to. Feelings are the body's signals telling us some immediate truth about our conscious relationships with REALITY. If our relations with REALITY are illusory, then the emotions produced by those illusory relations are information about how our life is estranged. If our relations with REALITY are open (thus Awe filled) then the emotions produced by those realistic relations are information that can guide our realistic living. Our emotions always tell us truth, but it is a truth that must be interpreted. We must inquire into our emotions to see what truth they are actually indicating. Nevertheless, in spite of this complexity, emotions are truth tellers in the living here and now of human experience. The same cannot be said for thoughts. Our thoughts are illusory unless our thoughts are in touch with our sensations, desires, and emotions and thus in touch with our open as well as closed relations with REALITY.

Next, draw a circle around these mind/body processes. Let that circle represent the specific personality developed during the lifetime of a specific individual person.



When we identify with our personality, we are living within that circle and are thereby closing out REALITY, symbolized by the whole sheet of paper. REALITY can come at us from many directions, symbolized by the arrows. Hence, REALITY can seem like many things. But REALITY is actually One, like the whole sheet of paper. And on that one sheet of paper also appear our mind/body: our sensations, desires, and emotions; our thinking; our thoughts; and our personality.

Our personality participates in the full page of REALITY, but when we identify with our personality, we live in a closed circle separated from the fullness of REALITY. We are not living as an Awed One confronting the Awesome and filled with Awe. We are not living in REALITY. We are living within the cocoon of our personality.

Unlike Awe (which includes Trust, Compassion, and Freedom) personality is not an aspect of the Essential Human Being. Personality is real, but it is a temporal construction. Personality is human made by the human being whose personality it is. We are not born with a personality. Personality is a product of our Freedom. Personality is constructed in dialogue with the general culture in which we are born, but we each have put together our own personality. Human society is also human made. Humans are not born socially conditioned in a specific way. Ants are born into an instinctive or genetically determined society, but human society is human made. Human beings are born into a pattern of social processes created by human beings. No particular social pattern is essential to the human being. Similarly, no particular pattern of personality is essential to the human being. All such patterns are options chosen by human beings using their own essential Freedom. The same Freedom that builds societies and personalities can also (to a very large extent) unbuild both and rebuild both. The fact that such unbuilding and rebuilding cannot be done easily does not contradict the fact that both society and personality are constructions made by human beings.

Rather than being our living presence in the here and now, our personality is a creature of the past. Personality is a somewhat organized maze of memories that we use as the default settings for our practical living. These default settings are useful; they include our worldview, our skills, our self images, our expectations. So strong are these settings that we quite regularly confuse those habits with our true self. But our true self is not our habits. Our true self is a living presence in the here and now. Our true self is states of Awe. Our true self is Trust, Compassion, Freedom, and all other states of Awe.

Further, this true self undergirds all our valid knowing and all our appropriate doing. When we are operating out of the default settings of our personality and assuming that this personality is our true self, we are not operating out of Trust, Compassion, and Freedom. Instead we are operating out of suspicion, malice, and bondage.

When we identify with our personality, we are suspicious of overall Reality, for we suspect that Reality might criticize or undo our personality. We are defensive of our self-constructed self. We are in bondage to our personality patterns. We are unfree to the extent that we opt to automatically function out of our default settings – those habit patterns we have constructed in our past.

Nevertheless, personality plays a huge role in our lives; it includes our sense of reality, our worldview, our view of everything. REALITY, however, is always larger than our sense of reality. So when the full scope of REALITY breaks through to us, it appears as a hole made in our personality. It is as if REALITY has penetrated you or me from beyond what we thought was real. The cosmic egg is cracked. The borders of our self image are ripped. In terms of who we thought we were, a great emptiness has appeared.

When we understand ourselves to be our personality, this hole in our personality, made by REALITY, feels like a violation, a curious oddity, a dangerous wildness to be avoided. So we typically respond by trying to patch the hole in our sense of things, to tape the crack in our cosmic egg. Or we may simply deny or try to forget that any such hole ever occurred. But REALITY is persistent. REALITY does not go away. Other holes occur. Old patches rip loose. We may experience holes that we cannot escape or patch. So perhaps we decide to live with the holes. Or perhaps we decide to commit suicide. That happens. Sometimes people conclude that if they cannot go on being who they thought they were, they don't want to go on at all.

But let us assume that we open ourselves and inquire into these holes. We find that they are only holes in some false view of ourselves. We are more, much more than we thought we were. Perhaps we become amazed with the world of wonder beyond the boundaries of our personality. Perhaps we become curious and move through these holes into a wider space beyond our personality's boundaries. Perhaps we learn to Trust this wide space of REALITY and to Trust the fullness of being that we are as a conscious participant within that wide space.

As our REALITY-opening life moves on, other holes occur in our personality until the circle of personality has become a dotted line on the full page of REALITY. Then one day it may seem that the personality has disappeared altogether. The circle has become all holes. There is nothing left but the blank page of REALITY. We are nothing but Awed Ones confronting the Awesome and filled with Awe. Our True Self is this two-way movement from Awesome to Awe and from Awe to Awesome. In other words, we begin to identify with being a Spirit being rather than our personality.

Spirit identification does not mean that our personality has evaporated. It is only our identification with our personality has thinned out. In the beginning of our Spirit journey, we seem to be a personality who is having Spirit experiences. In the more mature stages of our Spirit journey, we see that we are a Spirit being who has a personality.

After disappearing as our identity, personality reappears as a meaningful part of the reality of our lives. And this personality is useful. It consists of some useful default settings that may still work for part of our living. Personality includes our skills in driving a car or our skills in computer keyboarding. It includes all our cultural conditioning. It includes all our memories and all our anticipations. It includes all our organized wisdom and all our plans. It includes everything we once thought was "who I am."

But now, instead of being "who I am," my personality is simply my habitual practices. These habits, useful or troublesome, are only a small part of my life on the full page of REALITY. Some of these habits contain a measure of realism. We can use that realism in the living of our

Spirit lives. Other parts of our personality are significantly illusory. We can observe that fact. We can notice how we are drawn to cling to our personality and thus continue those illusory habits. And having so noticed, we can experience the power to live differently. This experience is closely related to the experience of an addict who is moving away from his or her addictions. The personality may feel specific stresses and may believe that its addictive behaviors will alleviate these stresses. But the Spirit Self can notice these feelings and these tendencies and nevertheless behave in some other way. The Spirit Self is Freedom. Freedom from our personality's habits is a key part of realizing what Spirit Freedom means.

As we elect to Trust REALITY and to be this Freedom, we also experience a dimension of Awe I will call Compassion. **Trust, Compassion, and Freedom**, are fundamental aspects of the overall drama of Awe-filled living. At first this Awe-filled, Trust-filled, Compassion-filled, Freedom-filled life seems to be the **obliteration** of all we hold dear. But as our Awe-filled Essence **resurges with its own power** to become the dominant identification of our lives, **Tranquility, Stillness, Peace, Rest, Bliss, Joy, Strength, Connection, and other aspects of Spirit** become the qualities that characterize our living.

So what is our Essential Humanity? Our Essential Humanity is our actual Awe-filled humanity opening to the Awesome full page of REALITY. On this foundation an appropriate society can be envisioned and built.

As a further expression of this inward journey from personality identification to Spirit identification, I want to share the following poems. Sometimes poetry helps us see what prose cannot.

## Stillness

She talks so loudly,  
she plays so madly,  
she works so brashly,  
the peace that passes understanding  
is eclipsed.

So much storm rages  
on the surface of the sea  
that the deep stillness  
is not noticed.

Why strive to be alive,  
when aliveness is already  
present in all its quiet power?

Why remain irritated  
that happiness does not come,  
when happiness lies in wait,  
waiting to be simply noticed?

Why indeed?  
Why not part with old habits  
that go nowhere,  
except into the well-plowed ruts  
of substitute living?

Ah!  
Death!  
Death to all busy habits!  
How restful is thy sternness.

Ah!  
Void!  
Void of boundless unachievement!  
How sweet is thy stillness!

Ah!  
Stillness!  
Stillness that drowns out all noise.  
How satisfying is thy aliveness!

## Independence

He would not dance  
except to his own music.  
He would not read  
except his own theory.  
He would not act  
except in his own good time.

Such independence may mask deep hurt.  
Perhaps some caretaker of his innocent child  
refused to celebrate his essential independence.  
Perhaps now he labors  
to defend obsolete habits of  
self-constructed independence.

Though unintended,  
self-constructed independence is slavery.  
True independence  
is open to truth  
wherever, whatever, whenever  
it appears.

Ah!  
Death!  
Death to all achieved and defended habits!  
How liberating is thy sternness.

Ah!  
Void!  
Void of boundless unachievement  
How strengthening is thy presence!

Ah!  
Strength!  
Strength supplied by the Ultimate Supplier  
How satisfying is thy aliveness!