



# WHY DOES GOD ALLOW EVIL?

A spiritual pamphlet

Jonas Yunus Atlas



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*Is evil absolute and ultimate?*

*The river has its boundaries, its banks, but is a river all banks? Or are the banks the final facts about the river? Do not these obstructions themselves give its water an onward motion? The towing rope binds a boat, but is the bondage its meaning?*

*(Rabindranath Tagore)*



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# The problem of evil

The existence of evil has often made many people doubt the existence of God since witnessing undeniably painful and unjust evil confronts a believer with a very obvious inconsistency: if God is truly almighty and benevolent, as is so often told, why then does He not remove evil, pain or injustice?

This very question is in fact so old that it has been given a specific name. It's called 'the theodicee'. And when we wish to answer the theodicee merely through logic, we quickly wind up with four possible answers that several philosophers have proposed many centuries ago:

Either God *wants* to take evil away but actually *can't*. That would of course mean He's not almighty and therefore puts a huge question mark right beside the reality of his divinity.

Or He *can't* take it away and on top of it doesn't even *want* to. But then he's simply no God at all. It would make Him no better than any person in this world that merely goes on leading his life without further thought or consideration of anything around him.

Or He *can* in fact take it away but secretly doesn't want to. But then He's not nearly as close to the benevolent Being that people like to make of Him. In other words, that would mean He's actually more of a devil than a god.

Or He *can* take it away and *wants* to but simply *doesn't*. But then He's completely incomprehensible and, to say it bluntly, simply quite useless.

These ironic answers might seem very rational and logical to many, but in many ways they are very inadequate.

Not only do they ignore the essence of the divine, but above all, they're blind to the essence of evil. For to understand God's silence in certain moments where you would expect him to roar, we first of all have to make a clear distinction between different types of evil. Suffering that befalls us because of forces greater than ourselves is quite different than evil done to us by other people. And evil done to us by other people is quite different from the suffering we brought upon ourselves.

And once these three types of evil have been separated clearly, one can also come to see how God's answer to all three of them is not one of silence but rather one of divine presence.

## Where is God when evil befalls us?

When a strong earthquake hits a city, people are left behind in a pile of rubble amid the tears for loved ones lost. When draughts last for many months, people are forced from their homeland in search of water and fertile soil, not knowing whether they will find it. When a fire rages in a house, a family does not only lose its properties but also the treasures of memories hidden within the pictures and letters they silently kept in their rooms.

To try to deny the distress and the loss that can befall all of us would be absurd. We might hope such calamities will never happen to us or the people we love but there is no single bit of certainty that they won't.

The inevitable exclamation "Why? Why to me? Why to us?" is of course more than understandable whenever such painful moments befall any individual or community. And it's consequent doubt of God's existence is not any bit less comprehensible. When a father dies of cancer at the age of 35, it is but normal that his wife, the mother of two or three young children, does not see how she can believe in the protecting power of a benevolent God. When a child is born with a painful genetic disease it is normal that the parents find it difficult to see how God wishes well for all. When a lover loses his beloved in an accident caused by a vicious storm, it is normal that her pain is greater than her trust in God.

It does indeed confront us with the question: "Where is God in these things? Where is the proof of His presence?"

When we consider such problems, it's good to remind ourselves that death is very much a part of life and that loss is a part of being. For nothing has been created to last forever. All things and all beings eventually wither away. They grow and they dissolve. They expand and they contract. It is simply the way of creation.

To say it somewhat more crudely: eat and be eaten is an inescapable and inherent aspect of nature but, in the end, there is no reason why that should make us angry or depressed.

We might of course perceive certain unavoidable events as evil because obviously they hurt and sadden us. But in themselves they aren't 'evil' in the regular understanding of the word. Surely they are 'bad things' happening to us, but there are no evil intentions behind it. We are struck by them, but they're not forced on us by some evil mind.

In fact, philosophical discourse specifically refers to such matters as 'ontological evil' – a fancy word to say 'stuff that is extremely painful to go through but that happens to you because reality simply *is* the way it *is*.' But in a way then, the term 'ontological evil' is a bit misplaced. It still uses the word 'evil' and as such does not convey the fact that no matter how many years it might take to get over the pain, such events are not evil in themselves. They are but different difficulties that have always been a part of society, nature and life.

Yet even when we accept the eventual transience of everything in existence as a matter-of-fact and even when we come to terms with the hardships that come along with the disappearance, decay and death of things, one might of course ask: "Could God not have made a 'better' world? Could He not have created a universe without all these painful difficulties?"

The simple answer is: no He couldn't.

The more complex answer is: difficulties are an inherent part of life for life is, by definition, a thing of change.

Change often brings friction, but out of change also grows beauty and out of beauty grows love. That is why God cannot

take away the change. He cannot make things permanent — not because He wouldn't be capable to do so, but rather because, if He did so, it would crumble the fabric of creation. Creation needs the change to allow the beauty. And God needs the beauty to express His Love.

If all things were permanent they would lose their seasons of birth, growth and decline. In short, they would lose their life.

The beauty of creation therefore exists in its dynamics. It is the beauty of the Tibetan mandala: the beauty of using coloured sand to create a piece of art full of symbols only to let it be swept away by the silence of the broom that gathers it like the dust it once was.

God expresses Himself through His Creation. His Love is like a waterfall of which every drop takes shape in all that exists. As such, creation needs to flow. It needs to flow like a never ending painting that eternally takes shape in different patterns, colours and symbols — which immediately implies that certain parts of the painting will also always fade away and disappear.

Yet even though the disruption of certain aspects of our lives is an unavoidable part of our existence, it does not take away the beauty of the bigger whole and it does not deny the existence of love within the creation that surrounds us.

No one really doubts the value of life simply because death exists. No one really questions the sincerity of a smile simply because he saw tears before. No one really denies his own existence because so many people have come and gone before. Therefore, when someone dies young, it doesn't put life itself into question. When someone cries because of pain, it doesn't put his previous smile in question. When a relationship of one couple ends it doesn't put the love of others in question.

In the same manner, the existence of decay and devolution doesn't really put God into question.

However, it might often be difficult to convince ourselves of such reasoning when decay, loss and death in the very moments when they become palpable in our lives and inflict those who,

in our spontaneous feeling, didn't seem to 'deserve' it. It's easy for example to accept the death of someone who's lived a hundred years and dies of old age but very difficult to accept the death of a twenty year old who seemed to have so much life in front of him. In the same sense, it's far more difficult to cope with the death of a loved one than with the death of an unknown stranger.

But the latter example is quite telling. It isn't so much death or loss itself that hurts, but the amount of emotional attachment we have to the things that were removed or the people who died.

There is of course nothing wrong with this since emotional connection is a great part of what it means to be human. We only need to be aware of these dynamics. For it is not because *we* have more difficulties with certain painful situations that befall us, that the situations themselves are 'more problematic' or 'more evil' than others. What happens to the strangers is just as painful in the eyes of the stranger as it would be for us if it happened to us. Yet when it happens to the stranger, we can put it in perspective and when it happens to us, we sometimes start doubting about life, love and God.

So it might sound hard to some who have been confronted with suffering inflicted by forces greater than ourselves, but eventually, it's our personal attachment which makes us see many accidents, calamities and deaths as evil. It's our personal attachment which makes us doubt God's existence and not the facts.

Even more so, it is also our personal attachment which blinds us from a divine truth that could help us to overcome the difficulties that befall us. For even though God could not have created a creation without change and therefore could not have created a creation without the pain of loss, God did give us an option to overcome this pain and He did give us a possibility to find balance within the change.

So when we are thinking about the problem of evil we should never forget this one premise: *God isn't a force that makes sure you*

*never encounter difficulties but God is the one that can make you strong enough to deal with them.*

As the great poet Tagore wrote: “When you cry because the sun has gone, your tears will prevent you from seeing the stars.”

If, on the other hand, we are willing to open our eyes, we will be able to perceive a deeper truth and that deeper truth in turn will open our heart. It is the truth of the permanence of Love. Even though everything comes and goes, the love that binds it all remains.

No matter how painful the difficulties one encounters, we can always return to the greater Love that sustains our creation and that Love can push us onwards to new beauty and life. The wife who lost her husband can find divine beauty in the love that binds her to her kids and that invokes the husband. The city that was destroyed by an earthquake can find divine beauty in the love that brings the people together in their effort to rebuild the place they call home. The cancer that destroyed a loved one did not destroy his soul neither the souls of the ones that stayed behind and within their soul they can find a connection.

So the way to cope with inevitable losses is to return to the deeper lying divinity. The way to deal with inescapable death is to dive into the deeper stream of Life. The way to cope with difficulty is to rise up once more — because of Love and with the help of Love.

Therefore, even though we might be confronted with sorrow, when we breathe in the divine and breathe out its Love, we can learn to let go and to follow the flow.



## Where is God when evil is done to us?

Often, of course, the difficulties we encounter are not some unavoidable aspects of life but suffering that could be prevented. That is to say: often it isn't the forces of nature that bring us trouble, but other people that hurt us.

In fact, this is what the word evil truly designates: the words and acts of people that, knowingly or unknowingly, inflict pain upon others.

Although this type of evil is present in the daily lives of everyone, the clearest cases are certain nauseating events that (luckily) do not happen to all of us, such as rape and child molesting or even bigger forms of injustice like genocide and war.

All of this, once again, can make people doubt about the existence of God. And rightfully so. For what can we think of the concentration camps in which so many people were massacred because of their ethnic and religious belonging? What can we think of atomic bombs that killed 80.000 civilians in 5 seconds? What can we think of profit-obsessed factories that dump their wastes in areas where it contaminates thousands of people? Where is God's hand in all of this? Where is his love?

It might seem absurd, but at the very basis of these evils lies in God's eternal love.

Let me explain.

If a God exists, then love will be one of His essential

attributes. Since so many prophets and sages have repeated over and over again that this is the case, we can fairly take it for granted. And if love is an attribute of God, then God would offer a choice to all of us. For a love that forces is no true love. A love that cannot accept that it's beloved does something else than what it asked, is no true love. A love that cannot offer freedom to its beloved is no true love. There is no way around it: true love offers choice. And if God's love exist, it needs to be a true love.

God's love is therefore an offer of choice to all the souls it sustains. It offers all our souls the freedom to express its beauty in its own way.

And therein hides the 'problem': the fundamental choice, which is given to us by the very primary Love of God, also allows everyone to choose 'ugliness'. God's love offers the possibility of answering back with love but just as much it also allows the choice of answering back with hate, anger, selfishness and aggression. Sadly enough, many people choose the latter — a choice which leads them on a path that brings pain and suffering to others.

God simply cannot force anyone to love. His answer is to keep on loving people, no matter what path they took. This is not a sign of impotence but rather shows his greatness since the ideal lover is the one who keeps on loving someone even though this love is not returned. The ideal lover is the one who does not force his love on someone by expecting something back, but who offers love as a gift and sets the other free.

Does that mean that God will always allow this type of suffering to exist, simply not to corrupt His own principle? Does it mean that God will always allow people to hurt others, simply to be consistent and coherent?

Of course not. God is not a 'mind' like the 'mind' of humans which gets stuck in dilemma's. God's 'mind' is an all-embracing divine spirit that penetrates all of his creation. And that divine spirit is not only full of the highest love but also full of justice. Even more so, exactly because love is such an essential attribute

of God, justice is an equally essential attribute. For true love, even though it allows choice, also wants to protect from suffering. True love, even though it offers freedom, will always rise against injustice.

How then does God do this?

The answer is simple, for it lies in the exact same choice-offering-love. He does so *through* us.

It's up to people to open up and let His divine spirit enter within. It's up to people to become strong enough and rise up against justice. It's up to people to transcend themselves by means of love and to stand up against suffering.

So even though God can't, with a finger snap, take away those that commit injustice, He can, over time, make people strong enough to counter that injustice.

God's love thus holds an appeal to strive for greater harmony *together with Him*. All of us have the choice to seek for justice and to minimize the suffering in this world or to stand by and let it happen. If we do not answer this appeal – that means, if we are insensitive to the justice around us – then we ourselves are in fact a part of the evil itself. For if we turn a blind eye to the suffering we could alleviate, we in fact strengthen the evil. Indifference is just as much a denial of love as hate — if not even more.

Yet, if we answer God's love with love, we can reach new heights. That is to say, we can answer His love by opening up to His divine spirit and by letting that spirit raise our voices to injustice. We can seek His love and let it guide us in our search for peace. We can overcome our fears and selfishness and let God inspire us to find solutions for the suffering done to ourselves and others.

At this point, one may wonder: what if we do indeed stand up against justice, what if we do indeed fight for a better world but, in the end, we fail? What if the evil we are confronted with turns out to be too strong and wins?

There seem to be two answers to such a doubt.

Firstly, whether one succeeds or not, at the very least one's

soul will have made the right choices and will have risen up to the realm of light and love. So even if we lose the material battle, our soul will win the spiritual war. Perhaps we do not reach our goal, but at least we will have walked the right path.

Secondly we can find peace in our hearts by considering the fact that eventually God will inevitably prevail. For evil cannot eternally exist. When evil would one day destroy all goodness, it would soon turn against itself because evil that continues to be evil will always want to fight, destroy and divide. So when nothing would be left except evil itself, it would fight, destroy and divide itself. This fight and destruction upon itself would in turn create an emptiness, a space and an opportunity for goodness to flourish again.

And therein one can witness God's eternal justice: *that evil eventually rots away in its own evilness and as such will always be obliterated.*

In fact, the spiritual reason why evil cannot ever have the final word is simple: evil is a step away from God's premises. It's a step away from the divine laws of the universe. It's a step away from the very essence of existence and can therefore do nothing else but disappear from the realm of the divine. Just like nature's law of gravity predicts that someone who jumps off a building will not fly up but fall down and hit the ground, someone who permanently chooses evil will not reach any heights but will gradually destroy his soul.

This leads us to the last type of evil.

## Where is God when we inflict evil upon ourselves?

By far the biggest amount of evil in most people's lives is the evil they've done to themselves. It's often difficult to admit, but it's an inescapable truth nonetheless. In the majority of cases, we all have quite a huge personal share of 'guilt' or 'cause' in the bad things that happen to us. That is to say, the stuff that happens to us is often a reaction of others on certain things we said or did ourselves.

A Hindu or a Buddhist would consider this to be a rather evident truism since the Asian religions all know this principle under the name of 'karma'.

Karma does not necessarily have to be related to the believe in reincarnation since in essence it's a spiritual term that simply describes the law of action and reaction on the moral level: when we treat people with aggression, we will get anger in return, when we let fear decide our actions and thoughts, we will be confronted with frightening situations, when we treat people with disdain, we will find cold-heartedness on our path.

If we're honest then, we have to agree that ninety percent of the time, the evil done to us is actually a reaction to the evil we did.

A father that does not give warmth and tenderness to his children does not have to be surprised when they're all too distant to him later in life; a lover that suffocates his beloved with expectancies or extreme jealousy does not have to blame

her for finally succumbing to the call of freedom and breaking the relationship; a boss that handles his workers without humanity and sees them purely as resources, does not have to feel disgruntled when he hears people speak of him with disrespect; a trader that lies about his products out of greed should not be startled when he encounters nothing but distrust.

And, as always, the principles that apply to our personal lives also apply to society at large: when we disrupt the balance of nature, we do not have to be surprised that natural disasters become more frequent; when certain countries extract the resources of others they do not have to be startled that big waves of migration bring impoverished people to their borders; when politicians create policies that only sustain the rich, they do not have to act estranged when the poor start to revolt; when a state wages wars to protect its own economic system, its leaders should not be shocked that their own economy eventually implodes on a lack of internal support.

It is all very basic and evident karma.

The origins of most of our suffering can thus be traced to the fact that we move away from the divine principles that should be the undercurrent of our lives. When we get rid of compassion, love and truthfulness within our lives or in the broader society, we are bound to attract misery and to be confronted with a backlash of pressure, anger and lies. Like a boomerang it all comes back and hits us in the face.

To describe it with a century old idiom: we reap what we sow. There's no way around it. A lack of divinity in our own thoughts and actions will always give rise to more suffering.

The inescapable law of karma is sometimes so bluntly present that we can't even see it. We look passed it because it's right in front of us. Or we become deliberately blind to it because we simply do not *want* to see it.

This is certainly so at those moments when our suffering is purely created by our own mental perceptions or inner tensions.

When we always want things exactly the way we want them, when we're jealous of others because we can't get what they

have, when we're frustrated because some people do not give us the amount of attention we'd want from them, and so on, we eventually only keep ourselves stuck in psychological and emotional patterns. We force the inner unrest upon ourselves because of unnecessary expectancies or self-absorbed reasoning.

Many situations that hurt us therefore aren't evil in any way, but they bring suffering because we continue to perceive them as evil.

Of course this brings us right back to the first type of evil, the 'ontological evil' or the 'bad stuff that simply happens to us'. As I explained, such 'evil' isn't really 'evil', we just see it that way because of our own frustrations and anxieties. The only real evil in such instances is our own fear of and our continued obsession with our personal problems.

Many people might easily agree on this. They might readily admit that the pain of things that 'somehow happen to us' can often be overcome by simply changing the way we look at it. However, what seems more difficult to admit, is the fact that even underneath real evil – this is to say: suffering done to us by others – we can find a similar pattern.

Yet, how long does it sometimes take before we can forgive, even though the other has apologized? How long can we sometimes keep a grudge because of what somebody once did, even though he wasn't aware of the impact his acts would have? How long can we sometimes be harsh to someone we once loved because that person chose not to be with us? How long can we blindly despise someone simply because of some words he once said but perhaps meant differently?

And on a more societal level: how long can we keep a grudge against a certain group of people only because the forefathers of our forefathers had a conflict? How long can we have political tensions over issues that were once important but have no more relevance in the present?

So even when initially there was some evil done to us, it is often we ourselves who prolong the suffering because of our incompetence to let go of certain things. Even when initially

there might have been a legitimate reason for discontent because someone else once hurt us with little or no reason, we often needlessly prolong that pain by keeping ourselves in a hell of frustration, anger and anxiety.

After the spiritual analysis of the problem, the next step is of course to ask ourselves the question how we can get out of this suffering that we do to ourselves.

Many spiritual and religious traditions offer various answers to that question. It is outside the scope of this pamphlet to discuss them all. I would however like to stress the importance of meditation and prayer in all of this. I have written about these spiritual practices in other books and texts, but unlike what I have written before, I need to do so because of a specific reason I haven't mentioned in those other texts: in order to get rid of suffering meditation and prayer are important key elements because they can teach us 'to put things in perspective'.

It isn't often mentioned in spiritual literature because it such a common and daily expression. In fact I can't even remember whether I have seen the use of the idiom in any spiritual or religious book, but 'putting things in perspective' is one of the most spiritual things we can do.

Putting things in perspective means to be humble and to see the bigger picture. Putting things in perspective means to see the different sides of the coin.

Away then with the big words, the expanded self-esteem and the pompous solutions. To overcome evil, we first of all need to learn that we aren't the most important people in the world, that what happened to us often isn't as bad as we think and that we have more of a share in the problems that surround us than we'd like.

In order to clearly see our own share in most of our suffering, we therefore need to learn to put things in perspective and there is nothing like meditation and prayer to do so. For when we free our minds and hearts during meditation, we become capable of having a much broader view

on the whole. When we sit down, breathe and concentrate, we leave behind the narrow focus on ourselves and our own desires and we open our soul to the bigger reality that was previously left outside our frame of reference.

Meditation and prayer are capable of doing so because God embraces everything. God connects and holds everything together. So when we seek for God in our hearts and when we allow Him to touch our soul, we will at once also connect to the bigger whole and become a part of the relationship that links everything with everything.

Meditation therefore breeds a type of consciousness that is able to transcend our limited vision. It breeds a type of awareness that takes in every part and not just one. And as such it makes us see how all our thoughts and actions and even our very own being is but a part of a bigger whole.

Only this type of consciousness and awareness of the whole can make us see our own mistakes more clearly, can make us realize how we brought suffering to ourselves and can make us perceive how our personal needs and desires aren't the most important things in the world.

If we truly wish to find inner peace and freedom it is necessary to attain this type of modesty.

And when we do, that is to say, when we find the spiritual rest and modesty of seeing the bigger whole, we can also become aware of the true essence of that whole. For in our day to day lives we don't always realize it, absorbed as we are in the hustle and bustle of work, kids, food, clothes, school, and so on, but once we sit down and quietly contemplate on the bigger picture, the truth can once again be revealed to us that underneath it all hides a divine flow of love and compassion.

Sadly enough our desires, anxieties, frustrations and habits make us blind to those principles that lie at the core of reality. But no matter how blind we are, the fact remains that the whole of creation is bound together by the flowing stream of divinity. So the one who is willing to open his eyes can in fact always find a way out of suffering and evil. For the one who leaves behind the narrow focus on his ego can open up to the

flowing stream of compassion, truth and love and can let these divine principles guide his soul.

Love, truth and compassion aren't just ideas like those that are found within philosophy or ideology. They are alive. They are virtues. They are a part of the spirit of the deepest divine reality. And as such they can become a strong force in our lives the moment we 'submit' to them.

Once more then, we can see how it isn't God's absence that brought us evil and how, in fact, His presence can help us to breach it. For to get out of evil we need to leave behind our arrogance, fear and self-centeredness and we need to 'atune' our thoughts and actions to the 'frequency' of truth, compassion and love.

When we wish to leave behind anger, we need to open up to love. When we wish to get rid of frustration, we need to seek compassion and patience. When we wish to overcome anxiety, we need to dare to face the truth. In short: when we wish to transcend evil, we need to let go of our cramped attachments and allow the divine to flow within ourselves and our society.

And when we do, when we choose to live according to those divine principles, they will push us onward to ever greater freedom and peace.

# The beauty of choice

Does the existence of evil truly beg the question whether or not God exists?

It seems to me that those who are spiritually honest can actually only come to the conclusion that the answer does not lie in a fact, but in an act. For the way we re-act to evil will determine our answer.

Do we let God's spirit inspire and fulfill us so that we can overcome evil, or do we keep stuck in our own misery? Can we find a thirst for life after natural calamities have ruined our possessions and after loved ones have died or do we let ourselves slide into a spiritual depression? Can we find a hunger for peace when injustice is done to us or do we let evil have its way? Can we seek for love when our own shortsighted selfishness has brought us pain or do we keep the illusion that it's always others that hurt us? Can we put our situations in perspective and can we let go of our attachments or do we willingly prolong our personal grievances? Can we let compassion guide our actions or do we keep obsessed with our own frustrations and anxieties?

So let us be honest. It isn't God's fault that evil exists but it remains our fault that we give in to it. The real question isn't 'Why does God allow evil?' The real question is: 'do we try to transcend evil or do we succumb to it?'

The very moment we decide to transcend evil – both the evil that surrounds us as well as the evil within ourselves – we can return to the source of truth, light and love. And that source is

God. He is the radiant essence of creation that emanates throughout existence. It is up to us then to be open to that radiance, to let ourselves be fulfilled by the beauty and the force of the spirit that sustains our soul.

God can always make us strong enough to overcome our own ego-patterns for we can always return to Him. We can always return to His gentle presence of love and peace and start living from it.

In the end then, it should be amply clear why God is called 'almighty' and 'all forgiving': Not because He's a puppet player that decides about every aspect of our lives but because no matter what one has done, there is always a possibility to return to the divine flow in life. God is the ever compassionate because there is always an option of refocusing on that undercurrent of peace, serenity and warmth that permeates the whole world and every soul in it.

No matter what your history has been, it is always possible to (re)start living from love in love for love. That is His true magnificence.

*I do dimly perceive that whilst everything around me is ever changing, ever dying there is underlying all that change a living power that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves and recreates. That informing power of spirit is God, and since nothing else that I see merely through the senses can or will persist, He alone is.*

*Is this power benevolent or malevolent ? I see it as purely benevolent, for I can see that in the midst of death life persists, in the midst of untruth truth persists, in the midst of darkness light persists. Hence I gather that God is life, truth, light. He is love. He is the supreme Good. But He is no God who merely satisfies the intellect, if He ever does. God to be God must rule the heart and transform it.*

*(Mahatma Gandhi)*



## About the author

### Biography

Jonas Yunus Atlas is a scholar and activist from Belgium. He writes and lectures on religion, mysticism and societal change. Spiritually, he's rooted within the Christian tradition, although, for many years, he also immersed himself into various Eastern religions. After his studies in philosophy, anthropology and theology at different universities he became active in all sorts of local and international peace work. His texts, essays and books can be found at [www.jonasyunus.net](http://www.jonasyunus.net).



### Previous books by the same author

*Breath: The inner essence of meditation and prayer*

This little gem beautifully elucidates the flow of our mind, heart and soul during meditation and prayer. In a concise and poetic language it explains how we can guide our inner being to moments of spiritual contemplation. Many meditation books focus on bodily exercises and physical postures that are needed to open distinct energy channels. This book, however, describes the different 'spiritual postures' that open the 'channels of the soul' between ourselves and God.

*Halal Monk: A Christian on a Journey through Islam*

For three years, Jonas Yunus Atlas had openhearted conversations with influential scholars and important artists from the Islamic world. From Jakarta to New York he talked to imams, sufis, poets, punkers and feminists to acquaint himself with the soul of Islam. This book collects his most fascinating dialogues at the intersection of culture, society and religion. In between those conversations, some extra light is shed on key concepts of the Islamic tradition and their relevance for today's debates. This book thus offers many novel insights that can help all of us transcend the contemporary cultural and religious impasses.

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