



ON
RELIGIOUS
TRUTH

A spiritual pamphlet

Jonas Yunus Atlas

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*How you exactly call it
or leave it wordless,
how you exactly describe it
or leave it imageless
does not matter.*

*What matters
is that you adhere to religion,
not to which.*

*Not the names or description
but the depth of what moves you within
will determine your progress.*

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Honest questions

Can any religion claim the fullest truth? Can any religion claim the purest truth? Can any religion claim the one and only truth?

To answer 'yes' is to silence every form of dialogue. To answer 'no' is to defy the revelations of prophets and the enlightenment of sages. The answer, so it seems to me, is therefore neither 'yes' nor 'no'.

But let me not be blamed for circumventing the question with a cryptic answer, for I will explain my view more fully in what follows. Just keep this Chinese proverb in mind: *when a finger points to the moon, do not look at the finger, for you will miss all the heavenly glory.*

Aggressive answers

Sadly enough, religions have often transgressed their own boundaries by making their claims into solid bricks and by using those bricks to bang the heads of those who wouldn't listen. Yet truth cannot be explained by an inflexible mind, just like bricks can't portray flowing water.

So even though force and violence have been applied by many a missionary from various religions, never has faith been truly transferred through it. A gentle finger pointing towards the moon can invoke a cry of amazement, but a fist that threatens to hit can only extract soulless words devoid of inner respect. As the Quran states: "There is no compulsion in religion."

That some, even today, still do not grasp this obvious premise, is saddening. And it is the task of every religious person to reproof his religious brothers and sisters if they would resort to any physical or mental violence when trying to missionise. It is our task to show people how their acts are contrary to their faith when they use aggression to convince other people of their faith.

The only true persuasion religion has at its disposal is the expression of a life lived in truth. Those who uphold their faith and radiate, those who live in wisdom and bring happiness, those who removed their egos and express the purity of their souls are the most vivid examples of their faith. Not their words convince but the love they offer. Not their words but they themselves have become a finger pointing to God.

People from one tradition have therefore often been startled

by the life of people from another tradition being far more aligned with their own faith than they themselves. A person like Mahatma Gandhi, for example, has shocked the Christian West, which for a long time thought it had a moral dominance over others. Gandhi, who always adhered to Hinduism, turned out to be much more a follower of Christ than the British elite who ruled him and his fellow Indians. Gandhi's non-violence, his deep devotion, his incessant search for truth, his love for the downtrodden, his devotion to God, his spiritual depth and his social accomplishments could not be denied and were a confrontational question mark for a Christian West that in many ways did not uphold these values.

Often Christians tried to persuade Gandhi to become a Christian. They wanted to 'turn' him to 'their side'. But the mahatma never grasped that attitude – mostly because he did not see how Christianity could help him more than his own Hinduism to become a more profound spiritual person. So one day he replied to someone's proselytic efforts with an ironic: "I don't reject your Christ. I love your Christ. It's just that so many of you Christians are so unlike your Christ."

And of course, as a Hindu, Gandhi could also not understand the incessant missionary attitude which was prevalent among Christians in the first half of the twentieth century since he was deeply convinced of an idea which has found wide-spread acceptance within Hinduism: that the various religions and the many strands within religions are all but paths toward the same goal.

One goal, many paths or one goal, one path?

Hinduism itself is one of the most internally diverse religions and it knows such an amount of subdivisions that probably no one has ever had a full overview. Perhaps exactly because of that, the manifold Indian traditions have often shown less proselytism than other religions and the different spiritual schools most often see the other schools as equally valid ways to enlightenment.

In the Hindu sphere of religion Truth is thus considered as something which can be understood from different views and which can be experienced through different means. According to most Hindu sages then, the Truth can be found in the varied religious modes of thinking, acting and being that constitute the spiritual world.

This is called a 'pluralistic' view on Truth.

Opposing the 'pluralistic' views on Truth one can find the 'exclusivistic' views on Truth, which uphold the idea that Truth can only be found within one specific strain of thought. According to exclusivists therefore only one religious system contains the essence of reality and only that one religious system is capable of leading the soul to its final liberation. From this follows that those who do not uphold the faith and devotion that accompanies this religion, will never find true happiness and peace.

Of course my description of exclusivism in one short paragraph is a bit blunt and much nuance can be added, but I

hope that certain readers do not immediately discard it as nonsensical. Even though it might be far from one's own stance, one needs to acknowledge its place in the search for Truth since 'exclusivism' is not a marginal stance at all. Historically speaking, for example, all religions have at least at some point in history passed through one or more phases of exclusivism. Even Hinduism has not escaped its grasp in the times when philosophical debates were held between Brahmins and Buddhist monks in order to determine which of the two held greater wisdom. On top of it, in the contemporary structure of many religions, many particular groups, branches or sects of those religions are strongly advocating exclusivism. In fact, some of them even thrive on it for it is often the feeling of being 'a chosen one' that makes people adhere to a particular group or sect.

In lots of modern spiritual theories exclusivism is strongly linked with old-fashioned and institutional religion while pluralism is strongly advocated, but since exclusivism is so widely spread in the past as well as the present, in smaller spiritual groups as well as bigger religious institutions, people should realise that it isn't stupid at all. On the contrary, quite some arguments can be brought up in its defence.

For one, the different religions do of course disagree quite often on certain core issues and it is only logical to admit that if one believes something and the other believes the opposite, one of them has to be true and the other false.

Even more so, when you truly believe, when your faith in other words is deeply rooted within your heart, you cannot be anything else but convinced of what you believe. There is no 'maybe', there is no fifty per cent, there isn't even ninety five per cent. There is only a hundred per cent.

Either Jesus resurrected or he didn't. Either Muhammad was a prophet or he wasn't. Either a certain group of people has a covenant with God or it doesn't. Either all we see is maya and the only true reality is Brahman or it isn't. Either Buddha was enlightened or he wasn't.

In a way therefore, a certain amount of exclusivism is

inescapable in everybody's life. Not even the atheists are free of such a hundred-per-cent-conviction because either God exists or he doesn't – and atheists do in fact feel more enlightened or knowledgeable than those who believe in the existence of a divine reality.

Thus, whether they like it or not, pluralists also always have a certain measure of exclusivism in their view on Truth, for their own 'one-hundred-per-cent-certainty' is the idea that every religion is a path to the same deeper Truth. And the pluralists therefore believe that their view on this particular matter is more true than the view of exclusivists.

In that sense exclusivists are simply more honest when it comes to their view on Truth itself. Obviously an exclusivist would say that his view on Truth is correct and that the stance of pluralists is wrong. This of course poses no problem for the exclusivist since it merely is an extra exclusivist claim, but pluralists are put into a dilemma here since they have to explain how the path of exclusivists can lead to the same deeper Truth, when exclusivists obviously will never come to agree that the Truth can be reached through different religious paths.

Even pluralists therefore must in the end conclude that exclusivists are, in their eyes, simply wrong and will never reach the full Truth. For pluralists believe that exclusivists never grasp at least one crucial element of the Truth.

Faith & Intellect

Let us however not get caught in the trap of intellectualism. The argument described above is a philosophical construct which is perhaps correct in its rational logic but which also leaves out an essential element of the search for Truth: the search for Truth is not only rational, it is also existential. It is also spiritual. And as such the concepts of the intellect often bump against the spirit of faith.

For example, when Christianity first came to India it found itself in a phase of strong exclusivism and upon en-countering the different branches of Hinduism which, in those days, held deeply pluralistic ideas, it was confronted with a sort of faith it did not know. The Christian missionaries tried to explain the particularity of their religion but the Hindus failed to grasp what the missionaries were saying.

“We bring you the light of Christ.” the missionaries said.

“Who is that?” the Hindus asked.

“He is the son of God.” the Christians answered.

“What do you mean by that?” the Hindus replied.

“He was the incarnation of God on earth.” the monks explained. “Ah!” the Hindus exclaimed, happy they understood: “No problem then...” and they showed the missionaries some statues in their temples: “you can put him in line with these other incarnations of Vishnu.”

This remark must have come as a surprise to the missionaries, but for the Hindus the idea of God incarnating himself on earth simply was not that special at all. Their religious tradition already knew several stories of Vishnu manifesting himself in

ten different terrestrial forms. Those are called avatars. Some of them are lesser known incarnations such as a man-lion or a fish, but others are widely known avatars such as king Rama and lord Krishna.

As the Christian missionaries could not accept the idea of several divine incarnations besides Christ, they tried to explain to the Indians why Christ was distinct from all of Vishnu's avatars. They explained how Christ was both man and God, how He suffered for their sins, how He died at the cross, and so on. But in the end, the Hindus simply didn't seem to bother too much about such things, and they welcomed Jesus into their religion as one of the other humanized forms of the divine – which is why here and there in Indian temples one can find statues and carvings of Jesus in between other Hindu deities.

The Christians on the other hand tried to keep Jesus to themselves, refused to accept the possible reality of Vishnu, Rama or Krishna and could not – at that point in time – open up to possible aspects of Truth within Hinduism.

The very reason then, why I eventually adhere more to a pluralistic view on Truth is not because it's intellectually more 'true' than other views but because it retains its inner rest and calmness when confronted with the unknown. Exclusivism aggressively needs to block out others to maintain itself, while pluralism can embrace them.

To exclude some or to include all?

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.

Arrogance & condescendence

Of course a believer of any faith could say that his insistence on the primacy of his religion has nothing to do with condescendence or arrogance for he could propose that it's only condescending in the eyes of those that do not accept that Truth.

And sure enough, no one is responsible for the way others accept or disregard the Truth. When two parties find themselves in an accident, for example, because one of them did not follow the traffic rules, then it is no sign of arrogance of the one who upheld the rules to say the other has made a mistake. And if the one who did not heed the rules takes it as a condescending act that the other obliges him to pay for the damages, we would find it absurd.

So exclusivists and inclusivists might say that the arrogance does not exist in their attitude towards other faiths but that it lies in the unwillingness of other religions to accept the Truth they propose.

Yet what such exclusivists and inclusivists misunderstand is how their arrogance or condescendence is not simply something that blocks their relationship with others but that it above all blocks their relationship with God. For the simple fact of the matter remains that God is always greater and anyone who claims to fully grasp Him, is not only arrogant but puts himself higher than God. Inclusivism tries to circumvent this issue, but it eventually does not succeed.

Whether you think you religion is the only truth or whether you think other religions also contain some parts of the full truth that is your religion, doesn't matter. There is simply no escape from the spiritual premise that no book, no institution and no creed can claim it has once and for all described the whole of God's essence. Nobody is able to see or know God completely and no religion is capable of revealing the divine in its totality.

I am of course convinced The Truth as such exists. So let it be clear that I am certainly not a relativist who says that everyone has 'his' truth. No sincere religious person would ever say such a thing. Every spiritual seeker is after the Truth, not after a truth. For the Truth with a capital T is not something we can invent or something we can personally create for ourselves. It exists independently of our personal understanding of the Truth and as such it is not something which can be invented but it is something that needs to be revealed or discovered.

As Gandhi used to say: "God is Truth and Truth is God". Therefore, In as much as religions are after God, religions are after Truth. They are not simply seeking a single and particular piece of wisdom. They are seeking the very essence of being. They are seeking the soul of existence.

But exactly because religions are searching for nothing less than Truth as God, and exactly because they have been doing so for centuries, all of them should recognize the fact that not one man on earth can ever grasp the full Truth.

As humans we are simply incapable of seeing the whole Truth. We are only capable of seeing a part of the whole. We can not even put our arms around a tree which is but a hundred years old. How can we then think of putting our mind around the One Being which has been there forever and which will be there until eternity?

It seems therefore clear to me, that a single religion will never be able to describe the Truth completely. Just like a man on earth cannot see the back of the moon but needs a man on Mars to tell him what it looks like, the different religions find

themselves in different positions facing the same Truth. The teachings of different traditions deal with different parts of the whole. They describe different flames of the same fire.

Would it after all not be absurd that God, the ever good, would show himself only to a particular type of people but not to others? Would God, the always loving, make it impossible for a certain group of people to find Him?

So, in the end, I really do not think it matters to God which specific religion brings you closer to Him, as long as it does.

Embodiments of truth

In spite of what the previous chapters might seem to imply, I certainly do not think that those religious teachings that speak of the 'full Truth' are completely wrong or mistaken. I do in fact agree that the 'full Truth' can be found within their religion. Only, it isn't their religion as such that contains the full Truth. It's the One they are referring to which does. So when Christians say the full Truth was revealed in Christ, they are right. Christ did, even though Christianity didn't and doesn't. For if Christ contains the full Truth it's because he 'embodied' God to the fullest extent a man can possibly do. That is to say: Christ had opened himself to God in such a complete way that God entered His soul and became fully visible through Christ.

So if Christ is the full Truth it is not because His words would be all there ever needs to be said about life, love and God but because he went to the very heart of the Truth and because He let God's Love speak through him.

The same can be said of other holy 'embodiments'. If the Quran contains the full Truth it is not because the Arabic words would be the exact replica of Gods utterances but because God's Spirit shines through it.¹

¹ I realise I'm getting myself on thin ice by saying such a thing if I would be discussing this with certain Muslims. Yet whatever their view of the holiness and transcendence of Quran, they cannot claim God speaks Arabic. If they would do so, they would inappropriately attribute a human element to God.

If the teachings of the Buddha contain the true wisdom to reach enlightenment, it is not because his four noble truths are the one and only rules in life, but because he drenched his soul in the full Truth and because he overflowed with compassion. So who would I be to deny that Krishna does not 'embody' God as well? Who would I be to say that the Guru Grant Sahib does not contain words of divinity? Who would I be to say that Lao Tse was not a spiritual master?

The embodiments of Truth in the end show it very clearly: the Truth of religion simply isn't about about claims of 'right' or 'wrong'. It isn't about 'true' or 'false'. The 'fullness' of their Truth doesn't lie in words, thoughts or principles. The Truth of religion is about something which is far beyond such concepts that are limited to the mind alone.

The Truth of religion is about the way we respond to Gods love and it's about loving it back. And because of that love, we can feel reverence and awe and even sheer bewilderment when we are confronted by an embodiment of God's love.

So to close our eyes, ears and heart to certain embodiments of the divine, simply because they belong to other religions, is to close ourselves to certain aspects of God.

Which religious tradition the embodiment belongs to should not be of any importance for all that is important is the Truth it holds within. And, if we are not too arrogant or condescending, we should be able to see that Truth.

God does not speak Arabic, he 'speaks' a divine language which is far beyond words. His divine decrees were perhaps translated into the Quran by use of Arabic, but we can't ever limit them to the words themselves, for then we would limit Him and his decrees to the framework of the human mind that needs a human language to express himself.

Falling in love with truth

If the 'Truth' claims of religion are not about 'right' and 'wrong', one can wonder why religious people so often become strong-headed about their own religion and why they are so often convinced of the supremacy of their own beliefs.

The answer to that question has a lot to do with the habits of our minds and hearts. For what often happens is that someone who comes into contact with an embodiment of the divine, can be so overwhelmed that it makes him somewhat blind to what exists outside of it – just like a lover, that has freshly fallen in love, is blind to all other beauties in the world.

And that is the state of most religions: their claims of truth are like a lover's claim of beauty.

Most men that have fallen in love seem to be convinced that their girl is the prettiest around. As everybody knows, this is nothing but a matter of taste but still, every lover, head over heels in love, thinks or rather believes he's kissing the prettiest girl in the world. And exactly the same can be said for deeply devoted spiritual people. They believe that their tradition – and the embodiment of the divine that this tradition holds at its centre – is the most beautiful of all. They are so filled by their own faith that they can't perceive anything else as equal or higher.

In fact, there is nothing really wrong with this. Even more so, this very feeling drives them ever deeper into their spirituality, binds them to their community and enlarges their view on their tradition, just like love makes a lover devoted to his loved one.

It only becomes a problem when this feeling prevents them from seeing beauty in other traditions, makes them jealous of the accomplishments of other religions or makes them feel threatened by spiritualities they do not understand.

It is never healthy when love and devotion become infatuation and obsession – neither in relationships nor within religion. For it makes one lose one's senses. It makes people forget that the 'truth-owning-claims' of religions are not 'factual' but rather 'existential'.

So when religious people are convinced of the completeness of their religion, they should always realise this completeness is not a rational truth or a hard fact but a personal experience of their contact with the divine. They should learn that the 'truth-owning-claims' of religions are more expressions of love and beauty than ideological stances. Which means that several religions can be considered as the 'most truthful' just as much as two people can say their partner is 'the most beautiful'.

The language, the dialect & the character of religion

Religion is not a language of facts. It's a language of love and devotion. It's a language of expression. It's a language of the soul.

That is after all why religious texts are so often written in poetic verses. Yet one piece of poetry is never liked by all and not every language is understood by all.

Languages need translation. So do religions. And just like certain concepts are more easily expressed within one language, certain insights are more easily explained with one religion.

Languages need time and effort to learn and understand its words and grammar. So do religions. And just like a language is not learned on one day, neither is a religion.

You can of course easily have superficial conversations with the standard sentences of a guide book but to have a deeper dialogue and to talk about the things that truly matter, you have to work hard and sometimes learn things by heart – both when it comes to language and religion.

Once you delve deeper into the structure and spirituality of a tradition that is not your 'mother tongue', you will certainly start to see similar words and expressions. Yet you will also notice how they are sometimes fundamentally different and how it can be very hard to say the same thing both in your own religion as well as in the other – or, like in the translation of poetry, you will see how the beauty of one religious tradition becomes sterile and gets lost when translating it to the words and grammar of another.

Yet, whatever the differences and no matter how huge the grammatical divide can sometimes be, languages eventually all have a similar goal: to allow communication. And this as well is no different for religions: it allows communication between the divine and the soul.

Religion does so by offering insight in the causes of our suffering and it transfers the wisdom one needs to root out those causes. As I have explained in a previous book, all religions agree it's the ego which is the essential origin of suffering. They thus all propose ego removal as the path to true happiness. That is to say, to liberate the soul they consider it a prerequisite to remove our egoism and egocentrism. Yet all religions also have different ways of bringing about that ego removal and all of them have different views on the exact relations between ego, soul and God.

So even though certain religions and spiritual paths might not be very far apart, they also are never the same. Every religion contains quite a number of elements that can without any problem be found in certain other religions – such as morality, spirituality, mysticism, etc. – yet their form and their precise concepts can differ quite a lot. Some elements are (nearly) absent in certain religions and receive extra attention in others. Within certain religions then, certain elements get a rather strong 'presence'. They are the 'accents' of their language, they are the 'character traits' of a religion.

And what many fail to see is that, for the bigger part, it is not so much the doctrines, but mostly the 'accent' and the 'character' of a religion which attract people to it or which culturally anchors it in their lives.

The very reason why Gandhi for example always stayed a Hindu, even though he embodied the Christian values a whole lot more than most Christians of his time, was not because he was convinced of its supremacy but simply because he felt most 'at home' in it. Whenever he was in distress, he turned to the Bhagavad-Gita and found answers in that cornerstone of his own tradition since Krishna's focus on Karma Yoga was the spiritual character that suited him the most.

And why should it not be such a character more than the supposed amount of truth which attracts people to a religion? The Truth that lies behind every religion is just as true as the other – for it is essentially the same Truth of God – but the way it comes to people in the form of religion is different, and it is that difference that will attract one person but not the other. It is the specific embodiments of the divine within a tradition that will make one person fall in love with its particular spirituality but not the other. It is the language and the accent of a religion that will make one person understand (a part of) the Truth but not the other.

So why should we fuss too much about doctrines? Why should we become aggressive about ideas? It is character that attracts lovers, not intellectual understanding.

Embodying truth

Jesus said: “People will be forgiven for every sin and defiance of God, but defiance of the Spirit will not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.”²

According to Jesus then, the way one relates to God isn't the most important. He even accepts that some people are opposed to Him – which means he does not see it as absolutely necessary to follow a specific embodiment of the divine. Thus, according to Christ, one does not need to follow all the rules of a specific religious path neither do you have to accept a particular focus of a specific spirituality.

What he does find absolutely important however, is how you try to embody the divine within your own life, how you try to live according to the Truth that lies beyond the words and that sustains the embodiments. For the one who lives untruthful defies the Divine Spirit. The one who lives only for his own ego speaks against the Deeper Spirit of life.

In simpler terms, what one can read in Jesus' words is that it doesn't matter which specific words you use to describe the divine. It doesn't matter which specific parts of the Truth you see or don't. Even more so, it doesn't even matter whether you believe in God or not. What is important on the other hand is whether you try to live according to the Spirit – that is to say,

² Mt. 12, 31-32

whether you try to let the Truth become a vivid aspect of your life. For that is true faith: to allow the Spirit of Truth to guide you.

One really does not need the 'correct words' or the 'right creed' to be able to do so. One can, in other words, be conceptually wrong, and still live truthfully. Not being 'right' is absolutely forgiveable, as long as you try to be 'good'.

Considered this way, all philosophical conflicts between pluralists, exclusivists and inclusivists eventually cease to be relevant. For when we belong to certain religious traditions or when we take part in certain spiritual communities, we should not take the 'claims of Truth' as our guidelines but we should above all look at the vivid examples of their embodiments of Truth and try to become like them.

The claims of religions are but fingers pointing at the embodiments. We should not just point at them, we should not merely talk about them and we should not only put incense in front of their statues. We rather should try to embody the Truth ourselves. We should try to really be like them, which means that we should follow them by leading a life in Truth not about Truth.

A love that only exists in the mind is no love at all for it needs to find an expression in a star-eyed glance, in soothing words or a in a warm embrace. The same applies to Truth since Truth is not a static piece of knowledge, it only gets its true meaning when it takes shape in life, when it finds an expression.

So the Truth of God – and therefore the Truth of religion – is not something we should understand and grasp merely mentally. It is a Truth that should be felt, lived and expressed.

It is often forgotten that the old testament uses the word 'to know' in a very broad sense, for it can also imply 'to have slept with someone'. So when you 'know' your wife, in Judaist tradition, it means you have seen each other in deep intimacy and closeness. In the West, the concept of 'knowing' has become narrowed down to a merely mental understanding of something and has lost its deeper and almost physical

connotation of knowledge that takes in your whole being. But true wisdom always contains an aspect of intimacy. For when prophets and sages say that we should 'know the divine' and that we should 'believe in God', they actually mean we should try to 'embody' Him.

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.



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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