

THE LIGHT OF LIFE

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Anyone interested in spirituality or religion will recognize that **light**, as an illuminating and life-giving energy, has been a much-used metaphor for the divine since time immemorial. Pure light has thus been equated with the light of truth, the light of God, the light of Consciousness, the light of Buddha, the Christ-light or the cosmic light, depending upon where one was born and what one was taught.

Nearly all cultures, peoples and religious groups through the ages have talked about the phenomenon of light in the context of the spiritual or mystical experience. Spiritually inclined individuals have spoken of being called to the light, of being filled with light, of being guided by the light, of dissolving in an ocean of light etc. Those who claim to have seen visions of holy beings typically report that they were surrounded by a radiant luminescence.

After Prince Siddhārtha Gautama realized his Buddhahood, he taught that all beings are imbued with a spark of inner divine light. In describing the original Buddha-nature, Buddhists use such phrases as innate luminosity, primordial radiance, the unobscured clear natural mind, and the clear light of reality.

The Muslim holy book, the Qur'an, referring to man, talks about the little candle flame burning in a niche in the wall of God's temple.

According to Jewish tradition, the Israelites were led to 'the promised land' by a 'fiery pillar of light'. David the psalmist sang, "The Lord is my light ..." and "In thy light shall we see ..." The Jewish mystics refer to the illuminating presence of the divine as the inner spark or the spark of God.

Jesus, the Jewish spiritual teacher, whose followers became known as 'Christians', asserted from his Christ-consciousness, "I am the light of the world ..." and to others, he said, "You (also) are the light of the world ..." indicating that their essential nature and purpose was the same as his. The New Testament reports that John the Baptist came to bear witness to that light and that Jesus said, "They that follow me (live as I live) will not walk in darkness but have the light of life."

The Bible, as we now have it, states that God not only lives in light (Ex 24:10, 1 Tim 6:16) and is clothed with it (Ps 104:2), but 'He' *is* light (1 John 1:5).

Many of the Church fathers referred to the divine light within. God's transcendence, for instance, is frequently described as ecstatic light by Symeon the New Theologian in the 11th century and Gregory Palamas in the 14th. These Greek saints can be seen as sequential mystical theologians glorifying the radiance of God in the Orthodox illuminative tradition. They held that the purification of one's consciousness leads one into that awareness of the Presence which is often manifested as an experience of the light of Christ.

In the 16th century, the Jewish mystic, Rabbi Isaac Luria wrote, "Know that before emanations were produced and creatures were created, there was a simple supernal light that filled all existence; and there was no empty space, like a completely empty space or vacuum, but all was filled with that simple infinite light (or, light of the Infinite One). It had no aspect of beginning or end, rather all was one simple light equally distributed, and this is called the light of the Ayn-Sof."

The Kabbalah (Qabala) recognises two double equations of infinite energy: Ayn-Sof and Aur-Aëlion. In Hebrew Ayn-Sof means "without end," or "infinite," and Aur-Aëlion means "light." Hence, Ain-Sof Aur is understood by Kabbalists to be the no-end or limitless Light, the Light of the Infinite, the radiant fullness that is the Source of all Reality, and/or, the Unending Essence that is Infinite Divinity.

The British mystic, George Fox, who founded Quakerism, used the term "inward" or "inner light" to describe the direct experience of God or Christ within oneself. This direct experience of the divine became the central tenet of the Religious Society of Friends. The Quaker belief that an inner light resides in each person is based in part on a passage from the New Testament, namely John 1:9, which says, "That was the true light, which lights every person that comes into the world." Friends emphasize the part of the verse that indicates that every person is born with the light within him or her. Early Friends took this verse as one of their mottoes and often referred to themselves as "Children of the Light."

The divine light has been the subject of many hymns and poetic works. In the early 19th century, for instance, British cleric, Thomas Binney, penned the lines:

*Eternal Light! eternal Light!
How pure the soul must be
When, placed within Thy searching sight,
It shrinks not, but with calm delight
Can live, and look on Thee!*

Like the vast majority of those brought up in the church, Binney believed that 'oneness with God' applied only to Jesus, and it probably never occurred to him that the Master was stating a universal truth when he declared, "I and the Father are one". So Binney was only able to imagine this awesome eye-to-eye encounter and write of it in dualistic terms.

Several centuries before, however, the great German mystic, Meister Eckhart, had gone beyond dualistic dogma and stated paradoxically in one of his sermons, "The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me."

In his hymn, Binney also expresses the now common belief of institutional Christianity that each person has a soul which is quite separate from God and which may, in certain circumstances and with 'spiritual' eyes, look on incorporeal divinity as one with ordinary eyesight would look at a tree or any other 'object'. This is a fundamental misunderstanding and one that goes against the clear teaching of scripture that God, who is pure Spirit, cannot be seen by anyone.

As Adyashanti says, all true wisdom teachings encourage us to look 'within', but this does not mean turning our attention inward and 'looking around' ... as we would when surveying the outside world. When looking within, we usually make the mistake of trying to find or see 'some thing' in our interior region that could be the 'inner light'. Looking within doesn't mean, "Look within and see if you can find yourself, or God, or signs of God, or something called the truth or the divine, etc".

Actually, when we turn our attention within, we will *always* find something -- a thought, a feeling, a mood etc. and if we are of a particular bent, maybe a voice, a vision or some mystical experience. Regardless of what is perceived, the divine Light is what perceives it in our awareness. Divine Light Itself cannot be perceived as an object just as your eye cannot see itself. The divine Presence is always the Subject or the 'Seer', as it were, and never an object of seeing.

When a student reported to his spiritual director that he had 'found the divine light within', the old master tested him by asking, "Is it like sunlight or moonlight or lamplight?" When the student tried to compare it to one phenomenon or the other, the teacher knew that the truth had not yet dawned on him.

Spiritual sages or esoterics have always understood that all-seeing sight or awareness is not just something the Absolute has, but rather what the Absolute is, and that this luminous Awareness is in no way separate from the awareness we experience within ourselves. The truth is that we perceive *from* the divine Light or *as* the divine Light -- *from* Awareness and *as* Awareness Itself.

Esoteric teaching down through the ages has asserted that *the divine Light* is the essence of all things and therefore, our essential nature. This inner Light, it reveals, isn't something we can be in relationship to ... the divine Light is really What we are! -- it is indeed the Light that lights and gives life to every sentient being that manifests temporarily in the world.

Contemporary Australian spiritual teacher, Bob Adamson has said, what we are in essence is self-shining, pure intelligence. It is shining through our eyes at this very moment. This Light of consciousness ever expresses as that living, vibrant sense of presence, which translates through the mind as the thought '*I am*'. The primary thought, '*I am*' is not the reality. It is the closest mind or thought can ever get to reality, for reality to the mind is inconceivable. It is *no thing*. Without the thought '*I am*', is it stillness? Is it silence? Or is there a vibrancy about it, a livingness, a self-shining-ness?

In summary, the divine Light is not something that can ever be seen or even comprehended by the finite mind. It is *the Seer* or *That* which does the seeing. When we see truly, there is a '*knowing*' that our inside world and the outside world are as one -- full of forms or phenomena -- and all contained in that formless Awareness which is ever the 'Light of Life.