

Things to Remember

Reflections on Our True Identity

Peter M. Parr

Things to Remember

Copyright 2016 Peter M. Parr

Thank you for downloading this ebook. This book remains the copyrighted property of the author, and may not be redistributed to others for commercial or non-commercial purposes. If you enjoyed this book, please encourage your friends to download their own copy from their favourite retailer. Thank you for your support.

Requests for permission to reproduce any part of this text, other than brief quotations in articles or reviews, should be made to the author via www.thingstoremember.org.uk.

Quotations from *Quaker Faith & Practice* are from the Fifth edition. Copyright 2013, The Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain.

Quotation from *A Course in Miracles* is from the Third Edition, published in 2007. It is used with permission from the copyright holder and publisher, the Foundation for Inner Peace, P.O. Box 598, Mill Valley, CA 94942-0598, www.acim.org.

Cover image: Thinkstock.

Table of contents

[Introduction](#)

[Who we are](#)

[Equality](#)

[Simplicity](#)

[Peace](#)

[Truth](#)

[Let your life speak](#)

[Remembering](#)

[Things to remember](#)

[By the same author](#)

[About the author](#)

Introduction

Through the ages, there have always been those who, when they looked at another, understood they were looking at themselves. Seers and mystics of all religious traditions have seen through the veil of form and recognised the essential oneness of all things.

But what would be the implications if we held an awareness of the Divine in everyone all of the time? What if we tried genuinely to live this belief day by day, minute by minute, in the encounters we have with our family, with our friends, at work, and in society at large?

This book is an invitation and a challenge to explore these questions.

A note about words

At best, words are pointers. They are tools we can use to describe an experience, but they are no substitute for experience itself. The word 'God', like any other word, is a human construct. It is an attempt to describe what cannot be described. When I use the word 'God', I use it as shorthand for that which is eternal: Being, Essence, Is-ness. Some would call this Light, or Love, or Spirit. If you are uncomfortable with the word 'God', I encourage you to substitute another which speaks to your condition.

I don't ask you to agree with what you read, or to accept it. I invite you to reflect on the words. Read a paragraph or two, a section at most, and then put the book to one side. Close your eyes and become aware of your breathing. Contemplate on what you've read. Consider your own experience, however similar or different to mine. Then take a pen and write down your own reflections. Not the beliefs you were brought up with, or those you've read about elsewhere, but your own. There is a still small voice in all of us, a source of inspiration and guidance. Listen, then, and trust that words will be given to you. What feels true for you?

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am.

Be still and know.

Be still.

Be.

WHO WE ARE

Imagine you are standing on the shore of the ocean, the waves breaking gently at your feet. You wade in a little way, and you take an empty glass and dip it in the water. What are you holding in the glass? It is not the ocean. The ocean is still there and has not been diminished to any visible degree. But the water is of the ocean: from it, and like it. Its essence is the same. For me, God is like the ocean. And God's Spirit within us is like the water in the glass.

~~~

In my own understanding, God is what Is. There is nowhere – no time, no place, no situation – where God does not abide. God is our essence but, more than that, God is Essence. Anything which is not God is not real, even though it may appear to be so. At our heart is Love, and that Love is of God. At our core is eternity, which has been, is now and forever will be. When we show kindness, it is God acting through us. Our God-Self is the truth about Who we are.

Are we the 'mad monkey mind' which chatters away, judging others, judging ourselves, never satisfied and always seeking more?

Are we male and female? Young and old? Gay and straight? Black and white? Are we rich and poor? Healthy? Sick? Are we our bodies which live for a while but then return to dust?

Are we the things we own? The jobs we do? The roles we play?

Who are we, when we take off our costumes and masks?

~~~

Genesis 1:27 suggests we are created in the image of God. Too often, humanity has turned this around and made a god in the image of man – one who, like human beings, is quick to anger, and whose love is conditional on our behaving in certain ways or believing particular things. That god is separate from us, as we believe we are separate from one another. Our existence is precarious. The world appears a fearful place.

It is worth taking a step back and asking how we came to be here. What created the universe? What caused the big bang? Did a reaction between infinitely small particles trigger the biggest explosion in the history of time and set in train an evolutionary chain of events which led to life on earth, and to you reading this book now? What made those particles and caused them to react? All matter, and time and space itself, was created out of nothing, out of formlessness. And what is formlessness? Energy. Spirit.

According to the Gospel of Thomas, a collection of sayings attributed to Jesus, "If the flesh came into being because of spirit, that is amazing. If spirit came into being because of the body, that would be really amazing". [\[1\]](#) If we accept God is Spirit and that we are created in God's image, does it not follow that our essential nature is Spirit as well?

~~~



We seek to use words to describe what is beyond words. It is enough to say, 'I Am'. That which Is, is God.

Then there are the qualities we ascribe to God. God is Love. God is Truth. God is Joy. God is Peace. But here already we are moving a step away from the simple truth, I Am that I Am. The problem is, we each interpret these words in different ways.

Yes, God is all of those things. But even when these qualities *seem* to be lacking, God is still there. He does not cease to Be. He cannot 'go' anywhere, because She Is everywhere. In the midst of the battlefield, God Is. When galaxies collide and stars explode, God Is. Nothing causes God to cease to Be.

That Is-ness – the indestructible Reality beyond time and space and form – is in us also. It is in us, as we are in it. We are part of it. When I speak, then, of the Divine Essence in everyone, I mean that which is, and which will always be. Our roles, dreams and fears, and our bodies too, we experience for a while. But all of them pass.

Are we something temporary, a flame which is snuffed out in a cosmic instant? Or are we that part of us which Is and forever will Be? Are we the form or the formless? Are we that which fears, or that which knows Itself as eternal, and is therefore free to love? It can look on death and see through it. In nature, we see death is not real. Each spring, death is overcome. There is an eternal force for Life. Stars too die, but in doing so they spark the seeds for new life. In the words of *A Course in Miracles*, "nothing real can be threatened" [\[2\]](#). Our Spiritual Essence is from God, and like God. Eternal. Whole. Lacking nothing. When we are in touch with that core of our Being we come to walk cheerfully over the world, sons and daughters of the living God.

## **For reflection**

These exercises – and the others in this book – can be explored either on your own or with others in small groups. If you want to reflect on them with others, I have found that a creative listening format encourages deep sharing and may bring fresh insights. Through listening to one another in a spirit of acceptance and love, we open ourselves to new light and deeper connections. The format of a creative listening session is described later in this book in the section on Remembering.

If you are doing the exercises on your own, I encourage you to choose a time and a place where you will not be disturbed. Commit to not answer the telephone if it rings. If a dog starts barking outside, simply let it be. If you are not able to give these exercises your full attention now, it is better to schedule a time when you can.

Have a pen and notepad to hand so that you can write down what comes to you.

Sit in stillness for five to ten minutes. To centre yourself, you may wish to concentrate on your breathing. Be aware of the air as it enters through your nose. You may find it helpful to close your eyes. If your mind wanders, return to your breath to help anchor you in the present moment.

When you are ready, open your eyes and reflect on the sentences below.

- If it is true that there is a divine essence in everyone, then...
- If there is a divine essence within me, then...
- If my true Self is made in the image of God, then...

Without thinking too much, complete each of the sentences in your own words. Write down the first thoughts that come to you. Then, rooted in stillness, try to come up with several further responses. Do not censor any response that comes, or judge it. Simply write it down. For example, taking the first statement, I might write, 'If it is true that there is a divine essence in everyone, then each one of us is holy. If there is a divine essence in everyone, then everyone is my brother or sister. If there is a divine essence in everyone, then what unites us is greater than what divides us. ...Everyone has the potential for good...' Let your responses fill a page.



## EQUALITY

In a churchyard in East Sussex there is a grave shared by two sisters. Although they had the same parents, Pattie and Catherine died almost a century apart. Catherine lived to be ninety-three. Pattie did not see her second birthday.

On the level of form, some people are blessed with good health, while others suffer physical pain or handicaps or have their lives cut short by disease. In our life situations, some are blessed with loving family relationships, satisfying work and material comforts. For others, life is a more or less constant struggle. Perhaps we lost our parents at an early age; perhaps we've experienced the loss of people we love. We may even lack the most basic needs: clean water, food and shelter.

One thing we all have in common is that, whether after two years or a hundred and two, we will all die. However happy or sad our lives might be, they will be over in a cosmic instant, and our bodies will return to dust.

To me, this cannot be the whole story. If we were only our bodies, God would have plenty to answer for. We say that "God is love" (1 John 4:8), but how would it be loving to create us, let us suffer awhile and then watch us die? My heart and my head both tell me this cannot be so.

If there is divine spirit in everyone, then the Good News is that there is part of us which cannot die, which is eternally safe, and which no harm can ever befall.

~~~

Let us return to the analogy I used at the start of this book. You are standing on the shore of the ocean. You take a glass and you dip it in the waves and fill it with water. Then you take a fine china cup, and fill that too. Another person fills an old mug with a broken handle in the same way. Someone standing on the opposite shore fills a plastic bottle from the waves that are breaking on that distant coast.

Glass, cup, mug, bottle: all appear very different. One is attractive, another chipped. One is tall and slender, another stout. But the water they contain – the divine essence within them – is the same.

~~~

Intellectual belief in God in everyone counts for nothing if we still make idols out of forms, judging people by their appearance, or the roles they play, or on how they behave. We need to try to see beyond the surface differences to the shared Source – the divine essence – that is in everyone.

Equality is not only about equal opportunities; about overcoming prejudice in its most obvious forms: racism, sexism, homophobia... A commitment to equality means not pre-judging anyone. It means treating everyone with equal respect, recognising that we are all children of God. As our Father and Mother, God does not have favourites. She created us all in Her image and no one is any less holy than anyone else.

If we truly saw beyond the veil of form and recognized each person for Who they are, from that changed perception would flow an unswerving resolve to treat all people – all life – with reverence.

~~~

When asked which commandment was the greatest, Jesus is said to have replied, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:37-39.) Notice that the two commandments – I prefer to call them advices – are *like* one another. So much are they alike that in essence they are the same. We cannot demonstrate our love of God other than by loving our neighbour. Who is our neighbour? Whoever is with us or in our awareness at any point in time.

For as long as we identify ourselves as solely our bodies, we will perceive ourselves as separate from, and different to, one another. While we perceive ourselves as separate and different, the suggestion that we love our neighbour as ourselves might appear fanciful. However, when we recognize that of God which is both in us and in our neighbour, we may begin to appreciate that what unites us is greater than the surface differences. If we all have God within us, then we are all part of God. In a sense, our neighbour *is* our Self. What we do (or don’t do) for our sisters and brothers, we do (or don’t do) for the Christ-Self in them – which is indistinguishable from the Christ-Self in ourselves.

~~~

To love our neighbour authentically, we must first learn to love ourselves. Not in a conceited or self-indulgent way, but in a way that cherishes that of God within us. Loving myself may mean setting aside time to do those things that make me come alive. It may mean taking more care of my health; minding what foods I eat. It will probably mean letting go of pre-conceived notions of what is best for me, stepping back and letting God’s Spirit lead the way. Certainly we will make mistakes. We have all ‘sinned’ – which means simply that we have failed to act with love. But our failings and shortcomings do not detract from or change in any way the essence of Who we are. And, since that essence is divine, we are all of us worthy of love.

~~~

If we truly believe in equality, we will prize others’ happiness as equal to our own. We will not serve our own selfish interests while our brothers and sisters starve.

It is a tall order. How many of us are ready to sell our possessions and give to the poor (Matthew 19:21)? But we can listen to the still small voice within us and let it guide us in how we might serve. Perhaps it will lead us towards a sense of little ways in which we can act with love. If there are only two packets of my favourite biscuits left on the supermarket shelf, do I need to buy both? Or can I content myself with one packet today, so there is still one left for someone else? If I treat myself to a luxury item – something I don’t strictly need – am I willing to donate an equal amount of money to charity, to help those whose need is greater?

We are not asked to sacrifice our own happiness in the service of others. Pause for a minute. Think of spontaneous acts of kindness you have given without thought or expectation of return: kind words, acts of generosity, help you have provided to a friend in need. Recall how you felt immediately afterwards. If we give grudgingly or with resentment, that is not love.

To share God's Love – to be a channel through which It flows into the world – is not a duty, but a joy.

~~~

We all have that of God in us – and in that lies our essential equality. Of course we may be living our lives at different levels of awareness. Some of us may be in touch, more of the time, with who we truly are. Jesus, for example, had no doubt he was more than his body: “I am the light that is over all. I am the All. The All has come from me and unfolds toward me. Split a log; I am there. Lift the stone, and you will find me there.” [\[3\]](#)

But the divine essence is not only in Jesus, nor only in people like Ghandi and Mother Theresa, but also in Hitler and Stalin. The difference is in the fullness of our humanity: the degree to which we are ruled by our ego or separated self, or let ourselves be guided by the Spirit. The divine seed, or potential, is there in all of us. If Hitler had experienced pure unconditional love as a child, would he have turned out as he did?

~~~

On the level of personality and of form, there will be people who I like and people I may be less keen on. Can I treat them fairly? Am I willing to hold them all in the Light, and to try again and again to see the same Light in them all, however difficult it may be to discern? As Abraham Lincoln said, “I don't like that man. I must get to know him better”.

Equality does not mean sameness. We can love without exclusion, but that love – always accepting, always unconditional – can be shown in different ways. I may love my spouse or my partner. But if they are involved in a disagreement with someone, can I remain present enough to treat the person they disagree with kindly and fairly as well?

We don't all share the same talents and abilities. As such, it is likely that we will be called to serve in different ways. Some may be able to give more time, others more money. Some may have a gift of listening, or of smiling at strangers and making someone's day through that simple act of sharing. What matters is not what we do, or how much, or to whom we give. What matters is that we let our lives be guided by Love. As the Gospel of Matthew reminds us (25:37-40), whoever we give to, whoever we serve, there is ultimately only one recipient. And there is only one Source of the love that we share.

For reflection

- If there is that of God within us, then in a sense our body is a temple (1 Corinthians 6:19). Consider the care you take of yourself. In what ways are you treating yourself lovingly? In what ways are you perhaps not doing so? What small steps might you take to honour the divine within you?
- We might treat people equally regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation or belief. But perhaps our prejudices may be more subtle? Think of the encounters you have had with people in the last week – at work, while out shopping or travelling around. Think also about current events in the world. Are there less obvious ways in which you might be judging other people? When we're judging someone, can we truthfully claim to be treating them with love?
- Reflect on your interactions with people: managers and more junior staff at work; children and older people; the policeman and the dustman and the supermarket cashier. How do you relate to them? Do you treat them with equal kindness and respect, or is your behaviour influenced by the role they happen to be playing?
- Now look at yourself in different situations. Consider your home and social life, any faith community you may belong to, and any paid or voluntary work you do. In which situations do you find it easier or harder to respond to people with love and kindness? Why might this be?
- Jesus challenged us to love our neighbour as our Self; to do to others as we would have them do to us. This 'golden rule' is mirrored in the scriptures of all the major religions. How might you respond to this call? What steps can you take to turn it from an idea into a reality?

SIMPLICITY

There is more than one reason why we might move towards a simpler lifestyle. First, there are concerns related to social justice. When we recognise our essential oneness with others, can we continue to prioritise our own pursuit of luxuries ahead of their basic needs? As Jesus put it, “He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.” (Luke 3:11.)

Then there is the environmental imperative. According to research carried out by the Global Footprint Network, humanity uses the equivalent of 1.6 planets to provide the resources we use and to absorb our waste. [\[4\]](#) Our present consumption-oriented lifestyles in Europe, the US and elsewhere in the economically developed world are unsustainable. If everyone in the world consumed the same resources that the lifestyle of the average person in the UK demands, it would require 2.9 earths to support humanity. To sustain the lifestyle of the average US citizen, 4.8 earths would be required. If we take more than our fair share, what will be left for our grandchildren?

When we stop to reflect on this, we may find ourselves led to live more simply for the good of the Whole. But there is also a third, positive, reason to adopt a simpler lifestyle. Simplicity does not only benefit the world. It can also nourish us.

~~~

For me, simplicity is about cutting down on what’s not so important to give space to what is. It’s about removing the attachments and distractions – material or otherwise – which prevent the Love or Light of God shining through me in the world.

Some time ago, I facilitated a session on simplicity at my Quaker Meeting’s weekend away. I asked those present to identify something that’s important. We went around the circle and each person tried to think of something different until we had more than twenty words on the flip-chart. One person said love; others said friendships, health and peace of mind. No one suggested their giant-screen television, and no one mentioned promotion at work, or reputation, or ‘being right’ either. When we stop to reflect, we already have a sense of what truly matters. Why then do we invest a disproportionate amount of time and energy focusing on things that don’t matter all that much?

~~~

Often, the things we would add to our life situation do not bring us closer to the truth about Who we are, but move us further away from it. First, there is the time and energy we expend in earning the money to pay for the latest gadgets, the new clothes to squeeze into our already brimming wardrobes, or the more modern car. This is time which we could have spent nourishing ourselves spiritually, whether by going within or connecting with others. Then, there is the attention we devote to those things when we do have them: the hours we spend in front of the television or on the internet; the time it takes us to maintain our larger homes. First, we seek after things. Then, for a while, we worship them. Soon the novelty value wears off and we seek after something else. This cycle continues, until one day it may dawn on us that true lasting happiness cannot be found in things that do not last. We may come to a sense of what truly matters: quality time spent with loved ones, acts of kindness given and received,

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

