

Daily Evolver Live edited transcript - 3/31/15

EVOLVING TOWARD GOD

The surprising next stage of spiritual development

Hello my friends, Jeff Salzman here and welcome to the Daily Evolver Live. It's Tuesday, March 31st and this is the first episode of our Spring 2015 season.

It's beautiful evening here in Boulder. The early flowers are in full bloom. We had a long cold Spring which held the flowers back -- but they have literally sprung forth in the last couple weeks and we've been blasted with tulips.

I think tulips are beautiful flowers especially, and I love to bring them in from the garden where they can slowly open and bloom into their full expression. They become big daisies and give up the ghost in florid final exhale with a little fraying around the edges that just intensifies the color.

When I bring them in I place them in ikebana frogs - those little contraptions of upside-down nails where you can stick flowers and position them. Ikebana is the Japanese contemplative art of flower arranging. I'm no expert - I basically arrange the flowers just so each one can have an individual "I-space" which together creates the "we-space" of the bouquet itself.

It's a beautiful living art form and I love it. But what I've come to realize this year that I didn't last year is that ... the tulips love it too! They love being in my ikebana arrangements. And I think they may even love me.

One of the projects, if you will, of being an integral spiritual practitioner is to re-enchant the world. To see that everything that is alive is not just alive ... but conscious. Every living thing ... cells, plants, animals, humans and beyond ... has a consciousness appropriate to its level of development. This consciousness includes awareness, volition, and yes, even longing ...

So what I'm realizing is that flowers can be ennobled by our adoration. It makes them happy, more alive, more fulfilled. I always think of the wonderful line from Rumi where he said ... it's only six words: "Grapes *want* to turn into wine."

But I'm warning you. It may not be such a beautiful thought the next time you rev up the lawnmower. But hey, I didn't make the rules. God did.

All of which turns out to be relevant to the topic I want to look at tonight: the nature of one stage of life adoring and being adored by another. It does seem to be built into the system. We humans too, seem to be magnetized to and enthralled by beings who are flying at a higher altitude than we are. The obvious ones are the great spiritual geniuses and Buddha and Jesus.

But this also may also include beings who are flying at altitudes that we can't touch on the physical level, but who we can touch with our energy bodies and spirit

bodies. Perhaps culminating in a communion with an Ultimate consciousness, which I wish we had a better word for than “God.” But yes, the great loving intelligence at the center and circumference of the Kosmos: the great Mother/Father God.

Over the last weekend we had a conference here in Boulder, produced by Integral Life, called the *Return to the Heart of Christ Consciousness*. It drew over 250 people, plus several hundred more joining via the internet, all of whom were looking at this question of who is God, and how do we relate to a personal divinity. So I’ll look at some of the issues we addressed there. And I’ll be joined a little later in this episode by Steve McIntosh, who has done some of the best thinking on theistic spirituality in his upcoming book *The Presence of the Infinite*.

But before we get to that I want to encourage any of you who are interested in integral theory to check out the information under the “theory” tab on my website, Dailyevolver.com. And by the way, I love hearing from you! You can reach me via email at Jeff@DailyEvolver.com. Or you can leave me a voice message by clicking the orange button on the front page of the Dailyevolver.com site.

All right, let me just move into the main story I want to talk about tonight. One of the purposes of the Daily Evolver is to report on current events in terms of politics, war and peace, economics, culture and spirituality ... but also on integral happenings in the integral community.

On that note, let me just say kudos to my bros and sisters over at Integral Life, David Riordan, Corey deVos, and the whole team, for really moving the ball in integral spirituality. Not just with this last weekend’s conference on Christ Consciousness, which was really a beautiful, warm, loving gathering appropriate to the love vibe of Christianity, but also with all the integral spiritual events that Integral Life and Integral Institute have sponsored over the last 12 years.

What was going on this last weekend is what I would consider an evolutionary move: we were engaging the question of how to reconnect to something in the spiritual realm that is lost when we move from traditional stage of development (the amber altitude) to the modern stage of development (the orange altitude). We lose a connection to second-person spirituality or to God; and so that’s really what I want to look at.

This idea of creating a second-person relationship with Spirit, means a real relationship with a personal god, one who sees me and loves me. The first question being, does he, she, or it even exist? And if so, and how can we reconcile God’s presence with science, which would seem to negate it?

One of the most brilliant and I think spiritually precious insights of Ken Wilber is that Spirit, like all of reality, arises in first-person, second-person, and third-person dimensions. There are streams of spirituality that have been developed in humanity that relates to each of those. The religion that specializes in first-person spirituality is Buddhism and the contemplative religions. The goal of Buddhism is the expansion of my own identity to include more and more of both interior and exterior reality. I’ll talk about that a little bit more in this in a minute. Next I’ll jump to third-person spirituality, which is nature mysticism. This is a spirituality that arises from a spiritual relationship with the manifest world: vision quests, deep ecology, shamanism, that sort of thing.

Then there are the second-person religions, and these are the religions that relate to God as a divine *person*. The Western religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam specialize in this form of spirituality.

Now, one of the hugely important aspects of integral theory is that first-person, second-person, and third-person dimensions of reality can't be reduced one to the other. To have a more complete or more inclusive spirituality we are invited to practice in all three realms. A lot of us have actually done this without necessarily even meaning to, or noticing, or doing it as some sort of a project.

This is certainly true of many of the people at last weekend's conference, including me. Many of us started out as children with a fundamentalist, traditionalist version of Christianity. That's the majority religion in this country and in the West. This is, of course, the religion of today's social and religious conservatives.

Yet people at later stages of spiritual development tend to see the people who believe in the Bible literally as being backwards and even stupid.

I noticed that myself as I was watching Real Time with Bill Maher the other night, and Mike Huckabee was on the show. Mike Huckabee is a conservative ex-governor of Arkansas who is also an ex-pastor. He's actually a really warm, avuncular guy, but still very fiercely fundamentalist. He represents that whole vibe of conservatism in a deeply believing way.

Huckabee was talking to Bill Maher about guns and the joy of duck hunting. Bill Maher who is a big animal activist, interrupted, "Why do you want to kill the poor ducks?" Without a moment's hesitation, Mike Huckabee responded with great gusto, "Because they taste good! You kill things because they taste good!"

My immediate response was, "Oh, you fucking asshole." I just so hate any thinking that takes joy in the killing of an animal.

Of course, I'm a good integralist now, at least a wannabe. So I immediately note that "hating" something is an invitation for me to turn *towards* it. To open my mind, open my heart and ask myself, "What's right about this perspective? What piece of the truth does it bring to a more wise, integrated understanding of reality as it is? And what part of reality does this perspective see that I don't?" That's all really interesting when you really stop and think about it.

And when I do I realize something like: "Okay. Mike Huckabee and his people, the traditionalists, the amber altitude people, live in a world where ducks are God's precious gifts to us. They are given so that we can feed ourselves and be good, strong citizens of God's kingdom on earth. They're delicious because God made them delicious for us. God's kingdom is a good, true and beautiful place, except -- and of course, this is a big except -- human beings disobeyed God's instructions and brought sin into the world. And so now we're in a big war with the Devil and the forces of evil."

Of course this is where Mike Huckabee loses me -- and everybody else who has moved beyond a traditionalist, mythic understanding of reality into the next stage, which is modernity. But from an integral perspective we can see that not only is there nothing

wrong with traditionalism, but that traditionalism serves the purpose of organizing and civilizing the stage of consciousness that came before it, which is the brutal, might-is-right *warrior culture* (red altitude). From this perspective traditionalism represents huge developmental progress for both the cultures and individuals who make it that far.

In any case, after traditionalism we end up at modernity, and this is where we basically lose our religion. It just doesn't make sense anymore. I know that lightning isn't God's will; it's just atmospheric electricity discharging from positive to negative. And we turn from seeking answers in "The Book" to understanding the world as it presents itself. Of course, science is way more fruitful in terms of working with material reality, and so with science and technology we create the modern world, and all of what modernity has brought forth.

And yet from an interior perspective, there's a special kind of spiritual suffering that comes on line at modernity because ... we're not just kicked out of the garden, we're hanging on to a rock that's hurtling through space in some meaningless journey. At modernity, spirituality is not just not respected -- it seems to not even exist. I'm talking about real philosophical materialism, which is the scientific view.

In this view consciousness is a self-delusion of the brain. It has some evolutionary benefit because it allows us to interact with other brains who are under a similar delusion, so we can get together in our delusions and do things. Everything that makes us human, all volition, all awareness, all enthusiasm, all first-person consciousness is reduced to the brain. Second-person love is reduced to third-person meat. We're a collection of molecules, and cells, and neural networks that are doing their meaningless work.

You can feel yourself lose your religion in real time as I talk about it. I can feel it right now. There's an enchantment that just ... It washes away, and a little light goes out. It's hard to believe that this materialism represents progress along the spiritual line of development, but it does. Because it wrings the superstition, and magic, and myth out of the system, so that we can move forward cleansed of the downside of pre-modern religions, and all of the violence and the ethnocentricity that comes with the pre-modern stages of development.

After losing our religion at modernity, many of us moved on to a post-modern spirituality. Certainly, probably, most of the people listening to this would have moved on to a post-modern spirituality as well. It's exemplified by the Beatles' trip to India. That's the event that ushers it in to the mass consciousness. It's the bringing in of meditation and yoga, Tibetan Buddhism here at Boulder, Suzuki Roshi, Maharishi, Rajneesh, the New Age, the '60s.

What's cool about that is that ... The Buddhism, for instance, that is brought to America is shorn of all its indigenous, traditional, cultural aspects, and it's basically brought here by the most advanced people and practitioners. The most adventurous ones, the one who are really looking to innovate, and they replant themselves in the West. Tibetans were forced into a diaspora, but many great teachers have chosen to come over to the West.

They basically teach a high-end pristine graduate school level of Buddhism, of nondual technology if you will; while poor Christianity is still stuck in the Sunday school stage. This is not to say that Christianity doesn't have an equally beautiful mystical tradition,

but it's just not presented. Traditionalists don't know anything about it nor do the modernists. It's just waiting to be rediscovered, and of course, it is being rediscovered. And that's one of the projects of this last weekend. And a project a lot of people are doing.

I'd like to share a bit about what the nondual traditions do, particularly from a Buddhist view, which has been my main first-person practice. Buddhism relates to ultimate reality as being empty of intrinsic content, and let me just unpack that a little bit. In meditation practice, you start by seeing ... One of your first realizations is that what you previously saw as being concrete and unchanging actually turns into being an ever-changing fluidity. It's like what you thought was a noun becomes a verb, and there's this realization.

As you continue to practice, you see that even this fluidity reveals itself to be more energy and less mass. It's just more open and spacious, and aerated. I always love what Whitman wrote, "I inhale great drafts of space." As you further work and contemplate this, you realize that even this aerated effervescence is empty of any actual content.

I did a master's degree at Naropa University on Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, and one of my favorite courses was Madhyamaka where we did this practice of just basically splitting everything, continued to split into two until you find that there is, as they say: *nothing findable*. And that's profound. That realization delivers you into a realization of absolute reality that blasts away all of your identity, your conditioned mind, and you are now identifying with an open empty space where there's nothing findable.

Then you can, with further practice, see that this open space is actually lit up with Buddha nature, which is an intelligence, a compassion. And then you come back to do what you did before: you chop wood and carry water. You look the same. You do the same stuff, but you do it now lit up with this wisdom and compassion, this equanimity, this absolute liberation from conditions and conditioned mind. And you're enlightened!

Again, from an integral perspective, we'd say that that is a first-person realization. Your personal identity is expanded and essentially obliterated. At which point then, you can put yourself back on and wear yourself like a beautiful coat. I always loved that expression.

So again, post-modern spirituality embraces first-person, nondual spiritual practices like meditation. It also embraces third-person spirituality such as deep ecology and nature mysticism.

But second-person, Spirit as a Creator God? Not so much. There are still a lot of allergies to this idea of a personal God ... Anything like that. This is where integral comes in because at integral, of course, we keep the realizations about first person, nondual Spirituality. Whatever we got from third-person, nature, we continue to work on those as well. But we reintegrate second person in a post-traditional way ... and a post-modern way ... and a post post-modern way.

At this point, I want to look at this with the help of my guest, and dear friend, Steve McIntosh, who is really one of the leading thinkers in this differentiation between what a post-modern spirituality is and what he calls an evolutionary spirituality. Steve, of

course, wrote *Integral Consciousness, Evolution's Purpose*, and his new book *The Presence of the Infinite*, which will be coming out later this year.

Jeff Salzman: I'll put on my headphones here and hopefully hear Steve. Steve, are you there?

Steve McIntosh: Yes. I can hear you fine, Jeff. Thanks for having me on the show.

Jeff Salzman: It's my great pleasure. Steve, as I said, you wrote a book, it's not yet published, but it's very, very powerful to me called *The Presence of the Infinite* where you make an argument for theism basically. You differentiate post-modern spirituality from what you call "evolutionary spirituality", which is the post-post-modern move. I guess I'd start there by just asking you to give us a quick and dirty explanation of what it is.

Steve McIntosh: Sure. As I argue in the book, I'm not making an argument for theism as a replacement for the important achievements of progressive spirituality, which is bringing forward, and refining, and developing the nondual side of spirituality.

I argue for what I call "panentheism", which is a theological term, meaning that spirit is both immanent and transcendent. That the panentheistic insights of a transcended element of spirit ... infinite spirit that both encompasses and contains, and is contained within ... is imminent within the finite universe. That this is something that evolutionary spirituality can reclaim.

Indeed, when we look at what the signs of evolution has shown us about the evolution of the cosmos, the evolution of the bios, and when we add to that the integral understanding of the evolution of consciousness and culture, we can get a unified picture of evolution as a universe of becoming.

In this universe of becoming, nature and history have been creating value. This value has spiritual reality like the beautiful, the true, and the good that are entering the universe through us, through our choices, through our creations, through our spiritual experiences ... that this is bringing a becoming reality of spirit that's moving into existence in time.

This may relate to what we're going to talk about in a minute, but evolutionary spirituality, as I argue, just like integral consciousness or the integral worldview. It is dialectically separated from the post-modern worldview. In other words, the problems and shortcomings of post-modernism provide our point of departure.

Jeff Salzman: What would you say they are?

Steve McIntosh: The shortcomings of post-modernism?

Jeff Salzman: Yes.

Steve McIntosh: I would say one of them is a degree of value relativism. Another one would be anti-modernism like the tendency to see the previous stage before the post-modern primarily for its pathologies. Only for its disasters and not for its dignities.

It's evolutionary appropriate for post-modernism to be anti-modernist because that provides its points of departure, but it can only get so far in this position of antithesis before there needs to be another synthesis of the important achievements of post-modernism and the important achievements of modernism while attempting to prune away the pathologies that are resident within both of these worldviews.

This dialectical move is important because this is how evolution works for the most part: transcending and including. We can think about the idea of transcending and including from a dialectical stance because the antithesis transcends and the synthesis includes, so you have to transcend and you have to include in order to be a form of evolutionary growth. This is how evolution works all the way from the Big Bang to us. It keeps building up what came before. It doesn't just transcend and include. It takes up and uses the accoutrements from the previous stage.

Jeff Salzman: Yes, indeed.

Steve McIntosh: Now, we're trying to go beyond the post-modern both culturally, politically, and spiritually, and so that involves a pushing off against the shortcomings not just of the post-modern worldview or the post-modern value set, but the form of spirituality.

I call it "progressive spirituality". It's not entirely post-modern. It extends into the modernists who are engaged in various forms of progressive spirituality just like there's modernists engaged in traditional forms of spirituality; but the center of gravity of progressive spirituality is the post-modern worldview, and it rode the coattails of the emergence of that liberating form of culture.

One of the ways that post-modernism broke away from modernism was in reclaiming spirituality from the hands of secularism. In other words the modernist's job, as you said before, was to push off against the superstition, and the myth, and the magic, and the oppression, and those were the points of departure.

Jeff Salzman: The witch burning.

Steve McIntosh: In doing so, of course, it went too far, right? The sailboat has to tack back. It goes too far in one direction. They got rid of so much superstition but they also got rid of the sacred dimensions, the enchanted elements of the universe which are really there. They became blind to those, so this provided an evolutionary opportunity for progressive spirituality to reclaim the sacred, but to do it in a way that avoided regression to a pre-modern traditional form by finding forms of spirituality that is distinctly different feel and flavor than the Judeo-Christian heritage, which the post-modernist had inherited from their history.

Jeff Salzman: Right, so ...

Steve McIntosh: At first in the '60s, you could trace progressive spirituality back to Emerson and maybe even Rousseau, but what really gets things going is not just the emergence of the post-modern worldview, but it's the introduction of psychedelic experience on a mass scale. That really opens the door to a new form of spirituality because for most people who have a powerful psychedelic experience, the sacred nature of the universe is almost laughably obvious, right?

Looking for answers, once you've had that taste, involves discovering alternative forms of spirituality. And one of the advantages, the relativism, becomes the shortcoming. Every strength is also a shortcoming to a degree. They're tied together, and evident in post-modern's relativism and its unwillingness to make value judgments or say that one thing is better than another.

That's a strength when it comes to finding alternative forms of spirituality because you can let a thousand flowers bloom. You can let everything back in. Every form of spirituality (except maybe mainstream proselytism or evangelicalism) is given a fresh look and brought back. And so there begins to be this eclectic, syncretic, welcoming, anything-goes, New Age, spiritual, cultural milieu that emerges.

It starts in the '60s, as a result of the youth movement and the psychedelic movement, but in the '70s, it starts to consolidate. The momentum of the hippie movement dies out in the mid-'70s. New Age spirituality takes up the torch and continues. Even though it gained a lot of ground in the '70s, it was still very immature.

In the '80s, it was underground, but there was a lot of consolidation going on, especially with Buddhism, and the leadership of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche in bringing Tibetan-Buddhism. A lot of that occurred in the '80s. Then in the '90s, progressive spirituality becomes a big cultural phenomenon. Evidence to this you can see in a lot of places.

One of them is in the book industry. New Age titles in the '90s are the largest category of book sales by far. They dwarf everything else. New Age bookstores spring up in every town. There were once thousands and thousands of New Age bookstores in the United States, and they weren't just bookstores, they were also subcultural centers, where you'd go to do a lecture or you'd do a yoga class.

The approach of the millennium gave it an enchanted feel. And in the 2000's it seemed ... again, there's no hard evidence we can point to, but it seemed to level off a little bit or maybe even shrunk. Part of it has to do with the Great Recession. Part of it had to do with the commercial shortcomings of progressive spirituality.

Jeff Salzman: I would say that part of what happened too, and I think of myself at that time as saying, "I got it. I got the fruits of that. I turned over many rocks. I got something from everything. It's all in the table for me, and I'm now ready for the next thing, which is to put it together in some kind of meaningful pattern and also to find the piece that's missing, which is a relationship with the Divine Other actually." That is part of the, I think, move to the next stage which is what you call "evolutionary spirituality", right?

Steve McIntosh: Right. This task of moving away, of breaking the oppressive grip of pre-modern traditional spirituality, especially Christianity, that took two stages to do, right? The first stage was to cut it off completely with modernism, and the next stage was to rediscover spirituality in ways that try to either exclude or tone down the major themes of Christianity. There are some things that made it into progressive spirituality, but by and large progressive spirituality, especially as it matured and as we can see it now in its 2015 form, it's come to really favor the nondual conception of ultimate reality.

This has been an important accomplishment of progressive spirituality. The intellectual strength of it is that they come to inhabit this nondual form of spirituality by not only

bringing it forward in Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta Hinduism, but also in looking at the historical record. The wisdom of the ages been assembled and nondualists have found nondual expressions in practically every other religion, right?

Meister Eckhart is the poster boy for nondual Christianity, and then there are the Kabbalists. Many of them had a nondual view, and there's even nondual versions of Islam, right? It can be seen in Sufism, in some of the poetry of Rumi. This had been searched out and assembled, and it brought home a picture of this nondual form of spirituality. Even though it has variations and is not uniform, it is a real powerful form of human spirituality. It's based on spiritual experience, the experience of oneness, the unitive experience that can be had either through mystical encounters or through practices such as meditation.

This is a very important accomplishment, and I think this accomplishment belongs primarily to progressive spirituality, and it was an important step. Now, that it's been taken it allows us to go from antithesis to synthesis -- which is the primary program of the emergence of this integral or evolutionary worldview. In keeping with its pushing up against progressive spirituality, where does evolutionary spirituality go now? Nonduality has been very well-developed within progressive spirituality, especially among its intellectual thought leaders.

One way is to begin to reclaim, as you mentioned, the theistic side. When I say "theistic", the correct terms might be "pantheistic", which is a technical term for a version of nonduality, and "panentheistic". But those sounds so similar, and they're technical. It's probably easier to talk about these two major forms of spirituality as nondual and theistic. There are a variety of famous theologians such as Hans Kung who have identified this. Most of his work was done in the '70s and '80s.

Those who were familiar practitioners of Buddhism and Christianity could see that there was a very interesting tension that couldn't just be reconciled. That they weren't just different paths to the top of the same mountain, but there was some inherent tension between not just the spiritual teachings, but the spiritual experiences that went with the practices, right? It's not just a matter of doctrinal distinctions.

As I mentioned, the nonduality is based on a very deep, real, replicable, and ancient spiritual experience. But the theistic side also has its own sort of spiritual experience, which is not the same thing. This is the experience, as I argue, of the love of God. The love of a universe that cares. The love of a higher transcendent form of reality that exists within you. It's immanent *and* transcendent.

But for the love to be real, a nondual vision complicates it. In other words, the teachings of nonduality are ... You have to stretch them or fuzz them up in order to allow for a dualistic relationship like love of creator and creature. Again, this is immensely complicated, and it's something that can't just be summarized easily. But the idea is that evolutionary spirituality is growing beyond progressive spirituality by finding a place to reclaim the deep truths of the spiritual heritage of Western civilization, the truths about a loving God -- but doing that in a way that transcends.

I know in my own experience, and I know in teachings that have resonated with me very deeply, that the universe is clearly a ... there is clear evidence for creative causation. We have freewill. We have purpose. We are agents, and this agency that we possess I think

also exists in the totality. The totality is real, and it has features in a way that goes far beyond anything we can conceive.

These features of agency, love, and purpose are things which are indeed possessed by the source of universe, and those have been realized throughout history by the insights of the great saints and sages who brought forth the theistic vision of ultimate reality.

Jeff Salzman: Okay. Let me stop you there and just say I'm working on this, okay? I go to this Integral Christian conference, and I'll just give you a little example of something that happened, and see if you can maybe help me.

Steve McIntosh: Okay.

Jeff Salzman: All right. I'm part of this little panel that's only up there for like 15 minutes, just five people giving their opinion on things just to get the conversation going in the room. So David Riordan, who is the Master of Ceremonies, asks me the question: "What do you think spirit is up to?" I know he was expecting a pretty predictable answer from me. That's a softball question for a guy like me. What spirit is up to is that we're riding an ever-accelerating evolutionary flow into a sacred world that's more good, true, and beautiful than ever. I believe that, and I can feel God at the center of it pulling me, and loving me and seeing me, and that I can love God back.

But there is a big problem for me, and it came up in my answer. My answer was that I think that clearly God has a greater tolerance for suffering than I do. We had just heard a speaker who talked about her mother whose family had perished in the Holocaust and how she was allergic to God. That somehow just stuck in my craw, and I thought of a famous story about a sentence that was carved into the barracks wall of Auschwitz. It said, "If God exists, he's going to have to beg my forgiveness."

So I look at the good things that are happening, and I can see God in there, but I also have to realize that this is the same God who has allowed just ... I don't know, untold suffering of children and mothers ... there are tapeworms, and disease, and war, and beheadings, and starvation, and drought, and ... jeez, I don't know. Where is God in all this? Or is my moral sense more developed than God's?

Steve McIntosh: The question you're posing has a formal philosophical name. It's called the "problem of evil", and the idea is debated by both those who are atheistic and those who argue for theistic vision of ultimate reality. The basic question is, if God exists, how could God allow all this evil and suffering in the world, right? Why wouldn't God create the universe where maybe there'd be a little bit of suffering or maybe just some discomfort, right? But the horrors ...

Jeff Salzman: Yes, a little discomfort would be all we need. The thermostat would still move towards the comfortable. Evolution would still be served. It doesn't have to be red of tooth and claw.

Steve McIntosh: Yeah. I keep saying this, but it's important for intellectual integrity to say that is an immensely complicated question which we should ...

Jeff Salzman: You have three minutes.

Steve McIntosh: Yeah, three minutes. Okay, I can say that there are two defenses against the challenge of the problem of evil. One is philosophical, and the other is more faith-based or spiritual, as a form of spiritual teaching. If we go back we can say, "Look, the universe has been created." In other words, there was a Big Bang. The finite has come to exist within the infinite. The finite became a part of the infinite 13.8 billion years ago, and so evolutionary spirituality asks, "Is there a purpose behind this, or is this just a random purposeless event?"

Obviously, scientism would have us believe that it indeed is random, and we can explain it randomly or at least through purely physical causes. I know I and many others who are part of the evolutionary spirituality movement reject that and see that the creation of the universe indeed has a purpose. The characteristics of the creation gave us hints into what this purpose is. In other words, and this was something that was realized by the medieval Kabbalists ... They saw that, in a sense, the finite was created by the infinite being removed.

In other words, perfection was removed from a part of the universe so that there could be not just "being", there could be "becoming". "Becoming" has a cosmic function. It adds to pure being, and the question is, what could it add? I think it adds an experiential form of perfection. In other words, the creatures like us within the finite evolve our consciousness. As we do, we come to know perfection gradually through our own efforts, practices, and choices, right? We experience perfection in those ways. We create it.

The beautiful, the true, and the good are the forms of perfection that we're empowered as agents of evolution to create. And so we are here doing our best to create those things; but the creation of those things wouldn't really be ours if we didn't have any responsibility for them, if there wasn't a universe in which perfection had been removed and our job in the cosmic economy is to add it back. This process of adding it back has to allow for its absence.

In other words, the actuals have to be removed to create the space of potentials in which freewill creatures like us can participate in the becoming. Now, that's philosophical, but let me get to the punchline here, and that is that evil is a shadow of free will. Before humans had the capacity to choose morally, there was no such thing as evil. We don't assign evil to animals, right? Maybe they can suffer, right? But before they had consciousness, they couldn't even suffer. Rocks don't suffer, right?

The shadow of consciousness is suffering. The shadow of the higher level of consciousness that has morality is evil, and this shadow is, in some ways, the proof of the fact that this universe of becoming is not yet actualized and we have a role to play. Now, there's also the sense in which if we're here for a reason, then we're going have to accomplish something. In other words, our accomplishments as a culture, as a civilization, is to overcome this evil.

The fact that it bothers us so much, it seems so senseless and horrible -- indeed because it is -- is also because we are empowered to be able to overcome it. Once we have, we will have created something by our own means, by our own lights that will add to the perfect being that existed before there was a universe of becoming. In other words, freedom has a very important role in the cosmic economy. Not just the freedom of our wills, but the freedom of an imperfect universe. The imperfections that we see are urgent, and jarring,

and they're the opposite of the beautiful, the true, and the good. They awaken us to the urgent duty that we have to try to perfect the universe, to try to get rid of these things.

Now, that's at least a taste of some of the philosophical side of the argument. Let me just leave that there for a moment, and then turn to the spiritual side.

I think that probably there's a hangover from bad theology of the past where people conceive of God as being deterministic, of God being like the puppet master. The idea of free agents was something that was not universally accepted within traditional forms of spirituality. Partially, we're dealing with a kind of Old Testament idea that God is controlling things.

If he is controlling things and Auschwitz happened, then indeed, that is a big argument against any kind of loving creator. But I think that when we hold these freewill arguments, the philosophical understanding of the reason of becoming and the shadow of freedom, then we can say ... The only way that evil and suffering can be redeemed or could be somehow made okay in this longer scheme of things is if there's an afterlife.

If there is an afterlife, and I certainly believe there is, then it could be that the things which we suffer, the evil that we experience is a necessary part of our journey, and indeed, those who have borne a disproportionate share of that suffering ... that suffering in the afterlife becomes an inventory of their comparative joy.

In other words, the people who have suffered more are able to experience joy in a way that those of us who haven't suffered to that degree can't. Right? We may be jealous of the people who had to suffer throughout Auschwitz in the afterlife. They're going to be much more joyful by comparison.

Jeff Salzman: I'm doubly screwed then because I've had a very cushy life.

Steve McIntosh: You certainly been afflicted. It's been said, "The greatest affliction from this perspective is to have never been afflicted."

Jeff Salzman: Of course. It ain't easy no matter what.

Steve McIntosh: In other words, I think there is freedom in the universe of becoming. I think that a loving God can be reconciled with the horrific suffering in this world if we recognize that the suffering of the innocents is redeemed in the afterlife and that these experiences will be more they made up for.

Jeff Salzman: Yes. And one of the things that we learned even in the nondual traditions is the unreality of experience too. Every experience is shot through with emptiness. So when we die maybe it's like waking up from a dream and saying, "God, that was a nightmare." I was just chased by a lion and cornered, and just about to have my head ripped off, and I wake up and say, "Oh, okay. That's over. What a relief."

We know this from reports of near-death experiences and mystical experiences -- not to mention monks who joyfully self-immolate -- that there's a way of just receiving the suffering of life that is joyful. I think that's a big job, and I think it's a practice. I am not all that good at it, but I'm working on it.

Steve McIntosh: That's where the nondual side and the theistic side can true each other up a bit. They can challenge each other. There's nonattachment, and there's loving engagement. There's the idea that the universe is a beautiful illusion, and there's the idea that nature and history are the process of spirit coming into reality. Therefore, they're very valuable and very spiritually real.

We don't have to say, "It's both and." We can go back and forth, and say, "Well, no, from this perspective, that's wrong; and from this perspective, that's wrong." Yet, we know from a higher level of being able to hold a polarity like that within our consciousness ... through vision logic or dialectical understanding, that we can begin to use the polarity itself as a system for greater understanding.

I guess just to summarize what I was saying about the spiritual dimension: if we could summarize the philosophical argument as "evil is the shadow of free will", we could summarize the spiritual arguments through the faith conviction that "all things work together for good" despite all appearances to contrary.

Jeff Salzman: Yeah. Wow, well-put. Faith ... do you have any tips on that?

Steve McIntosh: Sure. Yeah.

Jeff Salzman: How do we hold that?

Steve McIntosh: Right. Faith is a spiritual practice which because it's most associated with the traditional level of spirituality is often confused with belief. The word is used in many ways. Your faith could be your belief system. But faith can also be understood as a form of spiritual practice, as a kind of a superconscious knowing beyond what's cognitively possible for you to know. A lot of this faith is meeting God halfway. The French philosopher Blaise Pascal is famous for his quote that I love which is, "Human things must be known in order to be loved, but divine things must be loved in order to be known."

This loving of God is the spiritual practice of faith, and it opens the channel through which you can feel God's love for you as a son and daughter of the living God. The idea is that we are actually known, and loved, and cared for by God from both within and without. That's the essential teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. I don't know how much it was emphasized at this recent conference, but the love of God is really the keynote of his teaching.

The practice of faith that Jesus commends is one in which you trust, you know. It's not like that you're just ... you're incredulous or you're duped. That may be the case with the masses of mythic believers of the traditional level, but like all spiritual practices, faith has an expression at the evolutionary level, and at the evolutionary level faith practice is not just a matter of belief in myths and miracles. It's a matter of practicing the presence of God and doing it through faith.

Jeff Salzman: Yes, that is an ever more delicious practice for me, and I think for a lot of integral spiritual practitioners, certainly, the several hundred who participated in the *Return to the Heart of Christ Consciousness Conference* this last weekend. The practice and the exploration continues, and I just feel so lit up by it. I want to thank you, Steve,

for once again really helping me understand this. It really helps to guide the practice and the experience itself, so thank you again so much.

Steve McIntosh: The teachings, and the practices, and the experiences are all woven together. They light each other up, and that's one of the things that evolutionary spirituality does. It gives us a new perspective on spiritual teachings from every tradition in ways that can be pluralistic, but doesn't get caught in relativism. That's what my next book [The Presence of the Infinite] is about.

Jeff Salzman: Exactly. Thank you again, Steve, for joining us. Steve McIntosh. I thank all of you for joining us. Again, I'd love to hear from you, jeff@dailyevolver.com or the "Voicemail" button on the homepage of the dailyevolver.com website. You can also find the Daily Evolver Live on Integralife.com, and on Stitcher and iTunes. Please share it with people you think might be interested.

All right. Thanks again, everybody. This is Jeff Salzman signing off. See you next Tuesday on Daily Evolver Live.