DEEPAK CHOPRA LEONARD MLODINOW

AN ILLUSION?

The Great Debate
Between
Science and Spirituality

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About the Book

Neither science nor spirituality is going to go away. Science has slowly but surely challenged traditional religion; yet even as our scientific understanding has expanded, some of the greatest questions remain unanswered. How did the universe emerge? What is the nature of time? What is the connection between mind and brain? Is God an illusion?

These and other profound subjects are debated by Dr Deepak Chopra and Professor Leonard Mlodinow, best-selling authors and cutting-edge thinkers in the fields of spirituality and science respectively. Chopra argues that there is design in the universe and a deep intelligence behind the origins of life. Mlodinow reasons from the vantage point of science anchored in modern quantum physics.

From the beginnings of time to the mechanics of consciousness, Mlodinow and Chopra lock horns and challenge us to consider revolutionary theories about the cosmos and our place in it. Their discussion enters fascinating new territory, where knowledge and mystery meet head on. And the results are startling: science could prove to be the strongest ally spirituality has ever found.

ALSO BY LEONARD MLODINOW

Euclid's Widow: The Story of Geometry from Parallel Lines to Hyperspace

Feynman's Rainbow: A Search for Beauty in Physics and in Life

A Briefer History of Time (with Stephen Hawking)
The Drunkard's Walk: How Randomness Rules Our Lives
The Grand Design (with Stephen Hawking)

FOR CHILDREN

The Last Dinosaur (with Matt Costello)

Titanic Cat (with Matt Costello)

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Consciousness in the Universe: Quantum Physics, Evolution, Brain and Mind (with Stuart Hameroff and Sir Roger Penrose)

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Return of the Rishi

Quantum Healing

Perfect Health

Unconditional Life

Ageless Body, Timeless Mind

Creating Affluence

The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success

The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success: Pocket Guide

The Way of the Wizard

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Boundless Energy
Journey into Healing
The Path to Love
Perfect Weight
Restful Sleep

Raid on the Inarticulate
The Seven Spiritual Laws for Parents

Perfect Digestion

Overcoming Addictions

The Love Poems of Rumi (edited by Deepak Chopra; translated by Deepak Chopra and Fereydoun Kia)

Healing the Heart

Everyday Immortality

On the Shores of Eternity

The Daughters of Joy

The Lords of Light

The Angel Is Near

How to Know God

The Deeper Wound

The Chopra Center Herbal Handbook (with coauthor David Simon)

Grow Younger, Live Longer (with coauthor David Simon)

The Soul in Love

Soulmate

Golf for Enlightenment

The Spontaneous Fulfillment of Desire

Manifesting Good Luck

The Chopra Center Cookbook (coauthored by David Simon and Leanne Backer)

The Book of Secrets

Fire in the Heart Peace Is the Way

The Seven Spiritual Laws of Yoga (with coauthor David Simon)

Magical Beginnings, Enchanted Lives (coauthored by David Simon and Vicki Abrams)

Teens Ask Deepak

Ask the Kabala (with coauthor Michael Zappolin)

Power, Freedom, and Grace

Life After Death

Kama Sutra

Buddha

The Essential How to Know God
The Essential Spontaneous Fulfillment of Desire
The Essential Ageless Body, Timeless Mind
The Third Jesus
Why Is God Laughing?

Jesus

Reinventing the Body, Resurrecting the Soul
The Ultimate Happiness Prescription
The Shadow Effect (with coauthors Debbie Ford and
Marianne Williamson)

Muhammad

The Soul of Leadership

Walking Wisdom (contributor; authored by Gotham Chopra)

The Seven Spiritual Laws of Superheroes (with coauthor
Gotham Chopra)

FOR CHILDREN

On My Way to a Happy Life (with Kristina Tracy, illustrated by Rosemary Woods)

You with the Stars in Your Eyes (illustrated by Dave Zaboski)

CHOPRA

IS GOD AN ILLUSION?

THE GREAT DEBATE BETWEEN SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY

LEONARD

MLODINOW



LONDON · SYDNEY · AUCKLAND · JOHANNESBURG

To all the sages and scientists who have expanded the human mind

Praise for *Is God an Illusion?*

"We physicists are concerned with observations of the physical universe and the mathematical theories that explain them. Others seek enlightenment through a focus on subjective experience. In this book these approaches meet, often throwing off sparks, occasionally agreeing, and always remaining both illuminating and entertaining."

—Jay Marx, Executive Director, Laser Interferometer Gravitational-wave Observatory (LIGO) Laboratory, Caltech

"Most conflicts in life can be traced to worldview differences, and none more so than the worldviews of science and religion. *Is God an Illusion?* is the best single volume I've ever read on this vital subject. Deepak Chopra and Leonard Mlodinow well capture the essence of the debate and do so in such an engaging style that you can't stop reading. This book is a game changer in the science-and-religion wars."

—MICHAEL SHERMER, publisher of *Skeptic* magazine, monthly columnist for *Scientific American*, adjunct professor at Claremont Graduate University and Chapman University, author of *Why Darwin Matters* and *The Believing Brain*

"A refreshing and more useful approach to the old combat between science and religion. The two authors want the best for humanity, and their zeal is revealed even when they fiercely disagree. The value of this book will only become greater and more appreciated with time."

—Menas Kafatos, Ph.D., Fletcher Jones Endowed Professor in Computational Physics; Dean, Schmid College of Science, Vice Chancellor for Special Projects, Chapman University

"Quantum mechanics demonstrates the reality of particle entanglement. The reality of today's world is that all of our lives are entangled. The dialogue between these two extraordinary writers serves as a source of awe and inspiration to all of us."

—James R. Doty, M.D., Professor of Neurosurgery, Founder and Director, Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (CCARE), Stanford Institute of Neuro-innovation and Translational Neuroscience, Stanford University School of Medicine

"Astrophysicist Sir James Jeans wrote: 'The Universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine.' This is the essence of Chopra's view: that a great consciousness—which we share—is the basis of the Universe and all reality. From Mlodinow's perspective it is unimaginable that consciousness could be anything more than brain chemistry at work and certainly not something capable of creating a universe. The book presents a lively and articulate debate on this most important human question: Are we simply complex biological machines destined for oblivion at death, or are we immortal spiritual beings temporarily experiencing reality through physical bodies?"

—Bernard Haisch, astrophysicist

"Deepak Chopra and Leonard Mlodinow argue convincingly for their particular worldviews. However, reading this book convinces me they should call a truce: science and spirituality are two sides of a quantum coin."

—Stuart Hameroff, M.D., Professor, Anesthesiology and Psychology; Director, Center for Consciousness

Studies, The University of Arizona, Tucson

"Finally! The beginning of a dialogue in the true spirit of open-ended science that should be inclusive of all phenomena including spirituality. Congratulations to Chopra and Mlodinow for the breakthrough."

—Amit Goswami, quantum physicist and author of *The Self-Aware Universe* and *How Quantum Activism Can Save Civilization*

"Is consciousness an aspect of nature that had no precursor prior to the appearance of life, or is it a feature of nature that was in some form always present? This question is debated in this lively, informative, and entertaining book coauthored by two skilled writers. Chopra argues for the pervasiveness of consciousness, while Mlodinow argues for emergence of everything from the purely physical, in the absence of adequate scientific evidence to the contrary. This book is a good read even if, and particularly if, you already have a fixed opinion on the matter."

—Dr. Henry P. Stapp, physicist, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, University of California, Berkeley, and author of *Mind, Matter, and Quantum Mechanics* and *Mindful Universe: Quantum Mechanics and the Participating Observer*

"Deepak Chopra and Leonard Mlodinow have opened the discussion on the fundamental physics of the spirit."

—Juliana (Brooks) Mortenson, M.D., Founder, General Resonance

"Ours is a time of unprecedented change and complexity. Never before have so many worldviews, belief systems, and ways of engaging reality converged. Such a moment of contact has many consequences. On the one hand, there are abundant instances of conflict and intolerance, as

people fail to see other points of view. On the other hand, the situation can lead to the creative emergence of new and more sustainable ways of being together in our otherwise fragmented world. Such is the promise of this thoughtful and provocative book. As Chopra and Mlodinow, two masters in their respective fields, come together to consider the challenges of merging science and spirituality, they offer an essential guidebook for shaping the future of our shared humanity."

—MARILYN SCHLITZ, Ph.D., President and CEO, Institute of Noetic Sciences

"In this latest skirmish of the age-old war of the worldviews, we find a spirited defense of both science and spirituality. The authors are masters of their domains, and their debate makes it crystal clear that the battle will not be settled any time soon. Reading this book may make your brain hurt, but it is an experience that is fascinating, exasperating, and definitely worthwhile."

—Dean Radin, Ph.D., Co-Editor-in-Chief, *Explore: The Journal of Science and Healing*; Adjunct Professor, Department of Psychology, Sonoma State University; Senior Scientist. Institute of Noetic Sciences

"In *Is God an Illusion?*, Chopra and Mlodinow prove to be eloquent proponents for their respective points of view. Though it is clear they remain far apart on many issues, the mere act of these two acclaimed thinkers addressing them together provides hope that the divide between science and spirituality can be narrowed."

—Jim B. Tucker, M.D., Division of Perceptual Studies, Department of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences, University of Virginia Health System

"A tension exists between the way that we think about the laws of physics and our own subjective experience. Chopra

and Mlodinow ponder both perspectives in their lively debate, leaving the reader enriched to see the world with a new depth. *Is God an Illusion?* offers clear choices for these rapidly changing times."

—Jeff Tollaksen, Director, Center for Quantum Studies, Head of Physics Faculty, Schmid College of Science, Chapman University

"As a brilliant scientist and mathematician, Leonard Mlodinow believes that physics can account for the creation of the universe through the laws of nature, without the participation of a deity. To Deepak Chopra, the truth exists in consciousness. The time has come for humanity to open its mind to all levels of reality."

—Lothar Schäfer, Distinguished Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry, University of Arkansas

"Is God an Illusion? offers a fascinating and detailed debate focusing on how the spiritual and the scientific approaches to understanding reality often clash. Physician Deepak Chopra and physicist Leonard Mlodinow provide a rich set of reflections and easy-to-understand introductions to the various topics, from the nature of mind and consciousness to God and the brain. Diving into the conceptual friction and heated emotional tension of this important and passionate conversation between two leaders in these fields inspires us to weave a tapestry of our own, blending the hard-won insights from an empirical approach to reality with the important journey to make a life of meaning and interconnection in our daily lives."

—Daniel J. Siegel, M.D., author of *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation*, Clinical Professor, UCLA School of Medicine, Executive Director, Mindsight Institute

mysterious than another **MORE** person's **NOTHING** IS worldview. Each of us has one. We believe that our worldview expresses reality. The Native Americans of the Southwest traveled hundreds of miles to hunt buffalo but never ate fish from their local streams. In their worldview, it was real that fish were the spirits of departed ancestors. In the Old Testament it was real that animal sacrifices appeased God's wrath; to the everyday Roman it was real that the future could be foretold in the entrails of a chicken. To the ancient Greeks it was real that a moral individual could keep slaves and that there existed many gods, of love and beauty, war, the underworld, the hunt, the harvest, the sea.

What happens, then, when two worldviews clash? In 399 BCE three Athenian citizens accused Socrates of refusing to recognize the traditional gods and introducing new divinities instead (he was also accused of corrupting their youth). The penalty for this clash of worldviews, or gods, was death. During his trial Socrates refused to back down or to flee from a certain verdict of guilty. According to Plato, he said, "So long as I draw breath and have my faculties, I shall never stop practicing philosophy." Unfortunately, in many parts of the world today, a clash of worldviews is still met with violence and death.

This book is about a clash of worldviews, but no blows were exchanged. The book came about when two strangers met at a televised debate on "the future of God." The setting was an auditorium at the California Institute of Technology, and the audience was composed of many scientists and students, but also of laypeople, including Deepak's fans from the surrounding community. Each of them brought his or her own personal beliefs—no doubt some of them were religious—but they also brought their own worldview, which runs much deeper than belief.

In the Caltech debate Deepak served as the defender of a worldview broadly known as spiritual. Since the ideas of physics became an issue, during the question-and-answer period Deepak asked, "Is there a physicist in the house?" Neither Leonard nor anyone else answered. But after the debate, the moderator, who recognized Leonard as a physicist, pulled him out of the audience to ask Deepak a question. Leonard instead offered to teach him about quantum physics. Deepak accepted—to a mixture of laughter and applause—and as we started to communicate, we found ourselves strongly disagreeing about our worldviews. Realizing the depth of our clash, we decided to have it out in this book.

Science has set humanity on a path to unravel the secrets of nature, harness natural forces, and develop new technologies, using reason and observation instead of emotional bias as a tool for uncovering the truth of things. Spirituality looks toward an invisible, transcendent realm discovered within the self. Science explores the world as it is offered to the five senses and the brain, while spirituality considers the universe to be purposeful and imbued with meaning. In Deepak's view, the great challenge for spirituality is to offer something that science cannot provide—in particular, answers that lie in the realm of consciousness.

Which worldview is right? Does science describe the universe, or do ancient teachings like meditation unravel mysteries that are beyond the worldview of science? To find out, this book explores the clash of worldviews on three

levels: the cosmos, or physical universe; life; and the human brain. Finally, we also explore the ultimate mystery, God. In "Cosmos" we argue about where the universe came from, its nature, and where it is going. In "Life" we debate evolution, genetics, and the origin of life. "Mind and Brain" addresses neuroscience and raises all the issues of mind and body. And "God" refers not only to a presiding deity but also to the broader concept of a divine presence in our universe.

This book covers eighteen topics in total, with essays from both authors. Each of us told his side of the story, one topic at a time, but whoever came second on any given topic did so with the other's text in hand, feeling free to present a rebuttal. Since rebuttals tend to persuade audiences, we tried to be as fair as possible about who got that advantage.

Each of us believes deeply in the worldview he represents. We have written fiercely but respectfully to define the truth as we see it. No one can ignore the question of how to perceive the world. The best we can do—writers and readers alike—is to leap into the fray. What else could be more important?

Deepak Chopra Leonard Mlodinow

PART ONE

THE WAR

1

Perspectives

The Spiritual Perspective **DEEPAK**

Who looks outside, dreams; who looks within, awakens.

—CARL JUNG

IF IT IS going to win the struggle for the future, spirituality must first overcome a major disadvantage. In the popular imagination, science long ago discredited religion. Facts replaced faith. Superstition was gradually vanquished. That's why Darwin's explanation of man's descent from lower primates prevails over Genesis and why we look to the Big Bang as the source of the cosmos rather than to a creation myth populated by one or more gods.

So it's important to begin by saying that religion isn't the same as spirituality—far from it. Even God isn't the spirituality. Organized religion same as may have discredited itself, but spirituality has suffered no such defeat. Thousands of years ago, in cultures across the globe, inspired spiritual teachers such as the Buddha, Jesus, and Lao-tzu proposed profound views of life. They taught that a transcendent domain resides beyond the everyday world of pain and struggle. Although the eye beholds rocks, mountains, trees, and sky, this is only a veil drawn over a vast, mysterious, unseen reality. Beyond the reach of the five senses lies an invisible realm of infinite possibility, and the key to unfolding its potential is consciousness. Go within, the sages and seers declared,

and you will find the true source of everything: your own awareness.

It was this tremendous promise that religion failed to deliver on. The reasons don't concern us here, because this is a book about the future. It's enough to say that if the kingdom of God is within, as Christ declared, if nirvana means freedom from all suffering, as the Buddha taught, and if knowledge of the cosmos is locked inside the human mind, as the ancient *rishis*, or sages, of India proposed, we cannot look around today and say that those teachings bore fruit. Increasingly few people worship in the old ways around the world, and even as their elders lament this decline, those who have walked away from religion no longer even need an excuse. Science long ago showed us a brave new world that requires no faith in an invisible realm.

The real issue is knowledge and how you attain it. Jesus and the Buddha had no doubt that they were describing reality from a position of true knowledge. After more than two thousand years, we think we know better.

Science celebrates its triumphs, which are many, and excuses its catastrophes, which are also numerous—and growing. The atomic bomb delivered us into an age of mass destruction that brings night terrors just to contemplate. The environment has been disastrously disrupted by emissions spewing from the machines that technology gives us to make life better. Yet supporters of science shrug off these threats as either side effects or failures of social policy. Morality, we are told, isn't the responsibility of science. But if you look deeper, science has run into the same problem as religion. Religion lost sight of humility before God, and science lost its sense of awe, increasingly seeing Nature as a force to be opposed and conquered, its secrets stripped bare for the benefit of humankind. Now we are paying the price. When asked if *Homo sapiens* is in danger of extinction, some scientists offer hope that within a few hundred years space travel will be advanced enough to let us abandon the planetary nest we are fouling. Off we go to spoil other worlds!

We all know what's at stake: the foreseeable future looms grimly over us. The standard solution for our present woes is all too familiar. Science will rescue us with new technology—for restoring the environment, replacing fossil fuels, curing AIDS and cancer, and ending the threat of famine. Name your malady and there's someone to tell you that a scientific solution is just around the corner. But isn't science promising to rescue us from itself? And why is that a promise we should trust? The worldview that triumphed over religion, and that looks upon life as essentially materialistic, has set us on a path that leads to a dead end. Literally.

Even if we miraculously eliminated disastrous pollution and waste, coming generations will still have no model for the good life except the one that has failed us: endless consumption, exploitation of natural resources, and the diabolical creativity of warfare. As a young Chinese student bitterly commented about the West, "You ate the whole banquet. Now you give us coffee and dessert, but tell us to pay for the entire meal."

Religion cannot resolve this dilemma; it has had its chances already. But spirituality can. We need to go back to the source of religion. That source isn't God. It's consciousness. The great teachers who lived millennia ago offered something more radical than belief in a higher power. They offered a way of viewing reality that begins not with outside facts and a limited physical existence, but with inner wisdom and access to unbounded awareness. The irony is that Jesus, the Buddha, and the other enlightened sages were scientists, too. They had a way of uncovering knowledge that runs exactly parallel to modern science. First came a hypothesis, an idea that needed testing. Next came experimentation to see if the hypothesis was true.

Finally came peer review, offering the new findings to other researchers and asking them to reproduce the same breakthrough.

The spiritual hypothesis that was put forward thousands of years ago has three parts:

- 1. There is an unseen reality that is the source of all visible things.
- 2. This unseen reality is knowable through our own awareness.
- 3. Intelligence, creativity, and organizing power are embedded in the cosmos.

This trio of ideas is like the Platonic values in Greek philosophy, which tell us that love, truth, order, and reason shape human existence from a higher reality. The difference is that even more ancient philosophies, with roots going back five thousand years, tell us that higher reality is with us right here and now.

In the following pages, as Leonard and I debate the great questions of human existence, my role is to offer spiritual answers—not as a priest or a practitioner of any particular faith, but as a researcher in consciousness. This runs the risk, I know, of alienating devout believers, the many millions of people in every faith for whom God is very personal. But the world's wisdom traditions did not exclude a personal God (to be candid, I was not taught as a child to worship one, but my mother did, praying at a temple to Rama every day of her life). At the same time, wisdom traditions all included an impersonal God who permeates every atom of the universe and every fiber of our being. This distinction bothers those believers who want to cling to the one and only true faith, whatever it may be for them. But an impersonal God doesn't need to be a threat.

Think of someone you love. Now think of love itself. The person you love puts a face on love, yet surely you know

that love existed before this person was born and will survive after they pass away. In that simple example lies the difference between the personal and the impersonal God. As a believer you can put a face on God—that is a matter of your own private choice—but I hope you see that if God is everywhere, the divine qualities of love, mercy, compassion, justice, and all the other attributes ascribed to God extend infinitely throughout creation. Not surprisingly, this idea is a common thread in all major religions. Higher consciousness allowed the great sages, saints, and seers to attain a kind of knowledge that science feels threatened by but that is completely valid. Our common understanding of consciousness is too limited to do justice here.

If I asked you, "What are you conscious of right this minute?" you would probably start by describing the room you're in and the sights, sounds, and smells surrounding you. On reflection you'd become aware of your mood, the sensations in your body, perhaps a hidden worry or desire that lies deeper than superficial thoughts. But the inner journey can go much deeper, taking you to a reality that isn't about objects "out there" or feelings and thoughts "in here." Eventually those two worlds meld into one state of being that lies beyond the limits of space-time, in a realm of infinite possibilities.

Now we face a contradiction, however. How can two realities that are opposites (the way baking a loaf of bread is the opposite of dreaming about a loaf of bread) turn out to be the same? This improbable vision is succinctly described in the Isha Upanishad, an ancient Indian scripture. "That is complete, and this is also complete. This totality has been projected from that totality. When this wholeness merges in that wholeness, all that remains is wholeness." At first glance, this passage seems like a riddle, but it can be deciphered by realizing that "that" is the state of pure consciousness, while "this" is the visible universe. Both are complete in themselves, as we know

from science, which has been satisfied for four centuries with exploring the visible universe. But in the spiritual worldview a hidden wholeness underlies all of creation, and ultimately it is this invisible wholeness that matters most.

Spirituality has been around for many thousand years, and its researchers were brilliant—the very Einsteins of consciousness. Anyone can reproduce and verify their results, as with the principles of science. More important, the future that spirituality promises—one of wisdom, freedom, and fulfillment—hasn't vanished as the age of faith declined. Reality is reality. There is only one, and it's permanent. This means that at some point the inner and outer worlds must meet; we won't have to choose between them. That in itself will be a revolutionary discovery, since the dispute between science and religion has persuaded almost everyone that either you face reality and deal with the tough questions of everyday life (science), or you passively retreat and contemplate a realm beyond everyday life (religion).

This either/or choice was forced on us when religion failed to deliver on its promises. But spirituality, the deeper source of religion, hasn't failed and is ready to meet science face-to-face, offering answers consistent with the most advanced scientific theories. Human consciousness created science, which ironically is now moving to exclude consciousness, its very creator! Surely this would leave us with worse than an orphaned and shrunken science—we'd inhabit an impoverished world.

It has already arrived. We live in a time of rude atheism, whose proponents deride religion as superstition, illusion, and a hoax. But their real target isn't religion; it's the inner journey. I am less concerned with attacks on God than I am with a far more insidious danger: the superstition of materialism. To scientific atheists, reality must be external; otherwise their whole approach falls apart. If the physical world is all that exists, science is right to mine it for data.

But here the superstition of materialism breaks down. Our five senses encourage us to accept that there are objects "out there," forests and rivers, atoms and quarks. However, at the frontiers of physics, where Nature becomes very small, matter breaks down and then vanishes. Here, the act of measuring changes what we see; every observer turns out to be woven into what he observes. This is the universe already known to spirituality, where passive observation gives way to active participation, and we discover that we are part of the fabric of creation. The result is enormous power and freedom.

Science has never achieved pure objectivity, and it never will. To deny the worth of subjective experience is to dismiss most of what makes life worth living: love, trust, faith, beauty, awe, wonder, compassion, truth, the arts, morality, and the mind itself. The field of neuroscience has largely accepted that the mind doesn't exist but is merely a by-product of the brain. The brain (a "computer made of meat," as Marvin Minsky, an expert in artificial intelligence, dubbed it) is our master, chemically deciding how we feel, genetically determining how we grow, live, and die. This picture isn't acceptable to me, because in dismissing the mind we eliminate our portal to knowledge and insight.

As Leonard and I debate the big mysteries, the great sages and seers remind us that there is only one question: What is reality? Is it the result of natural laws rigorously operating through cause and effect, or is it something else? There is good reason for our worldviews to be at war. Either reality is bounded by the visible universe, or it isn't. Either the cosmos was created from an empty, meaningless void, or it wasn't. Until you understand the nature of reality, you are like one of the fabled six blind men trying to describe an elephant by holding on to just one of its parts. The one who has hold of the leg says, "An elephant is much like a tree." The one who has hold of the trunk says, "An elephant is much like a snake." And so on.

The childhood fable about the blind men and the elephant is actually an allegory from ancient India. The six blind men are the five senses plus the rational mind. The elephant is Brahman, the totality of all that exists. On the surface the fable is pessimistic: if all you possess is your five senses and your rational mind, you'll never see the elephant. But there is a hidden message so obvious that many people miss it. The elephant exists. It was there before us, patiently waiting to be known. It is the deeper truth of unified reality.

Just because religion didn't succeed doesn't mean that a new spirituality, based on consciousness, won't. We need to see the truth, and in the process we will awaken the profound powers that were promised to us thousands of years ago. Time awaits. The future depends on the choice we make today.