

IGNATIUS, AN ANCIENT SAGE WITH ETERNAL WISDOM

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In every age and generation there have been individuals who have had deeper insights into the existential questions of life. They would treasure this wisdom in a group of like-minded people or pass it on to someone after the proper preparation. In one sense this new knowledge would either bring a person to a new understanding of life and a new way of living or it would destroy that person. This reality is reflected in the third chapter of Genesis, The Fall of Adam and Eve. Having eaten the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge, Adam and Eve gained new knowledge and new consciousness. They became a threat to the gods and were thus sent out of Paradise by the god whom they loved. Anyone, in any generation, who comes with new knowledge and greater consciousness, is alienated by those they care for the most, punished and made to suffer. Jesus came with Good News and was killed by those who represented the religion that was most dear to him. Jesus came with new knowledge that tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners belong to the Kingdom of God. He gave everyone, especially sinners the consciousness of our spiritual and divine identity. Jesus' idea of the Kingdom of God disturbed the social and religious order of his time. It questioned the authority of those in power. It was better that one man die so that the hierarchy could be maintained.

The Jewish Talmud's commentary on the Fall is very challenging. According to the Talmud the Tree of Life in

Paradise grows from the centre of the Tree of Knowledge. The goal of every individual is to reach that Tree of Life. And the only way to reach this goal is to eat the forbidden fruit of knowledge again and again. But, each time a person gains new knowledge and greater consciousness, that person is open to suffer the same fate as Adam and Eve or to be crucified like Jesus.

From time immemorial those who have been on a spiritual quest often clash with some of the principles and values of formal religion. The gods that religion offers them do not always resolve the great enigmas of life. Formal religion often does not easily read the signs of the times and speaks yesterday's language to tomorrow's people.

In ancient times the seekers of the truth would join a community of priest-sages who treasured a secret wisdom. These seekers were sincere followers of their religion who were either left unfulfilled or just wanting more. Having explored the well of their formal religion they encountered the source of that well, namely, the ocean of Divine love and life. They needed guidance and help to move beyond the well. They believed that the community of priest-sages would give them that wisdom.

As a novice each of them would have a prolonged period of preparation and testing. When the sages found one who is ready they would lead that individual stage by stage away from the earthly life and transport them to some hidden world in the mystical realm. Step by step all the senses are brought under the control of the spirit and the novice begins to experience the secret wisdom of the ancient sages and begins to live more and more like a spiritual being.

On this path of transformation, each person is in a constant cycle of death and new life. Sometimes a stage is reached when the seeker dies to the old self but no new self emerges. All of life seems to be death! This could be the end of the road for some but if they persevere through this death, a transfiguration occurs and a new way of living life is born. Human life continues to die many deaths before a person experiences life in all its fullness. From the beginning of human life, there is dying and new life: the embryo dies to bring forth a baby; the baby dies to give life to an infant and then to a youth, adult, old age and so forth. Heraclitus believed that, "it is impossible to go into the same river twice." "Everything is in flux." Therefore in human existence becoming never ends in being. Only the spirit is. To grasp merely the things of the world around us leads only to a denial of God. Only as spiritual beings can we live the fullness of life.

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The Divine lies spellbound in the world and comes alive in human beings who are able to experience the Divine life within themselves. This ability comes with the awareness of the Divine as a hidden creative power within the individual, not yet released into existence. Through this creative power of the Divine within, human beings create their own gods. The aim is to master this god-making power and to live the fullness of his or her divine and spiritual identity. According to the beginning of the Book of Genesis, the true human identity is created in the image and likeness of God and each human being is the Divine breath of God.

This new knowledge and way of living was dangerous. It would destroy anyone who was not prepared and tested. And the one who shared this knowledge irresponsibly was punished severely. It is better Jesus said that such a person tie a millstone around the neck and drown. These spiritual people took refuge in secret communities to grow in their knowledge and consciousness and to protect themselves from the unenlightened.

Ignatius is one of those Great Seers (*Rishis*) who attained Enlightenment (*Satori* in Zen Buddhism) on the banks of the river Cardoner. It was here that “the eyes of his understanding began to be opened, not that he saw any vision, but he understood and learnt many things, both spiritual and earthly and this was so great an enlightenment that everything seemed new to him” (Aut 30). From this moment on Ignatius was convinced that “if there were no Scriptures to teach us these things of faith, he would be resolved to die for them, solely because of what he has seen” (Aut 29). Ignatius found his own secret religion that helped him to scale mystical heights and also led him into constant conflict with people in power and institutions of his time.

While he was convalescing in Loyola, Ignatius reflected on his experiences while reading the lives of the saints and the Life of Christ and decided that he would follow Christ imitating the saints and that he would go to Jerusalem to live there and to die there. Even when the Franciscan Provincial who was the guardian of the Holy Land ordered him to leave, Ignatius continued to reflect on this experience. Ignatius planned to share this secret religion with those whom he would prepare carefully and test them to see if they would handle this new way of living: “When he noticed some things in his soul and found them useful, he thought they might also be useful to others, and so he put them in writing” (Aut 99). He decided to share his experiences and spirituality by traveling around and giving the Spiritual Exercises, but when he found himself in the hands of the Inquisition

time and time again, he decided to study in Paris, collect companions and once again go back to Jerusalem with this group. Ignatius thus had a select following from the beginning, which continued to get him into trouble with the unenlightened Inquisition. Luckily many of his followers were well connected with the high and mighty of the time and their influence allowed Ignatius to live. When it was not possible to go to Jerusalem according to their plan, Ignatius offered himself and his group to the Pope and finally, after making a discernment with his group of men, they founded the Society of Jesus.

The graces that Ignatius received, he passed on to his followers and he trained them to pass these graces on to all who came to them for spiritual help. His main tool was the Spiritual Exercises. Ignatius instructed that no one could give these Exercises unless the exerciser had first become their own personal experience. Additionally, no one was to give these Exercises unless they had carefully prepared their candidates. Ignatius was convinced that once this preparation was complete, the Retreat Director in the Spiritual Exercises “...should permit the Creator to deal directly with the creature and the creature with its Creator and Lord” (SpEx 15). The role of the Retreat Director is to help the Retreatant to come in the presence of the Divine and then disappear. He points to the Lamb of God like John the Baptist. He is the match-maker who does not go on the honeymoon. The secret religion was now personalized and the pathway ever new and often unknown. The goal was the same for all, namely, to be soaked more and more into the ocean of God’s love and to live the divine and spiritual life.

Personal experience was paramount for Ignatius. His experience of the Divine became his absolute in life and everything else was relative to this experience. Sometimes even the Church teaching was subject to his spiritual experience. While writing the Constitutions his first companions would often question him about some of the things that went contrary to the fundamental teaching of the Church on Religious Life. Ignatius would reply, “I saw it at Manresa” and rested his case. The companions had lived long enough with Ignatius to know that once he quoted Manresa he would not budge from his stand. The reason for this is because Ignatius believed that he was taught directly by God who “treated him at this time just as a schoolmaster treats a child whom he is teaching. . . Indeed if he were to doubt this, he would think he offended his Divine Majesty” (Aut 27).

A follower of Ignatius lives by the principles and the experiences of the Spiritual Exercises; therefore, when writing the Constitutions, Ignatius

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gives Jesuits only one criterion: “. . . it must be the Supreme Wisdom and Goodness of God our Creator and Lord which will preserve, direct and carry forward in His divine service this least Society of Jesus, just as He deigned to begin it, and although what helps most on our own part toward this end must be, more than any exterior constitution, the interior law of charity and love which the Holy Spirit writes and engraves upon hearts”. (Const. 134).

The interior law of charity and love will always supercede any exterior law. The Supreme Wisdom and Goodness of God will sometimes take a person beyond sacred boundaries and open up new horizons. Driven by the Spirit one will be a constant critique and a challenge to the Church and society.

Ignatius is comfortable with making one's personal experience the criterion for all action because the result of this direct contact with God is that “. . . the soul is inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and as a consequence, can love no creature on the face of the earth for its sake, but only in the Creator of them all” (SpEx 316). This is so Eastern where people approach the Divine as individuals not through the community. But the test of the encounter with the Divine is seen in the overflow of this experience onto the community. No wonder we do not find a social moment in the Spiritual Exercises and the retreatant has a one on one experience with the Divine. Secondly, the most mystical graces of God are always available to the individual just because with Paul, Ignatius also believes that if we consider ourselves as children of God, we are heirs and therefore the graces of God are a privilege but our very right (Rom 8, 17).

In following this supernatural principle Ignatius can be placed among the sages of ancient times giving us eternal truths. The prophet Jeremiah has told us that God could not trust his people with the external laws and an external covenant. He therefore gives them a personal experience where they will not be able to doubt who they are and what God expects of them. They would also find the will and inspiration within their own hearts to live by the inner covenant:

“This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord.” (Jer 31: 33-34).

These words of Jeremiah seem to be the foundation of Ignatius' way of living life and are reflected in so many of the world's great religious traditions. The Buddhist tradition brings out the Ignatian principle so beautifully: "So Ananda, you must be lamps unto yourselves. Rely on yourselves, and do not rely on external help. Hold firm to the truth as a lamp and a refuge, and do not look for refuge to anything besides yourselves. A brother becomes his own lamp and refuge by continually looking on his body, feelings, perceptions, moods, and ideas" (Digha Nikya ii. 99-100. Mahaparinibbana Suttanta). These last words of the Buddha are sometimes expressed by the famous saying, "If you see the Buddha, kill him."

With the help of Ignatius' wisdom, we look into ourselves and through discerning love discover who we really are and what is expected of us at every moment of our lives.

***Making Ignatian Spirituality A Way Of Life:
An Eastern Approach***

The spirituality that Ignatius lived and developed has become a spiritual methodology and it is also more than method—it is a way of life. Ignatius developed several methods of spiritual practice through the experience of his own life and he recorded these in his Autobiography and in his collection of Spiritual Exercises. One of the primary methods of Ignatian spirituality is to be open to experience, to reflect on that experience and have the courage to renew our life in light of the discerned meaning of our experience. From an Eastern perspective, 'experience' can be described by the Sanskrit word '*ANUBHAVA*' which means 'towards wholeness' or 'towards fullness.' An 'experience' is that which tends to make me a whole or better human being or that tends towards the fullness of life, finding my identity in the Divine. Experience in the Eastern tradition is what life is all about.

In the Indian tradition, 'experience' is the *SAT' CIT ANAND*. *Sat* means truth and the way to experience this Divine Being and Essence is through *Cit*, that is, pure consciousness. This consciousness transforms one's life into *Anand*, utter Bliss.

The literal meaning of *SAT* is 'truth.' In this understanding, experience becomes knowledge and true knowledge can only be gained

through experience. Knowledge is not something you collect to get good grades. Knowledge is not knowing about things. Knowledge is an experience of the heart that changes lives. Only when you have this transformative experience do you have knowledge in the Eastern sense. Mahatma Gandhi coined the term *SATYAGRAHA* based on his understanding of *SAT CIT ANAND*. *SATYAGRAHA* is commonly defined as nonviolence, or a nonviolent approach to life. *SAT* is truth but for Mahatma Gandhi *SAT* is not merely truth. *SAT* goes beyond truth. *SAT* is the **being** and **essence**. *SATYAGRAHA* is the invitation to union and communion with the Divine essence. Experience in the Eastern tradition, and in the Ignatian tradition, is *an experience of union and communion with the being and essence of the Divine*.

Ignatius wants us to be open to experience and he says that when you go to pray, if you don't have an experience, then you have wasted your time in prayer. When you go into your ministry and you don't come back with an experience, then it is a waste of time. If you come to a seminar or a conference like this and there is no experience, then, in one sense, you and I have wasted our time. For Ignatius, experience, or *ANUBHAVVA*, is the goal of our lives and finding oneself in the being and essence of the Divine is the goal of Ignatian spirituality. If you are following the pathway of Ignatius, you will find yourself becoming a mystic. Ignatius does not believe that mystics are a special group of people, or that mystical graces are special graces given only to a few. Ignatius believes that the mystical life is the logical culmination of the spiritual life. This belief was based on himself and his companions.

Of course, not every mystical experience is life giving, not every experience necessarily comes from God and not every experience necessarily takes us towards *Anubhava*, to become what you already are: the image of God, the likeness of God, the breath of God. *Anubhava* is to find my personal identity and the meaning of the whole of creation in the Divine. In fact, the holier the experience might seem, the greater the danger that it is not *Anubhava*. This is part of the reason why Ignatius says that after having an experience, we must also have the ability to reflect on the experience or make a review of the prayer.

In writings on the Review of Prayer, many translations will read that after an hour of prayer, for a quarter of an hour either sitting or standing or walking, I will reflect on what *I* did or how *I* succeeded in the prayer. But in the original text, Ignatius uses the phrase *como me ha ido*, which means

'how did it go with me?' In other words, I will reflect on what happened *to* me or what was *God* doing in my prayer not what *I* was doing. From this and from other parts of Ignatius' writings we see that when we go to pray Ignatius did not want us to find God but when we pray we allow God to find us. This is also a very Eastern approach to prayer and the spiritual life. In the fifth annotation Ignatius will want us to enter the retreat and our spiritual life with an animated spirit, making a conscious offering of ourselves so that the Divine Majesty may make use of us. The goal of Ignatian prayer and ministry is not to find God but to allow God to find you! And so the reflection is on God's action and not mine. The reflection is on how I experienced the Divine. We allow God to find us and use us!

The Examination of Consciousness follows the same dynamics. It's not about me. It's about God present in my life. In fact the Examination of Conscience is nothing but making the Contemplation to Attain Love of the Spiritual Exercises (SpEx 230-237) twice a day until it becomes a way of life. One begins to experience how everything in life is Divine gift and God who dwells in each of them. The Ignatian God labours to perfect the temple and the divine image and likeness. God labours and struggles to transform every moment of life into something Divine. So the review of prayer – The Examination of Conscience and even Confession— is not what I did but is about *ANUBHAVA*.

I have often wondered if Finding God in All Things is Ignatian. What is the difference between Finding God and Allowing God to find us in all things? If I am trying to find God, I will find what I am looking for; for example, if I am preparing for an exam I will find a God who is smart and when the exam is over I will give this God great thanks and forget about God till the next exam. I will do the same if I am sick or in financial problems or even basic human problems. I will look for a God who knows something about medicine or banking or a good psychologist and when I have received the help I need I will give this God great thanks once again and forget about God till the next time I have a problem. But if I allow God to find me I have no control as to when this God will appear and what kind of a God I will encounter. There is a funny story of this man who was drowning and he called out to all the gods to help him. Finally god appeared to him and this god was dancing while the man was drowning. The man complained to god saying, 'How can you dance when I am drowning?' And this god replied, 'Every year when I drown you dance, don't you?' In India all our festivals end with taking one or another image of God and in great pomp

and show, dancing and celebrations we immerse this image in the river or the sea.

When we allow God to find us sometimes, if not often, we will experience God who is dancing while we are drowning. The Ignatian God believes that we have the potential to swim and so Ignatius would want us to act as if God did not exist and trust as if we did not exist. This is in keeping with the Buddhist belief that if pain is not resisted, then it always purifies and enlightens us; pain that is resisted becomes suffering. It is through the pains of life that we will have *ANUBHAVA*, experience of the fullness of life.

Once I have reflected on an experience, I must have the courage to renew my life based on my reflection of that experience. We see this happening at different times in the life of Ignatius. At one time when Ignatius was at Manresa, he prayed seven hours a day. He did spiritual reading. He had spiritual conversations. And at night, before he went to bed, he would find himself having mystical thoughts and insights into the mysteries of God, many nights in a row for a long time. After one of these many nights of mystical experiences, Ignatius woke up and said, "That is not from God." Why would he have said that? These were mystical thoughts and insights into the mysteries of life, and yet Ignatius said that these were not from God. These thoughts interfered with his prayer and life the following day, so he ignored them and went to sleep.

Out of his positive experiences, like his experience on the riverbank of the Cardoner, Ignatius discerned that the experiences and insights were from God and he renewed his life based on those insights. His inspiration led him to form the Society of Jesus and over the course of his life, he continued to open himself to deeper and richer experiences of his relationship with the Divine.

Ignatian Spiritual Methods: Gazing and Contemplation

We know that the Ignatian mysticism of service is nothing if not a deepening of our union and communion with the Divine. It is not so much doing things *for* God but it is a *being in* the Divine. Ignatian gazing or seeing is a spiritual method and exercise of contemplation where we open ourselves to what we contemplate and allow what we contemplate to seep into our hearts, filling us and transforming us into the mystery that we

contemplate. Ignatius spent hours of his life gazing at the sky and through his contemplation would be moved to serve the Divine Majesty. “It was his greatest consolation to gaze upon the heavens and the stars, which he often did, and for long stretches at a time, because when doing so he felt within himself a powerful urge to be serving Our Lord.” (Aut 11).

While he was convalescing in his ancestral home at Loyola, gazing at the skies every night, he was moved to imitate the saints and live *for* God. If Francis did something Ignatius wanted to do more, and he wanted to outdo Dominic and all the other saints. He imitated Saint Humphrey who grew out his hair and his nails and neglected his body. During this time Ignatius imitated the saints, but without integrating their values, making them his own and giving his own expression of his love and desire for God. This mere imitation got him nowhere except into a deep frustration and desperation to a point when he even contemplated suicide.

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When Ignatius finally gave up mere imitation and trying to reach God by his own efforts, God got through to him. And as Ignatius continued to gaze at the sky, he contemplated on the mysteries of God and was drawn to be *with* God. Around this same time, Ignatius received an insight into the Trinity—in fact, he seems to have had an audio-visual experience in his encounter with the Trinity as three musical keys that play as one chord. He discovered that he said four prayers to the Trinity but this did not trouble him at that time. The fourth prayer is a first glimpse into a deeper vision and experience of the Divine.

His contemplation of the sky also leads Ignatius to a realization of the way that all of nature comes from the Divine, goes back to the Divine and is in the Divine. Furthermore, Ignatius understood each person of the trinity as being present and active in the divinity of nature. When the Father created the world he emptied himself into every part of creation. The Son saved the world through a process of *kenosis*; being Son did not count equality with God something to be grasped but emptied himself of all that is divine and became human so that all that is human might become divine. The Holy Spirit sanctified the world through the outpouring of Divine energy. Our invitation then is to empty ourselves of self-love, self-interest and self-

will and become one with this self-emptying process of the Trinity until we meld with the Divine. The response that Ignatius has to his experience of nature is one of reverence. Ignatius' reverence is *acatamiento* which is emptying of self in order to be filled with the Divine. When we empty ourselves before nature, through reverence, we invite the divine in nature to become a part of us. We have the same experience when we approach other human beings with reverence.

Following his *acatamiento*, Ignatius has a mystical experience of the Eucharist. For him it is not just Jesus present in the Eucharist but the very Being and Essence of the Divine. Ignatius believed that the Eucharist is the surest and most direct way to union and communion with the Divine Essence. In fact the only prayer that Ignatius seemed to have made while he was in Rome was the preparation for the Eucharist, the celebration of the sacrament and the overflow of this experience into the rest of the day.

Ignatius then had an insight into Jesus and Mary. In his autobiography we find that for Ignatius the human Jesus and Mary were persons that were not male and female but were part of the Divine essence. In Jesus, Ignatius sees the flesh of Mary and in the humanity of Jesus, Ignatius experiences the whole Being of the Divine Essence.

All of these experiences culminated in Ignatius' Great Illumination, his *Satori* on the riverbank of Cardoner, where the eyes of his understanding were opened. He began to acquire a deeper insight into things both spiritual and of this world. Being *with* the Divine climaxed in his experience at La Storta where Ignatius was placed with the Son. During one of the many times when he would contemplate the sky, Ignatius has this tremendous vision of God the Father talking to God the Son and saying, "I want you to take this man as your companion." Jesus turns to Ignatius and says, "I want you to serve Us." It was here that Ignatius put on the consciousness of Christ. It was here that he put on the mind of Christ. It was here that Ignatius began to become like Christ so that with Paul he could also say, "It is no longer I who live but God lives in me." Those of us who are following the Ignatian pathway will find that we are lead into a place where we become one with Christ and realize that Ignatian service is doing that which overflows from our experience of being with the Divine.

As Ignatius continued to gaze at the skies he was now invited to live *in* the Divine. While he was in Rome as Superior General, Ignatius continued his practice of gazing at the skies and he found himself placed *in*

the Trinity, and then *in* the very Being and Essence of the Divine. He gives us a glimpse into this experience through his spiritual journal.

In his writings, Ignatius uses the symbols of creation to express his deep spiritual insights. He will talk about the Eucharist as rays emanating from the host and Jesus as a sphere slightly larger than the sun. He will describe the very Being and Essence of the Divine in the same way, a luminous sphere. He will tell us that the sun and the moon and all the creatures on the face of the earth are there to provide for us even though as sinners we deserve to be punished. To define the goal of the Spiritual Exercises as being a total union and communion with the Divine, he uses this final image: "the rays of the sun and the sun, the waters of the fountain and the fountain." There are no rays without the sun. There is no fountain without water and the water has its identity only as being part of the fountain. In the same way we find our identity as being part of the Divine. In India, we might also say that the dance and the dancer become one. When the song and the singer become one the singer no longer sings but the song comes out from the depth of the singer's being.

The skies offer us the energy of the universe and this energy has the power to transform us and our world into a divine reality. Of course this energy is given to anyone who knows how to receive it. But our capacity to receive this energy is in proportion to our willingness and ability to share it with the rest of the world. If we *only* receive or *only* share the gifts that the universe offers, our whole being will explode and destroy us. But we need to learn how to receive in order to share, thus ever expanding our capacity to receive all that the universe offers us. Ignatius tells us in his autobiography that those things that he found useful, he thought would also be helpful to others and so he put them down in writing. He thus formulated the Spiritual Exercises as a channel for anyone to receive the same graces that he received. Nadal, one of the closest companions of Ignatius will tell us that anyone who follows the pathway of Ignatius is entitled to all the graces that he received. One of the most important and effective ministries of Ignatius is spiritual conversation. It is in the sharing of our spiritual gifts and experiences that we are confirmed in them and these gifts then become the platform for many and even greater graces. Our capacity for receiving the gifts of the universe increases in proportion to our sharing these gifts with others.

This energy that comes from the universe will teach us to distinguish the one percent of reality that is physical and the ninety nine percent of reality that is spiritual. The only way we can relate with other persons is to

connect with their spiritual ninety nine percent— so much so that if these people were to be taken away from us they would still continue to be present to us in a very real way. Food is one percent physical when we eat to fulfill our bodily needs. But when our meal is a sacrament where we connect with people, we latch on to that ninety nine percent spiritual force which connects us with those who we eat with. The story of Zacchaeus is a typical example in the Bible, as well as the stories of the wedding feast at Cana and the Last Supper. The first and the last miracles that Jesus worked were based around food. When we connect with the ninety nine percent of the birds of the air and the lilies of the field then we experience the assurance of divine providence and protection. Our day to day work will also have the ninety nine percent spiritual element that makes our work place a divine milieu.

Ignatius wants his followers to seek and experience the Divine in all things and he recognized this possibility through power of the ninety nine percent of the spiritual in our lives. On this path, the first help that Ignatius gives us is the call to keep our intention right— that is, to live simply and totally for God. Our aim is to please the Divine Goodness for its own sake without seeking the fruits of our labour. Ignatius exhorts us to love the Divine in all creatures and all of them in Him. Ignatius thus wants us to make consolation a way of life, “where the soul is so consumed by the love of the Divine that it can love no creature except in the creator of them all.”

Just as the Magi and the shepherds kept their interest in the sky and followed the star that guided them to Emmanuel, the Divine with us, may our enchantment of the sky awaken the Divine and the Infinite within us.

Conversation for Conversion

This leads into the second Ignatian method, namely, conversation for conversion, in order to be confirmed and grow. Ignatius wanted us to share our experiences with people. Through sharing, we would confirm our experiences and grow in those experiences. That is why St. Ignatius did not want us to make our annual retreats— he wanted every Jesuit to be *giving* retreats, because when you give retreats, you share your experiences, you get confirmed in those experiences and you begin to grow in those experiences.

In his autobiography, Ignatius tells us that when he had the experience of the Trinity at Manresa, he was so thrilled with that experience and it affected him so much that he could not stop talking about the Trinity. He used different examples and different analogies, but he could not stop talking about the Trinity—so much so that until the end of his life, any time he thought about the Trinity, it filled him with devotion – that is, it deepened his union and communion with the Divine.

What is Ignatius trying to tell us? If we have not shared our experiences of God with someone in one way or another, then we have lost them. But when we take the opportunity to share our experiences with someone, we will be confirmed and grow in those experiences. For example, those people who always have wonderful conversations, grow up to be happy old people. After all, old age is a perfection of what we have practiced all our lives. Those people who are critical are confirmed in becoming more and more of an expert in criticism or in criticizing. But those who have pleasant, wonderful conversations will grow into that goodness. Ignatius keeps telling us that we need to be careful about our conversation. Conversation for conversion is to be confirmed and to grow in our experience. The only way we own our experience is to share it and then it also becomes a platform for bigger and greater graces.

Conversation is rooted in our heart and mind, and our thoughts are the manifestation of that which we believe in our hearts. I believe that these thoughts are also a form of energy, so that if I have a good thought I am emanating good energy into this room and if I have a negative thought, you will be affected negatively in this room. Don't you remember a time when you went home one day and as soon as you opened the door you had a feeling that something was not OK. No one had talked to you yet, no one said anything to you, but then you meet someone from the family and you find that something *is* wrong. On the other hand, sometimes you step into your home and suddenly you feel happy. Then you meet someone from the family and they give you all this great news.

Our conversation, our energy and our vibrations affect our surroundings, affect the world. One of the things I like to say in the context of September 11 and all that is going on around the world is that you and I are in one sense responsible for it. I say this because every time we have a negative thought or feeling we throw out negative energy into the atmosphere and someone soaks up our energy and acts with it. What has been our response to the evil in the world? Has it been anger, has it been

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anxiety, has it been discouragement or fear? Then we are helping to perpetuate a negative atmosphere. What we need, Ignatius would say, and what we need, the Eastern way would say, is positive energy. So, next time you watch television, watch the news, or hear something tragic, watch your thoughts. Compassion and love needs to be your response. You want to change the situation. Change it with love. Change it with compassion. Change it with some kind of positive energy. And you will see how the whole situation changes, everything changes. The world will change. You know in Romans, Paul says, “through one man came sin and the whole of the human race suffered. And through one man, Jesus Christ, came life” and all of us draw from that. That is true about you and me. Through one of us, sin comes into this world. Through one of us, life comes into this world. If in the name of justice, we are getting revenge, it is negative. We need peace marches. We need peaceful thoughts. We need to fly a Peace Flag every time we fly our national flags. We need thoughts of compassion, thoughts of love, thoughts of reconciliation, and we will achieve the same thing. In fact, it will be better and it will be more effective. Peace then is, not a season, it is a way of life.

Openness, Availability and Generosity

The third and more all-encompassing method that Ignatius gives us is to have openness, availability and generosity. He tells us to make ourselves open to God or to be open to God, make ourselves available to God, and to generously respond to the movements of God. Throughout his Autobiography, Ignatius shares with us the times when he made himself available to God, and he shares the ways in which he felt compelled to respond to those experiences.

On the February 27, 1544 Ignatius makes this very profound entry in his Spiritual Diary, “and going into the chapel and praying, I felt or rather saw beyond my natural strength the Most Holy Trinity and Jesus, presenting me, or placing me, or simply being the means of union in the midst of the Most Holy Trinity.” Following the Magis, The Spirituality of Infinite Possibilities, Ignatius who was one with the Son at La Storta now becomes one with the Most Holy Trinity.

Can Ignatius' relationship with the Divine go deeper? Yes, on the 6th of March, in that same journal, Ignatius shares his experience of being lost in the very being and essence of God: "I felt and saw, not obscurely, but clearly and very clearly the very Being or Essence of God, under the figure of a sphere, slightly larger than the appearance of the sun." The "felt and saw" of Ignatius is an experience of the deepest or highest contemplation. Ignatius "felt and saw" not with his head nor with his heart but through pure consciousness. *Being lost in the very being and essence of the Divine* became an expressed reality for Ignatius on March 6, 1544. Ignatius died in 1556. One begins to wonder where these infinite possibilities finally took him in his relationship with the Divine.

Spirituality as a Way of Life

Ignatius did not come to start a religion; he gave us a pathway to live our life. In the same way, Eastern religions are not religions. Eastern religions are a way of life. Hinduism is not a religion. Hinduism is a way of life. Our ultimate goal in our life experience is to find ourselves as one with the being and essence of the Divine. Now that has tremendous repercussions. That has tremendous consequences. Reflecting on Ignatius in an Eastern way, I like us to ask ourselves, "Do I have a relationship with God? Have I seen the face of the Divine? Where am I on this journey towards God or is my life a religion?" How do I know if I am living a religion or if my spirituality is a way of life, a path to finding myself within the being and essence of the Divine?

Religion is that which has a creed, a code, a cult and a community. The creed is, "I believe in God, Father, Son and Spirit. I believe in one, holy, Catholic church." This is the creed. The code would be the commandments, ethics, moral law, etc. The cult is our ritual and the community distinguishes us from other communities. A Catholic community is different from the Episcopalians. So Episcopalians are different from Catholics are different from the Buddhists are different from the Hindus. All of these components identify and constitute a religion.

Ignatius' creed is simple. His creed is in the Divine being and essence. What is his code? The only code that he gives us in the Constitutions No. 134 is the law of charity or the law of love or compassion that the Holy

Spirit engraves on the heart of every individual. That is the only code he gives us. In his Autobiography Ignatius reveals to us his code when he said, “even if the Scriptures were not written he would be ready to die for what he had experienced.” His personal experience of the Divine was his absolute code. Follow the Spirit. Follow what the Spirit tells you. Of course this can be dangerous. Jesus followed what the Spirit told Him and what happened to Him? They crucified Him. When we follow the spirit, we will be crucified. We will not be crucified by our enemies. We will be crucified by people who are dearest and nearest to us. People whom we care about most are the ones who will crucify us if we follow the law of the Spirit engraved in the heart of each one of us.

What about the cult? Ignatius did not want us to have high liturgy. A Jesuit liturgy has to be simple and devotional. Not that Ignatius did not like high liturgy. He loved high liturgy. He enjoyed high liturgy but he told the Jesuits if you want that kind of liturgy, go to the other churches where they specialize in high liturgy because that is their charism. But for us, we will have very little of the cult. You know the definition of a good Jesuit liturgy is when no one gets hurt. Ignatius does not have much of the cult.

What about community? Ignatius did not want us to have community. In fact, we come together as Jesuits only to get out, only to be disbursed, only to be sent. What Ignatius wanted us to have was, communion not community. Sometimes the more community life we have the less we experience communion with one another. Check with your own families. Sometimes the more family life you have, the less communion you have with one another. Ignatius did not specifically want us to have community. Ignatius wanted his followers to experience intimacy with one another and to make the experience of one that of all. Ignatian spirituality is not here to start another religion but Ignatian spirituality is about my relationship with the Divine.

Religion and Relationship

I like to make the distinction between charity and compassion and its relationship to the difference between living a religion and living a relationship with God. The theological virtue of charity and compassion are the same, but just for the sake of seeing the difference between the two, I like to make the following distinction: if my life is based on charity, I will

decide the people I am going to help, how long I am going to be in the situation and the price that I am willing to pay. So I will help these people and not those people. I will volunteer my time for so many years and no more. And the price I pay is this much and not more than that. Compassion is where I am sucked into the situation and I have no choice over the people that draw me, the time that I am going to be there and the price that I will have to pay.

Here is an example of charity: on the last day when Jesus says, “When I was hungry, you gave me to eat,” and you are shaking your head and you say I remember all the checks that I sent to the homeless shelters, and the food that I gave and the soup kitchens that I worked in, etc., etc. “When I was thirsty, you gave me to drink,” and you are saying, ‘Oh, yes, I have my accountant here and he can tell you how much money I gave to the needy’ and all of the sudden you hear Jesus saying, “I am not talking about you. I am talking about those who say, ‘When did we see You hungry and feed You? When were You in need and when did we do this?’” Those are people who practice compassion.

Joseph Campbell gives an example of compassion when he tells the story of something that happened in Bali. Apparently in Bali there is a place where people come from all over the world to experience the power of the wind. But at the same place, there are other people who come to commit suicide. One time there was a man who was obviously going to kill himself when a police car drove past. The policeman who was not driving jumped out of his car and ran and grabbed the man as he was falling to his death. Had it not been for his partner who grabbed him and pulled him up, that poor policeman would have died.

Of course, immediately the media came around and they asked him, “Why did you let the man go? He was a stranger, a criminal perhaps, and one who was going to kill himself anyway?” His response was, “If I had let him go, I would not be able to live another day of my life. Why? Because that man was a part of me. That man was a part of me.” And then he said, “When I was holding on to that man, I wasn’t thinking about my wife whom I love very dearly. I wasn’t thinking about my two little children who mean everything to me. Least of all was I thinking about my career as a policeman. The only thing I thought about was if I let this man go, I will not be able to live another day of my life.”

When you are sucked into the situation and you have no control as to who these people are, how long you are going to be in the situation and

the price that you have to pay, you have an experience of compassion. It is like when you fall in love. Compassion comes automatically and you find yourself looking at the world differently. You reach out to people who are most irritating in a very loving way. You are more understanding. In compassion, you are falling in love with the being and essence of God. The willingness to be drawn into a situation of compassion is a consequence of falling in love with and becoming one with the very being and essence of God. When you are in the being and essence of God, then there is an interconnectedness with the rest of humanity. That is where, like Ignatius and the Eastern way, we experience non-dualism.

Non-dualism is not one but not two. Take the story of the salt doll—the salt doll was walking along the seashore and looked at the ocean and said, “Who are you?” And a wave came up and swept away the feet of the doll. And the salt doll continued to ask the ocean, “Who are you?” Systematically the salt doll disappeared into the ocean waves. When it was totally lost in the ocean, the salt doll realized what the ocean was and who it was. This is being drawn into the being and essence, this is Ignatian spirituality.

Towards The Ignatian Ideal

The Ignatian goal is to become drawn into God, to be lost in God, and it is only then that I realize who God is and who I am. And who am I? I am not this body. This body changes every year. This is the 2006 model, 2005 is gone. The body changes every year. I am not my feelings because my feelings keep changing. I am not my work because one day I will not be able to work anymore. Who ‘I am’ is beyond my body, beyond my feelings, beyond my thinking, beyond my work. I am.

The God of Ignatius is the God who revealed Himself to Moses. The God who said “I AM.” So God is and I am. The salt found its identity in the ocean, when it became a part of the ocean, when that salt water was not one but was not two. That is when salt found its identity and also discovered who the ocean was. When I find myself in God, I will experience who God is and I will find myself as I am. That is the only way to find out my identity. Now when I find my identity in God, there is an interconnectedness between you and me, the rest of humanity and the whole of creation. So whatever

happens to me will affect you and whatever affects you will affect the rest of the world. And when I find my identity in the Divine, then there is neither male or female, Jew or Gentile, slave or free (Galatians 3:28).

I want to give you a test before we move on. The test is to find out if you have a relationship with God or if your life is based on religion. First, imagine yourself on the Titanic: the ship is sinking and you are in the water in a lifeboat, safe and secure. Around you swimming in the water, there are little children who need help. If you do not save them, they are going to drown and die. Can you see those beautiful faces? If you don't save them, they are all going to drown and die. And a little in the distance are your loved ones, your parents, your brothers and sisters, your children, your best friend. If you don't save them, they will also drown and die. You cannot save both.

I do not want an answer but whom would you save? Would you save the children and watch your loved ones die or would you let the children die and go looking for your loved ones to save them? If you save the children, you are on the side of compassion. If you go looking for your parents and your loved ones, that is charity. Is it good? It is very good, and acts of charity can lead to being drawn into acts of compassion. But the Ignatian ideal and the ideal or the goal of the Eastern way of life is to live by compassion. And compassion is when we feel an interconnectedness with the rest of humanity. Saving the children is as good as saving my own loved ones.

The experience and the goal of Ignatian spirituality is first to become one with the very being and the essence of God, to find my identity in God and through that experience, to live by compassion. Charity is good, but desire the ideal, and the ideal is compassion. Charity is good but compassion is an indication of your relationship with God—at least, the Ignatian God, the Eastern God.

We reach compassion through *CIT*. In *SAT CIT ANAND*, *SAT* is our experience of the truth, of the being and essence of God, and in that experience we are brought into *CIT*, 'pure consciousness.' Pure consciousness is found in Ignatian spirituality in the exercise of the Application of the Senses. We have to make the Ignatian Application of the Senses a way of life. How does one do this? In the East, we worship the cobra, the snake. But besides worshipping the cobra, we do not allow the cobra to sleep. We wake up the cobra. The Application of the Senses is being in that moment, when you are in the presence of a standing cobra

that is ready to strike. In that moment, you are fully awake, fully alive, and all of your senses are alert. It is being fully present to the mystery to the extent where the mystery and you become one. It is in being fully present to the moment that we live in eternal time because that moment is part of every moment from the beginning of time, that moment is part of every moment till the end of time. That moment is eternal time.

When you are in the presence of a standing cobra, you cease to be 'me' and you become the fully present 'I.' The 'I' is the image and likeness of God, the good and beautiful breath of God. When you are in the presence of a standing cobra, you are not thinking about your sins. You are not thinking about all the things that you did not do right neither are you thinking of all the wonderful things you did in your life. You are fully yourself, the 'I,' because if you are not fully here and now, if you are thinking about the

*when the song and the singer
become one the singer no longer
sings but the song comes out from
the depth of the singer's being*

past or the future, you will get killed. Application of the Senses or *CIT*, pure consciousness, is living fully and totally in the present moment. If you start thinking 'I wish I were somewhere else,' the cobra will kill you. To be fully here is to be everywhere because this

chair on which you are sitting and the ground that your feet are touching is part of everywhere. To be fully here, fully now, fully 'I' is *CIT* pure consciousness. That is the Ignatian way to live life and that is the Eastern way to live the fullness of life.

As the French philosopher Simone Weil says, "Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer." The total attention is not necessarily at the time of traditional or religious prayer, but especially in secular and mundane activity. Ignatius will not allow young Jesuits in training time set aside for prayer. In fact he wants young Jesuits to give up penance and other spiritual ministries while they are in studies: "For their devoting themselves to learning, which they acquire with a pure intention of serving God and which in a certain way requires the whole man, will be not less but more pleasing to God our Lord during the time of study."

Mother Teresa translated this for priests. She said, "When you celebrate the Eucharist, celebrate it as if it were your first, your last and the

only Eucharist that you celebrate.” Jesuits do not understand this analogy very easily so I tell them instead ‘When you go to eat, eat as if you were eating for the first time, the last time and the only time. Taste your food. Taste it, relish it, savor it, enjoy it, so that when you are eating, you eat.’ One time in Bombay there was a Japanese young man who came to a convent and he was there for lunch and the sisters prepared a beautiful dessert. It was out of this world. So the young fellow said, “I have never tasted such dessert in all my life. It was wonderful.” What did the nuns do? They brought more. And he said no, I haven’t finished tasting, relishing, enjoying this dessert. He was fully there, fully now, eating and present to that dessert.

When you fully relish something, you are not attached to it. When you fully relish something, you do not need more. You are free when you relish and enjoy people, places and things. When you are fully I, fully now, fully here, you enjoy this to the full and then you can say goodbye and you will not miss a thing. When I am fully with my parents, enjoyed them to the full, when the time comes for them to die, of course it is painful, but you will not miss them because you have enjoyed them. The same thing happens with friends or with a job and it is the same with material things. We only want to hold onto our material things because we haven’t enjoyed them. If we have enjoyed them, we are free to want someone else to have them. We are therefore attached to those people, places and things that we do not fully enjoy. One way of overcoming our attachments is to learn how to appreciate and enjoy them.

In *SAT CIT ANAND*, ANAND is bliss, having experienced the being in essence in pure consciousness, being in love with the Divine in all creatures and all of them in Him. Ignatius thus wants us to make our spirituality a way of life, “where the soul is so consumed by the love of the Divine that it can love no creature except in the creator of them all.” The energy that comes from the universe will teach us to distinguish the one percent of reality that is physical and the ninety nine percent of reality that is spiritual. The only way we can relate with other persons is to connect with their spiritual ninety nine percent— so much so that if these people were to be taken away from us they would still continue to be present to us in a very real way.

Ignatius wants his followers to seek and experience the Divine in all things and he recognized this possibility through power of the ninety nine percent of the spiritual in our lives. Ignatius believed that the methods and spiritual experiences of his life could be lived and experienced in the

AN ANCIENT SAGE WITH ETERNAL WISDOM

life of any human being— mystical awareness and conscious co-mingling with the Divine is a grace offered to all. Anyone who desires a living relationship with God, and will make his or herself available to an experience and revelation of God, will find this true identification with the Divine. On this path, the first help that Ignatius gives us is the call to keep our intention right— that is, to live simply and totally *for* God. As we grow in our relationship with God we begin to live *with* God until we find ourselves *in* the very Being and Essence of the Divine.

I would therefore like to conclude with the question we need to ask ourselves at the end of every day, after every retreat, at the end of every year, How Big is Your God? Is your God the same God that you knew as a child? Has your God grown bigger since you were a teenager? Is your relationship with the Divine grown in intimacy since your previous consciousness Examen? As your relationship with the Divine keeps growing you will grow in your own self image and confidence and your prayer will be the Magnificat of Mary: My soul glorifies the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour. He has looked on the no-thingness of his handmaid. From henceforth all generations will call me Blessed because God who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is His name!