

“THE FALL OF MAN”

“The root cause of all human suffering is one simple yet profoundly tragic mistake: the ignorance of our true nature. When we misidentify ourselves as separate egos, as individuals separate from the one source that animates all of life, we suffer untold misery and confusion. We are disconnected from each other and from ourselves.”
~Shanti Einolander

Most people share some notion of an ideal world that we long for but that always seems to be out of reach. We seem to perceive this elusive goal as something in the distance and something to hope for. Whether we call it Heaven, Nirvana, Paradise, or The Ideal World, most of us would agree that our current reality is not it. Some religions suggest the idea of a “fall”, or that humans have forgotten what life is all about, that we missed the mark, or “sinned”. They have at the core of their teachings, a story, or myth explaining the cause of suffering and how “evil” entered the world. What is this human condition that seems to prevent us from manifesting and experiencing our highest ideals? Christianity presents us with the idea of “original sin”, although this concept is not mentioned in the original story of *The Fall of Man* in the book of *Genesis*, it was a later addition, introduced by the apostle Paul.

The Greek word for sin, *hamartia* is derived from the root word *hamartanō*, which was an archer's term that means to “miss the mark”. What is this mark that we keep missing, this target that we are supposed to hit? Where is the path leading, the path that we are walking while often getting lost and distracted, causing us to take detours at an often high cost of pain and suffering?



The Bible tells the story of how a serpent tempted *Eve* in the *Garden of Eden*. Are we to believe that the history of suffering is caused by a woman succumbing to the temptations of a snake? Humans, throughout history, are known to be storytellers. We seem to have a need to personify the different aspects of our nature in legends and fairy tales. In Greek mythology, the gods and goddesses represent the different qualities of the human psyche. We can find countless other examples of this in ancient folk tales, legends and fairy tales. Isn't it reasonable to think that this also applies to the characters in the biblical story of *The Fall of Man*? Any story that was written that long ago is most likely mythological in

nature. Based on this view the stories in the Bible can be understood as mythological stories but nevertheless shedding light on life and the human condition.

“The psychologist, Carl Gustav Jung believed that universal, mythic characters—archetypes—reside within the collective unconscious of people the world over. Archetypes represent fundamental human motifs of our experience as we evolved; consequently, they evoke deep emotions.” (From *The 12 Common Archetypes* by Carl Golden)

Bruno Bettelheim, in *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, writes, “The child intuitively comprehends that although these stories are unreal, they are not untrue...” What if the story of *The Fall of Man*, rather than being a historical account, instead alludes to a collective human archetypal story? What if the characters in the story, as in Greek mythology, and as in folk tales, legends and fairy tales, represent all the different aspects of ourselves? What if Adam and Eve represent mankind as a whole, and the serpent, a certain aspect of human nature?

Gregg Levoy, in his book *Callings, Finding and Following an Authentic Life*, suggests that “both fiction and myth involve stories that are not factual but true. They aren’t literally true, but they are psychologically true. They didn’t really happen, but they’re happening all the time. Myths are the stories we create to help explain ourselves.” From this standpoint, history becomes an account of mankind’s collective journey towards the actualization of our highest potential and how we often miss the mark, and often seem to even forget what the target is. The story of *The Fall of Man* then becomes a story about original potential, detours, choices and consequences.

In order to fulfill our highest potential as eternal souls, as both lover and beloved, we must first be born into the physical, material world where we gradually establish ourselves as unique and separate individuals. As earthly, physical, individual selves we have an instinctual survival mechanism. This is necessary because physical existence is temporal and finite and quite fragile. During life in the material world, when in danger, real or perceived, the survival instinct will override any higher, more spiritual aspirations.

Seth Godin, in his book *Linchpin*, writes, “You can’t give a speech while drowning. You can’t fall in love while having a heart attack. You can’t write a sonnet at the same time you’re vomiting from being on a roller coaster.” During the early stages of the process of growth and maturation the identification with our seemingly separate, material selves and our developing sense of ego will often predominantly guide our choices. The desire for food, sex, material wealth, status symbols and other physical or material pleasures often take the driver’s seat. The tendency to go for immediate gratification at the risk of jeopardizing long term benefits, is often the very definition of immaturity.

This is, of course, not in itself a bad thing and the key to growth is to integrate our ego pursuits: the physical body's concerns and needs, with the higher calling of the soul. To deny and neglect the self only to benefit the greater whole is, in my opinion, just as dysfunctional as to ignore the greater whole in favor of only the self. A healthy human being is able to fully integrate both the need for self-preservation as well as the desire to contribute and serve the greater whole.

The highest aspiration is to consciously choose to actualize our ultimate soul-purpose. Our challenge is to learn to identify with our soul which is infinite and eternal and therefore has no fear of death, has no enemies and therefore no need to be defensive. Ken Wilber, in *Up from Eden* writes, "When a person rediscovers that his deepest Nature is one with the All, he is relieved of the burdens of time, of anxiety, of worry; he is released from the chains of alienation and separate-self existence. Seeing that self and other are one, he is released from the fear of life; seeing that being and non-being are one, he is delivered from the fear of death."

The material world will always have a pull on us on our path to spiritual maturity. Such distractions can be detrimental, but can also be the necessary friction that makes us grow. They become the grains of sand that make the pearl. We can grow our character by being in challenging situations and making the right choices. Life is full of obstacles and challenges and that's the way it's supposed to be. The spiritual path has to be chosen. Our existence as "separate" individuals in the material world is crucial. It allows us the experience of being "other", in a world of Oneness. But this also comes with the risk of over-identifying with our physical selves and all its fears and impulses and therefore forgetting who we are as eternal souls.

This, to me, is the essence of "the fall" as mythologized in the Bible. In my view, it wasn't something that happened once at the dawn of human history, with one specific couple, but rather something that happens in every person's life, at several points on our journey of maturation. We are born into the physical world and the first part of life is all about establishing ourselves as individuals and growing and maturing our bodies. The second part of life is about cultivating our spiritual identity, and maturing in wisdom and in love. Of course, these two parts of life are not sharply divided and don't always progress chronologically and often overlap as well.

Could it be that the serpent in the Biblical story of *The Fall of Man* is a symbol for the earthly self? A serpent; a snake, is the most earthbound of all creatures. Earthbound forces have always been a metaphor for the desires of the flesh, whereas wings that defy gravity symbolizes the flight of the spirit. Ken Wilber, writes in *Up from Eden*, "Uroboros is the primordial mythic symbol of the serpent eating its own tail, and signifies self-possessed, all-enclosing but narcissistic, paradisaical but reptilian (or embedded in lower life forms)."

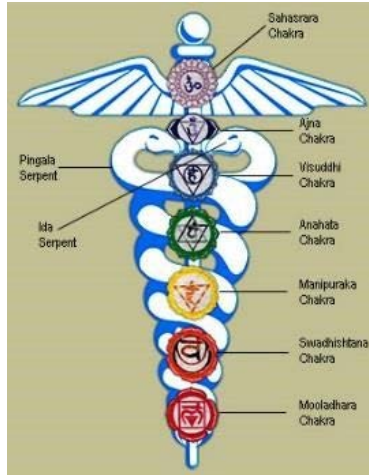


We evolve, or grow gradually (collectively throughout history, as well as individually) from first identifying primarily with the earthly body and our environment (uroboric fusion) in a dream-like, primal, undifferentiated state in which we can't yet know ourselves as separate, into eventually becoming fully mature, conscious, still "separate" but fully integrated individuals. Jean Piaget supports this idea, he writes, "During the early stages, the world and the self are one; neither term is distinguished from the other...the self is material, so to speak."

Wilber continues, "...this uroboric state, this state of beatific but archaic consciousness, is ruled by instincts and biological drives. Neumann [a German psychologist] calls it the 'alimentary uroboros'." We see this in infants, whose biological needs for safety and human contact is predominant. In Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs we see further evidence that physiological needs are most basic and needs to be met first, followed by the need for safety. This then becomes the foundation upon which all other needs can be met.

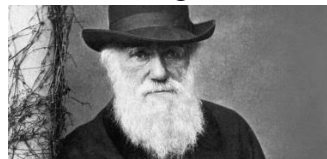
We don't see infants philosophize about world peace or sacrificing their lives for other people. Few babies will opt for delaying gratification in order to allow their parents a good night's sleep. Wilber writes, "Thus physiologically, the uroboros-as the serpentine center-may be thought of as the reptilian complex (primarily) and the limbic system (secondarily). This obviously does not imply that uroboric men and women had no cerebral cortex; it only means that it was not predominant. That is, it was not serving all of the functions it serves today such as abstract logic, language, and conceptualization." He continues, "There stands anyways the fact that in almost all mythologies the uroboric symbol is serpentine reptile. The reptile: instinctual and unself-conscious behavior, embedded in Mother Nature, rooted in the subconscious sphere. And there, I believe, is the actual state of the Garden of Eden universally described by mythology."

The seven chakras represent that same journey, collectively and individually, from identification with the physical body, sexuality, and survival, represented by the lower chakras, on to higher dimensions of consciousness, all the way to the crown chakra which represents the oneness with the divine.



Man's potential for higher consciousness starts out at the lowest base of his being, at the first chakra, the center of material, pleromatic, alimentary, visceral-food impulses (the first chakra is said to represent food and physical matter). From this lowest state (or chakra) the serpent power (consciousness itself) is said to evolve or awaken to successfully higher centers of awareness, moving precisely through the levels of the Great Chain of Being, from the lowest material or natural state toward the brain-mind center and then into truly super-conscious states.~Ken Wilber

On the website Integrallife.com, Corey W. de Vos writes, "As Darwin himself explains, pure survival is but the lowest of evolutionary drivers, and are eclipsed by a number of other drivers as we move up the evolutionary chain. In Darwin's mind, evolution was guided by an entire spectrum of critical drivers that ranged from sexual instincts on the lowest end to the Golden Rule on the highest, with parental instincts, social instincts, emotion and reason, cultural habits, etc. filling out the rest of the picture."



Wilber suggests, "From this viewpoint, the evolution of consciousness is the evolution of the serpent power, and, according to kundalini texts, this power, in its earliest, lowest, and initial starting point, is precisely represented by the uroboros, the Serpent of Eden." Based on this understanding we can conclude that the serpent in the Garden of Eden, is not to be understood as something "Evil" but rather is to be interpreted as the part of us that is susceptible to over-identifying with the lowest chakras, with the biological drives of survival and sex. This is obviously not evil and when properly integrated, serves an important purpose.

Based on this view Adam and Eve come to symbolize humans emerging or evolving out of the uroboric, womb-like oneness into awareness as conscious, separate individuals. This would have been a very vulnerable time when we as humans are no longer in the

undifferentiated state of oneness with Mother-Mater, Matter, Earth, and not yet at full potential as divine beings conscious of ourselves as individuals and of our oneness with God. Both Sigmund Freud and Joseph Campbell describe this time period of no-longer-but not yet, as the typhon or titan stage, where humans are still in a state of half animal, half human...or rather half human, half divine.



These images depict how the serpent symbolizes our physical, earthly selves and lower chakras, as the foundation upon which the spirit grows (symbolized by the wings). It illustrates humans in the *no longer, but not yet* state, where we are both earthly humans (from the Latin words *humus*, meaning earth and *humanus* meaning man, "Dust thou art and to dust thou must return."), symbolized by the snake, and divine, again; symbolized by the wings. Wings that defy gravity and earthbound forces.

Wilber writes, "Freud seemed to penetrate to the heart of this early condition: the ego, he said, was 'first and foremost a body-ego.' That is, in the early stages of development, the self, is centered on the body, and not so much on the mind..." The serpent, or the body-ego, needs to be rightly understood and then integrated, not demonized, and it is, in my opinion, one of the biggest mistakes of religion; to separate the body and the mind and to demonize earthly, bodily desires and needs. Any religion that demonizes the serpent and shuns the lower instincts of the body is bound to fail as we have seen so clearly in recent cases of several religious leaders who, devoted to a life of celibacy or a strict moral code and forcefully condemning the "sins of the flesh", have themselves been caught in the act of secret sexual crimes. Shunning, demonizing, shaming and repressing the desires and needs of the body doesn't make them go away but rather causes them to fester and morph into dysfunctional behaviors such as molestation, incest, adultery and rape

The Fall of Man story not only illustrates the tendency to over-identify with the serpent; the earthly self, the physical body and with ego, but also what happens when we go in the opposite extreme and instead reject and shun the serpent (lower chakra instincts) and turn it into a devil and an enemy.

From a larger perspective we can understand the process of how Oneness, or God, divides Him/Herself into unique, thinking, free-willed, creative others. This cannot simply be created or orchestrated by God, because then it would still be God pulling all the strings. We would merely be a creation of God and not independent, free individuals. The reason prehistoric men and women began extricating themselves (driven by the prompting of their internal divine potential) from Eden or the womb-like uroboric oneness,

without the help of God, was that life has to be figured out on one's own. It is not something that is given to us. We have to want it. We have to choose it. We are not programmed to love God. That's the whole point of freedom. To love. In freedom.

Based on this premise the "fall" becomes a metaphor for all those moments when we over-identify with the physical body and its urges: fight, flight, food and sex at the exclusion of the aspirations of the soul and those moments when we cling to our ego, and thus forget our true identity as eternal, inter-connected souls, only temporary in a physical incarnation?

Joseph Campbell says, "Psychologically, the dragon is one's own binding of oneself to one's ego. We're captured in our own dragon's cage. The ultimate dragon is within you, it is your ego clamping you down."



Could it be that we "fall" every time we choose to remain in the cocoon of safety, every time we avoid the discomfort of growing, stretching, expanding and taking risks, every time we listen to the fear of our survival instincts that seek to protect and defend us from pain? The part of our brain that wants to keep us alive and safe can also prevent us from growing, because growth always involves taking risks and going beyond our comfort zone. "The reason the resistance persists in slowing you down and prevent you from putting your heart and soul into your work is simple: you might fail." Seth Godin writes.

M.Scott Peck in *The Road Less Traveled*, points out that "Fearing the pain involved, almost all of us, to a greater or lesser degree, attempt to avoid problems. We procrastinate, hoping they will go away. We even take drugs to assist us in ignoring them, so that by deadening ourselves to the pain we can forget the problems that cause the pain. We attempt to get out of them rather than suffer through them head on."

Scott Peck continues, "Again and again I have emphasized that the process of spiritual growth is an effortful and difficult one. This is because it is conducted against a natural resistance, against a natural inclination to keep things the way they were, to cling to the old map and old ways of doing things, to take the easy path. "And later in the book he says, "So original sin does exist; it is our laziness.....it is the force of entropy within us, pushing us down and holding us back from our spiritual evolution".

I wouldn't necessarily call it "laziness". It is rather just the natural, instinctual impulse to seek pleasure and avoid pain. It is a defense mechanism. Peck says, "...the lazy part of the self, like the devil that it may actually be, is unscrupulous and specializes in treacherous disguise. It cloaks its own laziness in all manner of rationalization, which the more growing part of the self is still too weak to see through easily." Seth Godin, in *Linchpin*, talks about the idea of "... 'pearling' where our great ideas and creativity will always have to face the resistance that lives in that part of the brain that seeks to protect us from danger, risk and loss, the part that wants to keep us 'safe'. "Gregg Levoy says, "At our first steps toward authenticity or love or compassion or any high calling, every devil in hell will come out to meet us."



"There's a moment when fear and dream must collide". ~J. Corcoran/B. Jutras

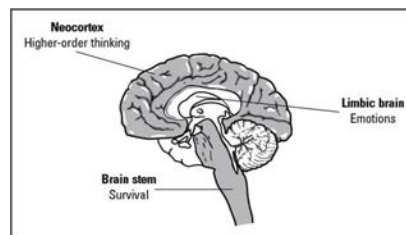
Michael Dooley, in his book *Levering the Universe*, presents us with the idea that "original sin is committed whenever we base our behavior on the physical world around us as if it were bedrock reality." and "giving the world revealed by our physical senses precedence over the world revealed by our inner senses." He continues by positing that the "The entire story of the fall is about our forgetting the truth concerning the very essence of what is real...."

Perhaps the "fall" simply describes the human dilemma of believing that material things can satisfy our spiritual hunger. Gravity is often used as a metaphor for downwards, earthly forces, pulling and tempting us to settle for less. In this sense, the "fall" happens every time we choose, not necessarily immediate physical gratification in itself, since this too has its time and place, but when we choose it at the expense of, or instead of, or in denial of long term spiritual growth.

Philip Zimbardo, in his book *The Lucifer Effect*, writes, "Lucifer's sin is what thinkers in the Middle Ages called cupiditas. For Dante, the sins that spring from that root are the most extreme sins of the wolf, the spiritual condition of having an inner black hole so deep within oneself that no amount of money can ever fill it.' For those suffering the mortal malady called cupiditas, whatever exists outside of one's self has worth only as it can be exploited by, or taken into one's self." Lucifer here, symbolizes the ego separated from the soul. Eckhart Tolle, in *A New Earth*, explains that "The ego doesn't know that the Source of all energy is within you, so it seeks it outside."

The fruit of the *Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil* and the commandment not to eat it, could also be interpreted as "do not over identify with a mere physical sense of happiness and union, while still in the process of growth because through the ecstasy of your physical senses, sex in particular, you will have a sense of having already arrived, which may cause you to feel less motivated to strive for further spiritual growth, and stunted growth can potentially, over time even cause problems of even epic proportions."

The physical self is earthbound, in the same way that a serpent or snake is the most earthbound of all creatures. The amygdala and our sense of ego, is preoccupied with the needs and urges of the earthly self and its survival. Many inclinations that are usually referred to as "sinful" or "fallen" are simply legitimate physical and ego needs. The perceived inner conflict is a natural part of evolving from a sense of being a material body, to knowing ourselves as spiritual beings and part of a larger whole.



It's interesting to note that in the story of *The Fall of Man* in the book of *Genesis*, there is no mention of a devil. It is only later that the serpent becomes demonized. This clearly illustrates our human tendency to demonize our perceived and imagined "enemies". The tendency is that as we climb up the rungs of the chakras, as our consciousness unfolds to higher and higher levels of awareness we often reject, judge as sinful, and shun the lower levels. The mistake of many spiritual and religious people is to reject the needs and the desires of the physical body (especially sex) instead of harmoniously integrating them. Religion demonizes the serpent in the same way as it has demonized all earthly and especially sexual desires. Based on this understanding we can see why later in the Bible the serpent is referred to as "Satan" or "the devil".

Joseph Campbell explains, in the book *The Power of Myth*, that in the mythological "conflict of the eagle and the serpent, the bird is symbolic of the release of the spirit from bondage to the earth, just as the serpent is symbolic of the bondage to the earth." Gregg Levoy supports this idea. He writes, "The images of the dragon, for instance, appears in the myths of cultures as far flung as the Egyptian, Iroquois, Polynesian and Anglo Saxon, and has, for all of them, come to represent the conflict between earthly energies (the serpent) and spiritual energies (the eagle)."



As children, teens and young adults we are mostly concerned with self-image, accumulation of material wealth, physical beauty and status, and only later begin to ponder the bigger questions of life such as, “who am I without the mask of pretense and material possessions? What happens when I die? Is there a higher purpose? What is meaning?” This is how it must be. Richard Rohr, in his book *Falling Upward*, speaks of the two halves of life. One, in which we establish ourselves as unique individuals in the world, and where our main concerns become, as Rohr puts it, “identity, security and sexuality”. In the second half of life we are meant to find and realize our “True Self”.

There is a part in all of us that is designed to avoid discomfort and pain and it makes us vulnerable to instead blame others for our problems and circumstances. This is also symbolically expressed in the myth of the “fall” in the Bible. *Adam* and *Eve* blamed the serpent and each other for their problems. Scott Peck writes, “Whenever we seek to avoid the responsibility for our own behavior, we do so by attempting to give that responsibility to some other individual or organization or entity.”

The root cause of the human condition is the over-identification with ego and the material self which is most typically expressed through the tendency to avoid facing our problems and taking responsibility, erroneously thinking that we are merely material bodies that must be defended and protected at all cost, even at the cost of other people and the idea that we are separate from God and separate from each other.

Our assignment here on earth is to defy earth-bound forces and learn to fly. Birds and other winged creatures often symbolize empowered, liberated souls. Heaven, often seen as “up there”, is used as a metaphor for our ultimate destiny. It’s all about a gradual awakening to our actual and eternal identity as spiritual beings only temporary in this physical form.



“Our creative genius is the fountainhead to originality. It fires our compulsion to evolve. It inspires us to challenge norms. Creative genius is about flying to new heights on untested wings, it’s about the danger of crashing. It is amorphous, magical, unmeasurable and unpredictable.” ~Gordon McKenzie, in his book *Orbiting the Giant Hairball*.

Our survival instinct does not like this, it just wants to keep us safe. “The resistance”, says Seth Godin, “wants us to curl up in a corner, avoid all threats, take no risks and hide.” It’s important here, to note that the needs and desires of our earthly bodies, symbolized by a serpent, are not evil or bad. Our physical selves and our sense of ego do serve a crucial purpose of facilitating the sense of being other than God and separate from other people, and thus enabling us to experience reciprocal relationships. Our defense mechanisms are also keeping us safe from legitimate dangers. In a nondual reality, body and soul are not separate. The challenge is not to overcome or subjugate that part of ourselves but rather to integrate all the different aspects of ourselves. We are not striving for holiness but wholeness. We are both human and divine.

As mentioned earlier, the tendency to polarize often leads to more problems. Over-identifying with the material self at the expense of spiritual awareness is often at the root of dysfunction, but denying, ignoring, subjugating and shaming the physical self with all its needs and concerns is equally problematic. During our earthly lives the physical body serves as the container and the foundation for spiritual growth. The perceived conflict between the soul and the earthly body is not evidence of “sin” but is rather a catalyst for growth and the “conflict” will disappear in direct proportion to how we mature and learn to harmonize those two aspects of our lives. The optimal way lies in the healthy integration of the two.

“...the tension between opposites is the very basis on which life exists otherwise it would disappear”, the author Osho, writes in the book *The man Who Loved Seagulls*. The Biblical story tells us that *Eve* was tempted by a serpent not by a devil. It was only after the “fall”, much later in the Bible, that “The Serpent” is referred to as “Satan” or “The Devil”, signifying that it is only when we allow the physical self and its urges and needs to take the lead at the expense of the soul’s longings and aspirations, and at the expense of others, that problems arise. The physical body and the sense of ego are not in themselves evil.

Religion teaches that man “sinned” and therefore became separate from God, but in reality it is the other way around; due to over identifying with our physical existence, we misunderstand the meaning of being other than God and others and therefore we “sin”. The belief in separation is the root of all dysfunction, distortion and illness. In this way religion often creates, rather than solves the problem of our human dilemma by promoting the belief that we are cast out of the Garden of Eden, burdened with “original sin” and therefore separate from God.

Jesus said “You are of your father the devil” which is often used as evidence for a “satanic lineage”, that only a Messiah can free us from, but in light of the ideas in this chapter, we can conclude that this is, of course not to be taken literally. Being the “child” of...” can also mean subscribing to the ideas of someone or something, or being the result of certain concepts or ideas, as in the expression brainchild. Artists often refer to their creations as their “baby” or “child”. Being a child or offspring of....is a metaphor for being a result or creation of certain concepts or ideologies.

Being of “our father the devil” then, is to be understood in a metaphorical sense. It could represent subscribing to the ideas, convictions and concerns of the archetypal devil which is a symbol for the distorted and misguided ego; its main concerns being the self, immediate gratification often at the expense of others, defense/offense, survival and sex, and avoiding the discomfort of stretching and growing.

When mankind, symbolized by *Adam* and *Eve*, forgets their role as divine co-creators and eternal souls and choose to abdicate their power symbolized by how *Eve* blames the serpent and later *Adam* blames “that woman”, they become “children of their father the devil” or rather, the result of the misguided ego and the material world. This is the birth of addiction, giving power to someone or something outside of ourselves, and using the material world to fill our spiritual needs.

We were meant to be co-creators. We have free will and responsibility. The “fall” happens when we surrender our original freedom and instead make someone or something else a master over us. When we abandon the responsibility for our own lives by either blaming others for our misery or depending on others for our happiness, we give away our power and we become victims.

The Bible also talks about “Satan” being the “ruler of this world” which could mean allowing the misguided ego with its constant cravings and addictions, to rule us. Selfishness is the “ruler of this world”, implying its addictive nature. It symbolizes allowing external circumstances, other people and luck, (or the lack thereof), to determine the outcome of our lives and to define who we are, contradictory to the concept of a participatory universe where we co-create our lives and destiny. The truth is, however, that this devil only has as much power over us as we choose to give it. Who will we follow? The forever hungry ego, or our Higher Self?

“You gotta serve somebody, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you’re gonna have to serve somebody.” ~Bob Dylan

The Devil is merely a symbol for a way of thinking, an attitude, an erroneous belief that we have surrendered to, that we sold our soul to, that we have prostituted our lives to, in exchange for immediate gratification, fame and fortune, sex, food, drugs or whatever else we think will make us feel alive. Ryan Tedder in the band *One Republic* sings “Everything that kills me makes me feel alive...” But it is a fake sense of aliveness. Scott Peck writes, “...the substitute itself ultimately becomes more painful than the legitimate suffering it was

designed to avoid. True to form many will then attempt to avoid this pain and this problem in turn, building layer upon layer of neurosis.”

People don't do bad things because they're evil, but because they are unaware. We erroneously believe that we are separate from God and each other and therefore we “sin”. We “sin” because we feel alienated and empty. We erroneously cling to mistaken notions of who and what we are. We are missing the mark because we are unaware of the truth of our original identity and value. Jesus said, “The truth will set you free”.

I don't believe in “sin” in the theological sense as something from a devil, or something that separates us from God. I am obviously aware that there are unacceptable and wrong actions and behaviors and that there are thoughts and actions that prevent us from experiencing the omnipresence of God, but to me, those thoughts and actions are not “sins” (in the above mentioned theological sense), they are simply setbacks, mistakes, distractions and stumbles on our journey, and they can even, if we so choose, serve as lessons.

In my worldview, one cannot be drawn further away from God because of what one does or doesn't do. Our thoughts and actions will not, cannot change the universal principle of Oneness, and of God's omnipresence. It's not that God is far away, the problem is that our numbness, resistance, fear and resentment have created a veil, preventing us from perceiving God's eternal presence within and all around us. The problem is in us, in our limited perception. God doesn't change Her/His location....as if that was even possible.

We “sin” because we lack knowledge and understanding of the real nature of life and of who we truly are. The Greek word for sin, *hamartia* can also mean “intellectual shortcoming”. *Sophos* (wise man) is contrasted with the *Amartanon* (“one who is in error” and not “one who is in sin”). Maya Angelou writes, “When people know better, they do better”. And Jesus, while being crucified cried out to God, “Please forgive them for they know not what they're doing”. (Luke 23:34)

Gangaji, in her book *The Diamond in Your Pocket*, writes, “The original sin, the original mistake, is the belief that separation from the source, from consciousness, from God is even possible. Since separation is our experience, we believe it to be reality. This mistaken perception is the root of all suffering.” Charles Fay and Foster W.Cline, founders of *Love and Logic*, a philosophy of raising and teaching children, suggest that it is a lack of a sense of belonging and value that more often than not causes kids to misbehave.