

**William Blake as a Visionary of the New Age: Comparing the New
Age Concepts of Eckhart Tolle's Mind-Body-Spirit Books with
Blake's Illuminated Works**

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my committee.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Note to the Reader

It should be noted that throughout this work I use the terms New Age, New Age Thought and New Age Spiritualism interchangeably. It should also be noted that when I mention New Age texts, I will either refer to them as New Age self-help/personal-growth or Mind-body-spirit books.

-ABSTRACT-

Although William Blake was overlooked in his time, today he is considered a visionary who created worlds with his mythology and encrypted symbolic language. Scholars such as Mark Lussier and David Weir have connected the poet to the religious practices in Buddhism and Hinduism, since parts of his poems include symbols that can be connected to both Eastern religions. His connection to these specific religions has been, by scholars, investigated with the inclusion of his dreams and visions that inspire his work and include deceased loved ones and angels, with the result that Blake has been seen as a mystic.

However, Blake's at times otherworldly concepts go beyond traditional religion and mysticism and can be connected to the New Age movement, more specifically, to the concepts that stem from New Age Thought. His poetry has been quoted by supporters of the New Age in the 1960's (also coined as the *The Age of Aquarius* movement) and his work continues to be displayed on tarot cards as well as New Age streaming networks. His mythology does not just explore religious or spiritual concepts, but dives deep into thought patterns of the mind itself and how to alter our states of thinking. Blake demonstrates a curiosity to reform and reprogram the mind through perception and consciousness similarly to the New Age spiritual teachers, authors and influencers we know today.

Eckhart Tolle, a popular mind-body-spirit self-help author and spiritual teacher/speaker explores reconstruction of the mind through thought patterns that at times hold similarities to Blake's understanding of perception that he expresses in his poems and other works. Tolle's spiritual self-help books will be compared to Blake's poetry, prose and illuminated pages

Though there are some major differences to address when comparing these two writers, the purpose of this comparison is to explore the idea that Blake could be considered a visionary of the New Age (even before the New Age period) while investigating if his works can then be

read as Mind-Body-Spirit texts to assist in the altering of our perspective that New Age authors strive towards. Blake in his lifetime worked towards changing the world through his art and more importantly, strove to change the minds of humankind to achieve a higher state of being, much like mind-body-spirit texts.

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List of Abbreviations

Works by Tolle:

NE—A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose. Plume, 2006.

POW—The Power of Now: a Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment. Namaste Publishing, 2004.

SS—Stillness Speaks. Namaste Publishing, 2003.

Other Works:

E—The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake. Anchor Books, 1988.

SSLS—The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success: A Practical Guide to the Fulfillment of your Dreams. Amber-Allen Publishing, 1993.

-INTRODUCTION-

William Blake strove to alter the perception of humanity with his artistry whether that be his poetry, prose or illuminated pages. He often dared to look beyond the systemic beliefs of his time and frequently challenged the ideas of the English Church through his life's work. Blake was dedicated to not only using his art as an expression of himself but worked to broaden the minds of his readers despite his small following, perhaps due to the cryptic and highly symbolic language and images he often used. One of the works that I will be drawing on is Kathleen Raine's work *Blake and the New Age*, which touches on *The Age of Aquarius* movement, specifically the aspect of it that believes in the return to the simplicity of Eastern practices. She calls attention to the 'hippies' of the sixties and seventies who rejected materialism. Raine seems to see Blake as a prominent figure that, like those of the *Age of Aquarius*, challenges Western ideologies and more so follows practices of the East. In relation to my own work, while Raine compares Blake to the New Age movement itself specifically focusing on how it deviates from materialism, I will instead be looking at central themes of the mind creating reality, inner transformation and personal growth leading to social change that are specific to New Age thought.

Thanks to certain scholars such as Northrop Frye, Blake today is seen as a radical visionary who has created art with a plethora of mystified language and symbolism that point towards inspiration *beyond* traditional religion and instead suggests that the poet touched on a multitude of sources for his inspiration. Blake mingles with the spiritual and metaphysical knowledges that do not completely align with any label of his time.

Although Blake's work is enriched with the Christian biblical references, scholars of today have suspected the incorporation of unconventional sources of the Eastern religions of

Buddhism and Hinduism. However, with the use of Christian biblical references to Jesus' teachings, Buddhism, Hinduism and bringing awareness to mindful perception, much of his ideas that are echoed throughout his works include similarities to the New Age period, otherwise known as *The Age of Aquarius*.

This movement, along with the texts and works produced in its sphere, have a multitude of common characteristics, many of which, I argue, Blake expresses through his pieces. Themes include the unification of all things, being one with all that lives, finding truth and wisdom from a variety of sources and a realization of the intrinsic divinity within humanity, which are all themes that will be compared to Blake's work throughout this piece. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that Blake's poetic persona throughout his works sometimes differ in terms of voices as well as perspectives. Within *The Marriage*, Blake includes himself in the text and therefore the work can be treated more as a manifesto while in other pieces such as the *Gates of Paradise*, the writing is far more cryptic in terms of wording and what type of perspective the readers are meant to take on. Not all his works should be interpreted as an expression of his own thoughts – some can be seen more as literary personas.

For this paper, I will be drawing on New Age concepts and not the *Age of Aquarius* movement itself. This paper will *not* be comparing the 1960's movement of the diverse organizations of peace-making protestors that chanted against the military for a new era of harmony and enlightenment (Bowker), but instead, will be investigating the central themes mentioned on page 1 that began to arise with the New Age along with the self-help books that coincide to make a direct comparison to Blake's pieces including but not limited to his poetry, prose and illuminated pages. I intend to specify this comparison through the focused lens of the

world-famous New Age author and spiritual teacher, Eckhart Tolle and the concepts he covers in his self-help books.

Who is Eckhart Tolle?

It is important to briefly go over who Tolle is, what impact he has made on the world thus far and why he is the one I chose to represent New Age thought to compare to Blake. Tolle writes about focusing on living in the 'now' and tuning into our consciousness. Many of us, especially nowadays, live on autopilot. Tolle inspires others with his self-help books (as well as talks) to quiet the incessant noise of our minds to find a state of true calmness and peace. Much of his work centers around the idea of 'the ego' and how it takes us out of this state of consciousness through thought patterns and emotions that are considered negative (such as jealousy, resentment, etc.) by entering a new state of consciousness that ultimately alters how we view our life, and thus changes our reality. He alerts his readers to ways out of suffering from our own learned patterns and fixed mindsets and how we can more easily find a state of tranquility in our daily lives. He teaches us that our lives can transform if we should begin to tune into our own thought patterns and realize much of our suffering comes from the mind.

Though there are stark differences between Tolle and Blake, there are also many significant similarities that should not be overlooked. Both authors have a unique perspective of the world on how to change the way humanity views the mind. Tolle continues to do his part to inspire individuals towards positive change from a place within themselves and while reading Blake, it is clear that the English poet also wished to accomplish this through his art. Through the direct comparison of Tolle's self-help books titled *The Power of Now, A New Earth* and *Stillness Speaks*, to a selection of Blake's illuminated works from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, to

Songs of Innocence and Experience, I would like to explore if Blake can be seen as a visionary of the New Age.

I would like to note that in my research there was no indication that Tolle's ideas were inspired or influenced by Blake's illuminated books. Thus, I will not be looking into how Tolle interpreted or was influenced by Blake's work, but instead be comparing these two authors to explore the idea that if Blake had beliefs similar to that of the New Age spiritual teacher, it could suggest that Blake understood and practiced New Age concepts before the actual movement itself.

What this Paper entails

Though I recognize that both works being compared are completely different genres (self-help vs. illuminated books), each will be viewed from a perspective of New Age Spiritualism and will touch on the related topics that are central themes of this movement:

- 1) the mind creating reality,
- 2) inner transformation and
- 3) personal change in direct correlation to social change.

As a basis for understanding and sticking to central themes in self/personal growth books, I will be referencing Helen Lee's "'The Truth that Sets Us Free?': The Use of Rhetoric in Mind-Body-Spirit Books" as a guideline for New Age concepts to directly apply to Blake. Although I disagree with much of what Lee states in terms of the lack of effectiveness she sees with mind-body-spirit books and how she argues that concentrating on the betterment of the self ignores the larger problems of society such as the issues of the government and injustices being done around the world (Lee 100), her article will provide a foundation for the basic understanding of what New Age self-help books often entail. In the beginning of her article, she points out that "Three

discourses are delineated, each of which constructs transformation and liberation” (91). These subtopics that she sees as central themes to mind-body-spirit texts are ‘We Stop ourselves from being free’, ‘Transformation and Liberation’, and Transformation ‘from personal to global’.

Along with referencing this piece to act as guidelines for this paper, Tolle’s books, Blake’s works and the scholars that write about Blake, there will also be brief references to other New Age authors/teachers such as Deepak Chopra, specifically his book *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*. Chopra, like Tolle, is well known for his teachings of New Age concepts. I will also refer to Christopher B. Hill and his work *Nuclear Evolution: Discovery of the Rainbow Body* specifically for the purpose of explaining the concept of the “Cave of Brahma” that will be covered in the “Blake and Religion” chapter.

Chapter Breakdown

The first chapter, titled “Blake and Religion”, will set the stage with an analysis of Blake’s poem “All Religions are One” and then proceed to an overview of Blake’s connection to religion as well as his criticism of the Church of England (the dominant religion in England at the time) and a brief mention of its governmental power. Despite Blake’s inclusion of Christian concepts and biblical quotations, according to Bogan & Goss’s *Sparks of Fire: Blake in a New Age* his references to the Bible are unconventional in nature, used for his own interpretation (Bogan & Goss 67) and often used to speak against the core ideas the Church sought to enforce. Nevertheless, the poet’s Christian references also include the new religious movement that sparked much of Blake’s interest, Swedenborgianism. Although Blake’s work swerved away from Swedenborg’s teachings and the poet along with his wife left that church, Swedenborg’s teachings were used as ‘friendly opposition’ for Blake which assisted in his writings such as *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

This chapter also includes the connection between Blake's concepts and those of Buddhism and Hinduism since many concepts of New Age thought are adopted from these religions. The first text used will be *Romantic Dharma The Emergence of Buddhism into Nineteenth-Century Europe* by Mark S. Lussier. With the use of Lussier, Blake's ideas of self-annihilation will be compared to the Buddhist belief of the extinction of the self as well as the understanding of looking at the world with a non-dualistic perspective and that all things no matter how significant they may seem, are holy and have a purpose on the planet. Another text that will be referenced is Howard Cutler's *The Art of Happiness* that he wrote with the 14th Dalai Lama to reference common Buddhist beliefs articulated by the leader of Tibet.

As mentioned, this chapter will also reference Hinduism with the use of the text, *Brahma in the West* written by David Weir which will go into how Blake's mythos has elements that can be correlated to Hindu tradition. This section of the chapter will delve into the symbolism of Blake's coiling snake – Orc – in relation to the Kundalini serpent which is a common symbol of Hindu tradition. There will also be the mention of the 'mundane egg' that Weir refers to in his book in connection to the egg imagery in Blake's *Milton*. There will also be an analysis on plate 1 of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* to connect Blake's idea of 'vision' to that of Hindu beliefs that refer to the third-eye chakra and more specifically, the concept of the "Cave of Brahma". This chapter's purpose is to demonstrate that because Blake's work holds many concepts similar to Eastern religious practices, that this should be considered when comparing Blake to New Age thought which also draws on Eastern religious practices.

Chapter 2 discusses the possibility that Blake is a mystic. The texts in use for this section will be: Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry*, specifically the 'General Note' at the end of his text titled "Blake's Mysticism"; Laura Quinney's chapter on "Mysticism" in Haggarty's *William*

Blake in Context, William Blake Poet and Mystic by P. Berger as well as letters between Blake and Thomas Butts to analyze the peculiar and at times mystical language the poet uses in writing to his dear friend and admirer.

With the use of all these sources, whether Blake can be considered a mystic or not will be called into question. The very definition of the ‘traditional’ mystic will be explored and put into perspective along with Blake’s often recounted dreams and visions. The point of this chapter is to call attention to the fact that Blake’s life was a very spiritual one – and simply referring to him as a religious poet of the Romantic period does not fully encapsulate the magnitude of how his beliefs affected his life and works. This chapter is meant to bring forth the suggestion that Blake’s spirituality, like himself, is peculiar in nature and labeling him as either strictly religious or mystical, devalues the expansiveness of his work that cannot simply be put under a single category.

Part 1, titled “The Mind Creates Reality” will begin to get into the bulk of the paper and will focus on the first concept Lee mentions which is that the mind creates our state of reality. This belief is something crucial to New Age beliefs centering around the idea that how we think and the mentality we choose to allow ourselves to have affects the physical world and reality we experience as human beings. One of the main focuses for this section will be Blake’s “London” located in *Songs of Experience* and put in comparison to Tolle’s interpretation of the mind affects reality with the use of his texts *The Power of Now* as well as *A New Earth*. This section will go into great detail regarding both authors expressing the power of thought and how it has a direct effect on the physical world we live in terms of freedom and a sense of entrapment. The idea of co-creation which is intertwined with self-responsibility that is often a common concept in New Age thought that Lee briefly touches on will also be mentioned as well as a comparison

between the idea of spiritual manifestation and Blake's idea of imagination. What both of these subtopics aim to do is reinforce how much power the mind has over an individual's physical reality according to the alternative belief system of the New Age.

Part 2 "Inner Transformation" will cover the New Age concept of transformation of the self that comes with this change in perception mentioned in part 1. In this section, I will cover how inner transformation comes to be according to Blake and Tolle and compare the two. I will also bring forth the symbolism of fire— and although fire itself is not a symbol of the New Age, both authors refer to it when discussing the transformation of the self. In order to fully grasp Blake's depiction of Inner transformation, *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise* will be referenced and the plates from 1-5 will be analyzed. At this point of the paper, I will also be comparing and contrasting Blake's ideas of 'the senses' with Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* and Robert F. Gleckner's "Blake and the Senses" to Tolle's concept of 'the pain body' and how the body for both writers is *not* the hindrance that most religions make it out to be, but instead the beacon that allows for our Inner transformation. This section will also discuss some of the largest differences between Blake and Tolle, mostly centering around the fact that Blake sees the importance of opposition while Tolle, like many of the other New Age writers and teachers, seems to value speaking against it and opting for a place of inner-peace that is often achieved with a sense of acceptance and *letting go*. This chapter will have a section dedicated to pointing out that Tolle subscribes to the idea of passivity, nonaction and nonresistance while Blake, who favoured both the French and American Revolutions is a supporter of friendly opposition, action-oriented change and rebellious spirit.

Part 3, the last major section, titled "Personal Change leading to Social Change", is focused on what happens, according to New Age thought, after one has already altered their state

of mind to achieve an awakening that leads to inner transformation. This section covers how both Blake and Tolle focus on the concept that the inner transformation discussed in part 2 will ultimately affect others and the world. What will be covered first, however, is the concept that everything is intrinsically connected to one another and that everything—no matter how insignificant it may appear—will affect the greater whole. By analyzing *Auguries of Innocence* and comparing that which Blake says to Tolle's idea of the state of the individual being reflected onto the world, this part of my thesis will cover the idea of how that which is perceived as singular is an illusion and always affects the multitude. This central theme that Lee mentions is often found within mind-body-spirit books, and hones in on self-responsibility and applying it to the entirety of, not just our lives, but the lives of many. What will also be covered is Tolle's understanding that this can go both ways, and not just an occurrence that is positive. The state of the self which is reflected back at us also gives us insight into the parts of ourselves that we have not yet transformed and healed. These aspects of the self are projected to us through those conflicts with others and the world we interact with.

Proceeding to the conclusion, the final aspect of this thesis will be a general note, which will give examples of how William Blake, as the visionary poet and artist he is, interacts with the New Age today—even after his death.

My hopes for this paper are that my research will contribute to the existing literature of Blake to potentially challenge the way in which Blake is read. Although it has been speculated that Blake's work can be seen as ahead of his time, my piece is meant to add to this understanding in which the different perceptions often expressed in a multitude of his pieces can be directly compared to works from beyond his lifetime, not in terms of artistry, but in changing the way human beings perceive their engagement with reality. My thesis is also meant to argue

that because Blake's writings and works of art cover and overlap with a variety of topics – religion, mysticism, New Age etc., he cannot truly be categorized as one *type* of visionary, but instead, an artist whose ideas about spirituality, imagination and the mind intersect with various ideologies that cannot be constrained to a single label.

-BLAKE AND RELIGION-

“Thus men forget that All deities reside in the human breast” (William Blake E. 37)

“Being spiritual has nothing to do with what you believe and everything to do with your state of consciousness.” (Eckhart Tolle NE 18)

Blake’s relationship with religion of any kind is unique in the sense that he seems to draw on a multitude of religious sources. In his piece “All Religions are One”, which is the opening poem in Erdman’s chronologically arranged edition of *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*, the readers realize that Blake’s standpoint on religion is a peculiar one. Blake writes in ‘The Argument’ section that, “The Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nations different reception of the Poetic Genius which is everywhere call’d the Spirit of Prophecy” (E. 1). This line expresses that though religions such as Christianity, enforce that there is only *one* true religion, Blake sees truth in all which is more reminiscent of Omnism (the belief that there is truth in all religions). He points out that living in different parts of the world changes the individuals or nation's perception. And what is most interesting is that Blake does not point this out to claim one nation's perception superior to another, but argues that despite these differences in reception, they all come from the same one source. This poem is crucial to recognizing that despite Blake’s use of biblical references of Christianity throughout many of his pieces, Blake is not a traditionally Christian poet.

Despite 1) the visionary having a highly Christian background, 2) often writing and creating pieces that pertain to Christian ideologies and, 3) as P. Berger in his work *William Blake Poet and Mystic* writes, “[having] knowledge of the Bible was far more exact than that of an ordinary educated Englishman” (Berger 27), it is evident that Blake was critical of the institution

of the Church. The disdain he felt towards the Church's rigid views can be recognized in many of his works that are indicated by his reference to the Church as an institution and also the way he interprets his selected biblical quotations. Albert Roe who writes the chapter "Blake's Symbolism" in *Sparks of Fire: Blake in a New Age* states,

Most poets in search of a readily comprehensible symbolism have employed a traditional mythology which, because of its historical or religious character, is generally known. Thus Dante and Milton drew their images principally from Christian and classical sources. Blake, however, did not choose to use an established mythology (...) The age of neo-classicism had reduced much classical imagery to conceits and trivialities; the dogma of religious sects, he was convinced, had misconstrued much of the material provided by the Bible. Classical mythology he consequently rejected almost completely. From the Bible he drew continually. In most cases however, his use of Biblical sources is not conventional, but based upon a richly symbolical interpretation of his own...(Roe 67).

This quotation expresses that Blake uses religious tradition and classical myths in a completely unconventional way that differs from other writers and artists. He would not only interpret the bible in his own way, but also use the quotations to speak against those narrow views the established Church would enforce. Blake would use his imagination and creativity to denounce the strict beliefs of the Church while allowing for his own interpretations of the bible without the narrow viewpoint of having to be a part of organized religion. An example of Blake's criticism of the Church can be found within a plethora of his pieces, but for now, I will draw on only a couple. In *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, "secret tears; beneath the sun, and children bought with money. / That shiver in religious caves beneath the burning fires" (E. 46). Blake comments

on the power of the Church and its controlling nature and speaks about Christian collusion with slavery. These unfair conditions that the slaves must face demonstrate how the power of the Church being wielded in an unruly way causes suffering for those we most consider innocent—children. The line, “That shiver beneath the religious caves beneath the burning fires” gives this feeling of darkness and cold. The caves keep the children in the dark and being *beneath* the fire gives us the impression they are away from light and warmth. The Church itself confines these children that are not being cared for, but instead are bought. It is interesting to note that Blake mentions the children being *beneath* a form of light in both quotations regarding light giving the readers this imagery of being even more so taken and removed from nature, and thus God’s light.

Another indication of the poet's criticism of the established church is in *The Marriage*. The readers are almost immediately shown the opposition between the angel figure and the devil figure. The angel, it is evident enough, represents those aspects that the Church preaches, specifically to blindly follow instruction, when in one of the sections called ‘A Memorable Fancy’, the devil figure corrects the angel in saying “I tell you, no virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments: Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse: not from rules” (E. 43) As the reader can gather from the story, the angel follows instructions and rules, believing that humanity should do the same just as it is taught by the Church, but the devil figure reminds the angel, that Jesus the son of God himself would often act on impulse, meaning he did not just follow instruction blindly. Therefore, how can the angel figure preach such things if Jesus himself, being all virtue, went against those very things the Church enforces? Blake continuously through his work questions, not Christianity, but the institutionalized Church at the time.

From a young age, Blake seemed to veer away from the traditional aspects of Christianity applying alternative beliefs into the scope of his Christian background. And later in his life he began listening to many conversations about Swedenborg and the New Jerusalem Church, which no doubt influenced his curiosity about spiritualism beyond the established church as “it was not until after he had read and mediated upon Swedenborg that he [Blake] began to see visions like Swedenborg’s own” (Berger 54), meaning, not that Blake did not have any visions up until this point of learning about Swedenborg, but had visions influenced by him at this point. However, later on he and his wife, Catherine, rejected the New Church because the rituals and ceremonies that began being put into place created a sense of institutionalized faith that Blake loathed (Weir 92). Despite Blake being against the idea of established religion, he found Christianity to hold many truths and beliefs that he agreed with. Blake frequently mentions ideas of the self that reflect Jesus’ teachings. Frye states, “...self-development leads us into a higher state of integration with a larger imaginative unit which is ultimately God. Hence the paradox that one gains his life by losing it, which Jesus taught. The selfish or egocentric are incapable of *developing* themselves; that comes from expansion outward, not withdrawal inward” (Frye 63). This passage demonstrates that the individual will achieve a greater sense of self-development when they expand their sense of self to the world outside of themselves rather than have a ‘selfish’ perspective of coming from a place within themselves *only*. Roe mentions how Blake seems to believe in the divinity within humanity, stating “All of Blake’s philosophy stems from his acceptance of the statement in Genesis that God created man in His own image. There is, then, in every man the spark of the divine and the capacity to become one with God. But as man is the image of God, so is God the transcendent image of man” (Roe 68). This can be interpreted as, yes, we can seek God inwardly because the Source is present within us; however, if God is in

every human being, that means that it is necessary for humankind to see God *around* us as well. Frye is stating that when we integrate ourselves with that which is larger than our own lives, we, in a sense, lose the notion of the singular self by gaining an awareness *beyond* ourselves by incorporating the greater whole in who we are.

In *The Marriage*, Blake continues to reference biblical passages, specifically with the detailed comparison of Swedenborg to Jesus. Blake in his work states, “And lo! Swedenborg is the Angel sitting at the tomb; his writings are the linen clothes folded up” (E. pg 34) which can be compared to Jesus and his resurrection when he folded his burial cloth after he resurrected and the tomb was left empty (*New International Version*, John 20:7). Adding this small but significant detail points towards Blake being quite familiar with the bible and using the story of the resurrection of Jesus in John to criticize Swedenborg as one of the passive religious angels and to link Swedenborg's writings to Jesus' resurrection. By including this imagery of clothes being folded demonstrates that Blake understood that what Swedenborg would leave behind are his writings which the cloth symbolizes. Although Blake felt Swedenborg “...has not written one new truth: (...) [only] old falsehoods” (E. 43), Blake demonstrates his knowledge of the bible through criticizing Swedenborg in an (at times) respectable manner.

Though, indeed, it is plain that Blake often references the bible in many of his works, it is speculated that he also brings in beliefs and ideologies that are comparable to other religions, including Buddhism.

Before diving deeper into the comparison of Blake and Buddhist ideologies, Mark Lussier in *Romantic Dharma* notifies his readers that “Oriental scholarship has established the dharma of the Buddha as centuries older than Christianity, which raised ‘the disturbing suspicion that Buddhism could have influenced Christianity’” (Masuzama, qtd. In Lussier xviii), meaning

that there is speculation that Buddhism and Christianity are related. However, it is still bewildering that within Blake's pieces that reference Christian beliefs, that Buddhist ideas are also prevalent since Lussier's text indicates that "Buddhism, for even the most educated, well-read, and well-traveled Europeans, remained a somewhat dissonant presence within the sacred literature of Hinduism" (Batchelor qtd. in Lussier 2). He goes on to say that, "Other historical conditions rendered it difficult to gain a summative knowledge of Buddhism, difficulties deeply embedded in the complex geopolitical and cultural history of India and adjacent nations..." (8). This means there was no way for Blake to draw from Buddhism as it was not seen as separate from Hinduism at this time. So it is curious that Blake's work still very much lines up with Buddhist practices. Much of which he expresses about religion seems to be ahead of his time since there is no known way that Blake was able to receive Buddhist teachings separated from Hinduism.

Blake proclaims in "All Religions are One" that "As all men are alike (tho' infinitely various) So all Religions & as all similars have one source" (E. 2). Blake's argument that all religions come from the natural workings of the same source can be compared to what the Buddhist Tibetan leader known as the fourteenth Dalai Lama states in *The Art of Happiness*. "For myself, I found that Buddhism is best. But that does not mean Buddhism is best for everyone (...) If I believed that Buddhism were best for everyone, that would be foolish, because different people have different mental dispositions" (Cutler 295). This quotation highlights how Buddhism tends to be more open to ideas of other religions and individuals having their own way of looking at the world.

The reasoning behind extrapolating what Lussier says in regards to Buddhism in relation to Blake's work is to begin putting in place the understanding that the concepts of Buddhism are

also, at times, characteristics of New Age thought. Helen Lee states in her article that New Age thought “encompasses an eclectic array of traditions and practices which include, for example, various forms of meditation, yoga, Native American practices, Buddhism...” (91) meaning, it is quite conceivable that aspects of Blake’s works that have by past scholars been compared to Buddhism, should too then, be able to be compared to that of New Age spiritualism.

Simply having an open mind to other religions, however, is no grounds for making the argument that Blake’s writings can be interpreted as housing Buddhist beliefs. Lussier begins to go into greater detail while making a comparison between Blake and Buddhist doctrine. He references Blake’s *Milton* and the idea of ‘self-annihilation’ that is a central theme in Buddhist belief and practice. Lussier writes of how alike Blake’s wording is to that of Buddhist beliefs. “Blake’s elaboration of the process termed “self-annihilation” intersects the same process asserted by Buddha in precisely the same terms: ‘The extinction of self is salvation; the annihilation of self is the condition of enlightenment’” (Lussier *RD* 117). Both Buddha, and Blake within his work *Milton*, encompass this idea that in order to reach a higher state, one must first let go of this individualistic mindset of ‘I’. Lussier continues, “...realization of the illusionary status of an essential self that leads to a reconfiguration of its fundamental expression ignites an inner revolution in consciousness as the prefatory act for the alteration of the cosmos, bringing in its wake a new view of organism and environment that is now associated with the ecological state of human subjectivity” (120) which is the understanding that people cannot just exist as ‘I’. They are in complete contact with the world when performing any action or nonaction which leads to the change in consciousness and perception. Blake seemed to understand and believe this– that the individual thing or being will always influence something else. There is no ‘I’ in Buddhism as ‘the self’ is constantly immersed in everything else.

One of the most prevalent concepts that Blake makes apparent to his readers that can be compared to the Buddhist doctrine is the rejection of duality. Though Lussier directly mentions Blake's *Milton*, he states, "Blake [and] Buddha (...) while reflecting important differences in spiritual orientations (Christian, nontheistic, and atheistic, respectively), nonetheless insist beyond the barrier of their differences on non-duality as a solution to the illusions of selfhood and the omnipresence of suffering..." (117) which is not only a theme in *Milton* but is also observable in *The Marriage*.

In the section, "The voice of the Devil" Blake – or the devil – states, "All Bibles or sacred codes. Have been the causes of the following Errors. 1) That Man has two real existing principles Viz: a Body & a Soul." and goes onto say "...the following Contraries to these are True 1) Man has no Body distinct from his Soul" (E. pg 34) which is this idea that duality does not exist. Our sense of self relies heavily on this separation of the mind and body. The body is often seen as primitive and physical while the mind is seen as our reason and intelligence, or the mental. Blake argues these two are intertwined much like the Buddhist thought that Lussier calls his readers' attention to. The unification of the mind and body – parallel to the marriage of the ideas of heaven and hell – will lead to an ultimate understanding of duality as an illusion. The title *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* itself suggests the demolition of duality and is reminiscent of the Yin and Yang symbol often used in Buddhist tradition that depicts the wholeness of both evil and good. As Northrop Frye writes in *Fearful Symmetry* in "Chapter 3: Beyond Good and Evil", "Religion insists that however mixed good and bad may be in this world, there are eternally only heaven and hell, with a great gulf between" (Frye 61). But as the readers of Blake have no doubt taken note of, Blake challenges these religious ideas by infusing

the concept of both heaven and hell needing one another and existing at the same time. They fuse to create this enlightened state that will further be discussed and analyzed in parts I & II.

As mentioned earlier, at the time of Blake, Buddhism was indistinguishable from Hinduism to the Europeans, which means that Blake could also have similarities to Hindu doctrine. In *Brahma in the West*, Weir makes connections between Blake's work and Hinduism and it is also mentioned how Blake may have been familiar with Hindu beliefs. "The antiquity of the Hindu scriptures challenged the authority of the Bible by raising the possibility that the Hebrew faith might have been derived from an earlier Indic source" (Weir 87). Weir goes on to say that "British expositors of Hinduism often presented it in such a way as to make it accord with certain strands of Christian theology that Blake would have found immediately meaningful" (87). Within Weir's text, the *mundane egg* is mentioned (also known as the *cosmic egg* or *world egg*), a Hindu myth tradition of Brahma which is akin to Blake's mythology specifically in *Milton* on plate 33 [36] as labeled in Erdman's edition. Weir points out that not only is there the imagery of the 'mundane egg', but "...both the Blakean and the Hindu eggs involve a myth that construes creation as a type of on-going preservation that is, at the same time, a transformation of divine forces into natural forms" (65). In *Milton* it is written that the "Four Universes round the Mundane Egg remain Chaotic" (E. 112) and in the *Dictionary of Hinduism* by W.J. Johnson, the term Mundane Egg is given an alternative name *Brahmanda*, meaning Brahma's egg. It is defined as "A name given to the universe ... said to be born from eternal, unmanifest first cause inside a golden egg... After a year, Brahma divides the egg (himself) in two through the power of thought, and thus creates the physical and psycho-physical worlds. The egg, however, remains unhatched, and so ...the universe is conceived as a closed, egg- or ball-shaped entity. It is divided into twenty-one zones, comprised ...of six heavens, the earth, the seven lower regions of

Patala [seven treasure- and wonder-filled subterranean worlds which... are ruled over by nagas and other supernatural beings (235)] and seven hellish regions” (Johnson 66).

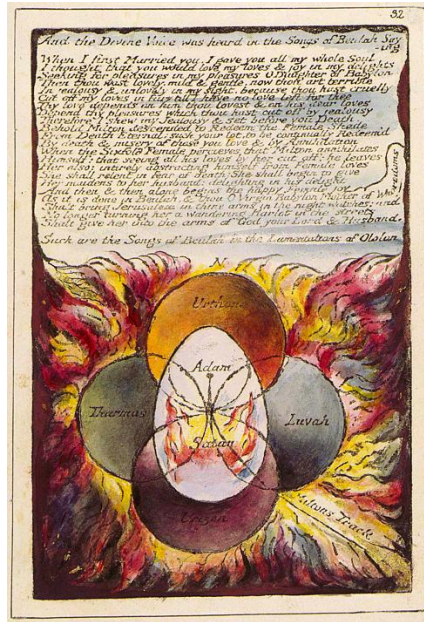


Fig. 1. Milton, object 34 (Bentley 32, Erdman 33 [36], Keynes 32)

What is especially interesting is that just as the definition states, that the egg is divided into two, so too does Blake divide the egg for his mythology as one can see from plate 33 [36] where the egg has two sections, Adam in the upper section of the egg and Satan amongst the flames in the lower section. Blake’s mythology continues to bear some similarities to Hindu mythology with the serpent figure, Orc. As mentioned from the definition from Johnson, the egg also has a connection to ‘nagas’ which, according to the Hindu dictionary, refers to serpent-like creatures (212-13).

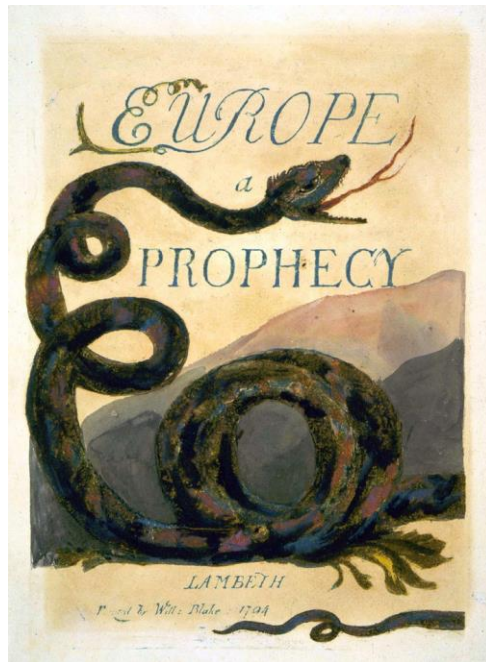


Fig.2. EUROPE a PROPHECY, Object 2 (Bentley 2, Erdman ii, Keynes ii)

In *EUROPE a Prophecy* the serpent Orc is depicted on a few pages. This coiled up serpent on the title page mimics the Kundalini serpent, meaning ‘the coiled one’ and representing an individual’s *Sakti* (or power), stored in the root/base chakra coiled up at the base of the spine. This serpent as well as knowledge of the chakra points that are associated with Hinduism are also concepts that are used in New Age thought. Often the depictions of this serpent are shown along the human spine moving through each of the chakras to reach an enlightened state. This idea of the coiled serpent rising through each chakra is similar to Blake’s depiction of Orc. On plate 13 of *EUROPE* we see Orc coiling upward. Each coil gets thicker and at the top, rays of light come from his head. This can be compared to artistic depictions of the Kundalini serpent where the head is often illuminated as it has moved through the chakras located in the body. Coincidentally, there are also seven coils on Blake’s serpent just as there are seven main chakras along the human spine and skull in Hindu tradition. In *EUROPE* Blake writes of “The ever-varying spiral ascents to the

heavens of heavens” (E. pg 63 line 13) which gives the imagery of elevation, much like a state of enlightenment.

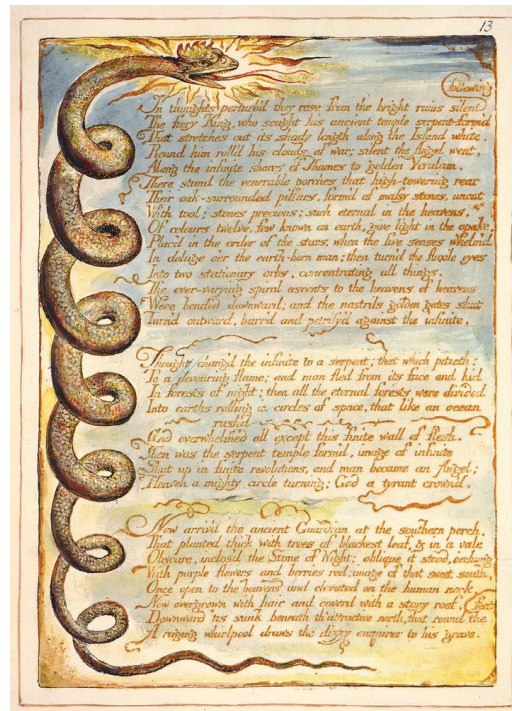


Fig.3. (Europe a Prophecy, object 13)

These similarities continue in *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion*. In Blake's illuminated work he depicts Oothoon and Bromion trapped and chained in a cave along with Theotormon. Though the cave can be seen as a skull, it also shows similarities to the center of the brain. The trio themselves could be interpreted as brain matter with their coiled up limbs that are a pinkish-grey colour, and there seems to be (in an abstract way) identifiable the parts of the brain. The shape of the cave and the scenery that appears behind it, is quite telling and can be taken farther than a scientific or factual interpretation of the human brain. In Christopher Hill's *Nuclear Evolution: Discovery of the Rainbow Body*, which discusses New Age concepts that derive from Yogi tradition, the term the 'Cave of Brahma' is mentioned and can be directly compared to this specific illuminated page. The 'Cave of Brahma' is the third ventricle in the brain and is also part of the cerebrospinal fluid circulation. Hill states, "The Cave of

Brahma’...[is] referred to in the Sanskrit texts as the seat of resonance with the one ocean of cosmic vibrations” (Hill 595), which is interesting wording since Blake illustrates an ocean behind the brain shaped cave, but looking at the image not as if it has many layers, rather artwork on a 2D paper, the ocean is *within* the brain.

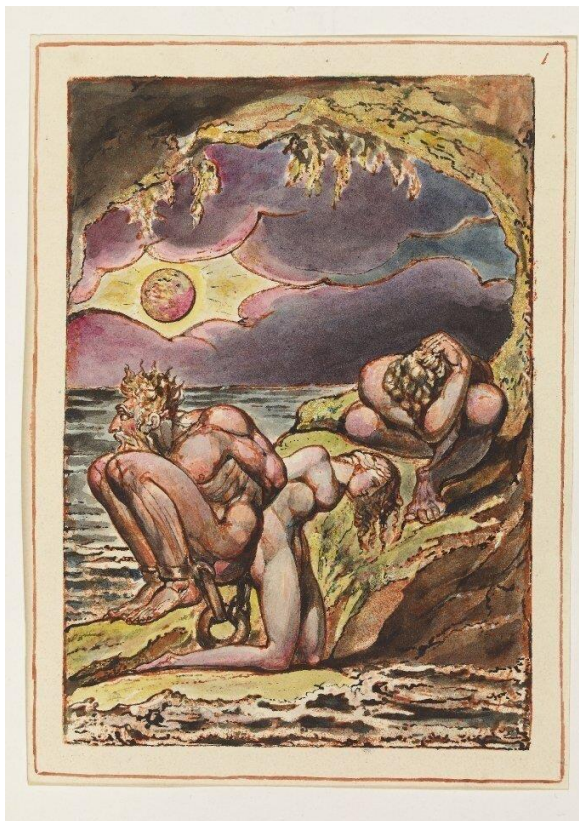


Fig.4. (Visions of the Daughters of Albion, object 1)

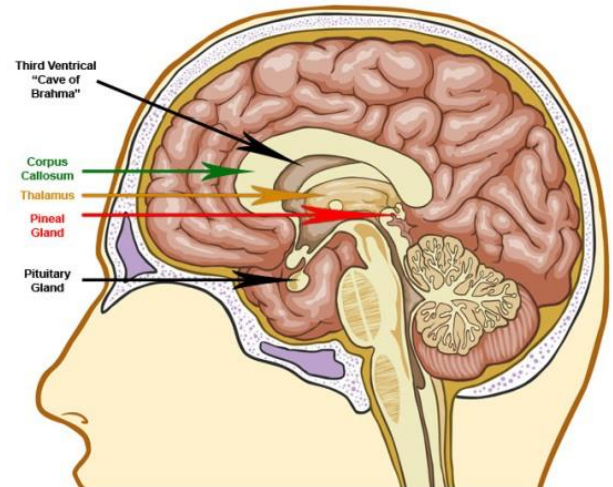


Fig.5. Dupuy, Pam. “Meditation and the Physical Transformation of The Brain: Part 1.” *iAwake Technologies*, 14 Feb. 2013, www.iawaketechnologies.com/meditation-and-the-physical-transformation-of-the-brain-part-1/.

This red blot looks to be the center of the brain (see figures for comparison). Hill mentions that “Consciousness, space and light are identical. The only thing that makes them not identical is consciousness when it limits itself from being the whole universe. It traps itself inside our skin and says, ‘Yes, I have got some light coming through my eyes down the optic nerve to the occipitals to the thalamus and that is the sun!’” (323). Hill’s quotation can also be compared

to what Oothoon says “They told me that I had five senses to inclose me up. And they inclose’d my infinite brain into a narrow circle. And sunk my heart into the Abyss, a red round globe hot burning. Till all from life I was obliterated and erased” (E. 47 lines 30-34), also depicting the idea of the senses being limiting. Blake does not only depict the cerebral fluid as an ocean but also depicts the thalamus as a sun, just like Hill does. This comparison between these parts of the brain to those of nature seems to be present in the Yogi tradition based on the interpretation of Hill.

The argument here can go further as we begin to question why Blake chose to depict the trio in a brain-shaped cave. The ‘Cave of Brahma’ is intrinsically connected to the kundalini. Hill writes, “For the kundalini or energy of consciousness to keep on rising higher and higher, a complete purification of the self-sense through the direct perception of cosmic intelligence is required” (75). He goes onto say “...the ‘inner light of consciousness’ ...is the same thing as kundalini, except the kundalini is its active state of flowing into the cave of Brahman” (75) and this inner light of consciousness is how “we perceive the external world inside the mind” (121). The idea of seeing inside the mind through this ‘inner light’ can be directly correlated to the title of Blake’s piece: *VISIONS of the Daughters* with its opening line, “The Eye sees more than the Heart knows” (E. pg 45). ‘The Eye’ in this statement can be referring to the inner eye or third eye when taking into account the center of the brain being in direct correlation to the third-eye chakra known for insight, and also called ‘the spiritual eye’ (Johnson) in Hindu tradition. The characters however, seem to be in mental turmoil, not reaching a state of enlightenment. Notice how the three characters are looking anywhere *but* the center of the brain. They coil in on themselves in dismay and seem to be trapped within their own thoughts. The characters here do not even interact. They all appear as singular and refuse to acknowledge the scenery around

them. Therefore, they are not *truly* seeing. Their faces are covered, looking downwards or elsewhere. The trio are trapped in this mind-shaped cave, but do not look towards the centre of the brain –the thalamus. This shows that the three are entrapped in a mental state that keeps them from connecting to their inner consciousness. They sit, feeling trapped in the cave, not coming in contact with ‘vision’ or ‘the inner light’. Though it can be looked at from a strictly scientific point of view with the depiction of the brain, Hill also mentions that “the image[s] we hold in the ‘Cave of Brahma’... controls our imagination” (988) which is something that Blake out of all people would be interested in since in many of his pieces he makes direct comparisons of imagination to vision itself.

This idea of depicting a brain with not only its scientific parts, but also through the use of certain Yogi terms, demonstrates that Blake indeed could have taken inspiration from not just one Eastern religion, but others. His use of Eastern religions as well as Christianity argues that he can be considered as having grasped what we now call New Age concepts. Blake does something similar to what the New Age movement does – he takes ideas from various religions and puts them together.

-BLAKE AS A MYSTIC-

With an inclination towards themes of spiritualism through prophecies and visions, Blake is often rumoured to have been a Mystic. This (sometimes said to be dubious) claim depicts him as a man who works towards transcending basic knowledge and looks to achieve a higher consciousness in order to access mysteries of the universe. Alexander Gilchrist in *Life of William Blake*, writes that William Blake was "...the most spiritual of artists, a mystic poet and painter" (Gilchrist 5). Tolle, on the other hand, is not considered a mystic and is often turned to as strictly a spiritual teacher, author and speaker. However, the purpose of this chapter is not to demonstrate that Blake can or cannot fit under the label as mystic, but to set the stage for proposing him as an individual who is more inclined to an alternative belief system. The connection between Blake and Mysticism can be tied to his vivid imagination and frequent visions that he mentions— even throughout his letters to his good friend, Thomas Butts. However, as we will soon discover, there is some reasoning as to why Blake cannot fully be considered a traditional mystic and therefore may be able to fit under an alternative belief system more effortlessly.

Butts to Blake was more than an acquaintance – he was a fan of the poet's work and often his top buyer who had "...found himself the possessor of so many of Blake's drawings that he had no space left for more of them" (Berger 29). Blake wrote to Butts quite frequently mentioning events and visions that others may have found too esoteric to comprehend. Blake writes to Butts and openly tells Butts of his 'Spiritual friends' and within other letters mentions 'the spiritual World' (733) and even seems to confide in Butts to share his more spiritual troubles stating, "...but I should not have troubled You with this account of my spiritual state unless it had been necessary in explaining the actual cause of my uneasiness into which you are so kind as to Enquire for I never obtrude such things on others unless questiond & then I never disguise the

truth— But if we fear to do the dictates of our Angels & tremble at the Tasks set before us. If we refuse to do Spiritual Acts. because of Natural Fears or Natural Desires! Who can describe the dismal torments of such a state!-- I too well remember the Threats I heard!” (724). This statement can be a bit alarming that Blake found himself to be tormented by voices and visions beyond the physical realm we know of. Kathleen Raine in her book *Blake and The New Age* writes “In 1927 Blake was still relatively unknown poet with a reputation for obscurity and eccentricity, shadowed by rumours of madness. The rumours are unfounded— Blake’s only mental abnormality was an altogether exceptional degree of sanity. But so strange did Blake’s ideas seem to the nineteenth century, so incomprehensible his unknown mythology, that the imputation is not surprising” (Raine 1). Despite at times being misunderstood to even those beyond Blake’s lifetime, scholars who have observed Blake’s writing and letters are puzzled at the thought of him being considered anything less than sound of mind. Berger writes, “His [Blake’s] visions were real, and external to himself: they came to him as the gods of old came among men, or as the angels and the saints appeared to the early Christians. It was not any hallucination of fever: his pulse beat quite normally, and still he saw them” (Berger 49), depicting Blake more as a mystic than an individual who lets their mind consume their sanity. G.E Bentley Jr states that Blake “From his earliest childhood (...) saw visions. (...) When he was eight or ten, one day as he was walking (...) he saw, ‘a tree filled with angels, bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars’...” (Bentley 19) which shows that this process of having visions was not just something that appeared later on in Blake’s adulthood, but was prevalent even at a young age. To Butts, Blake would write short poetry and on occasion express his troubling thoughts of being different from those in his circles. “I hear a voice you cannot hear that says I must not stay/ I see a hand you cannot see that beckons me away” (E. pg 725).

While he has heard voices and has seen angels, it is also known that his inspiration stemmed from these mystical visions. “After the death of his brother, Robert, he saw his spirit flying away and ‘clapping its hands for joy’. And it was Robert's spirit also which showed him—this time in a dream— the process by which his books were to be engraved and printed. And once he saw a ghost, a human figure covered with metallic scales, standing at the top of a staircase, and fled terrified from the house...” (Berger 49-50). This idea of having dreams and visions as well as paying them heed and interpreting them as messages is often related to mysticism pointing towards Blake being a possible mystic. Not only was he spiritual in ways that went *beyond* religious tradition, but Blake allowed what he saw and heard (that others did not) to guide his life’s work. Berger writes, “They [mystics] at any rate believed in the reality of their visions; and it is well for us that they did so, because such faith has been the great moving force of all mystics, in the domain of art as well as in that of action” (59).

Although Berger believes Blake to have been a mystic, Laura Quinney questions what the word mystic may entail and if Blake can be labeled as such. Quinney, the author of *William Blake on Self and Soul*, writes a chapter on Blake’s mysticism in the text *William Blake in Context* and by the end of the short chapter, it is clear that she sees little connection between Blake and mysticism. Quinney argues, “Vision in the mystical tradition involves a suspension of the will and (in theory at least) a suspension of individuality. Yet vision as adduced in Blake’s writing has a more deliberate nature. It requires an *exercise* of the imagination, and in this way, resembles a work of art. Like a work of art, too, it arises out of an individual imagination exerting its distinctive and unique view” (Quinney 306). Quinney argues that Blake is *too* individualistic to be a part of the mystical tradition because he values individuality and intentional imagination (which is often so unique) that that too exudes autonomy and therefore

suggests free will. Quinney seems to be puzzled by Blake's goal to purposefully apply imagination to his everyday life while the traditional mystic is more willing to have visions cast upon them. It should also be noted, as previously mentioned in the chapter "Blake and Religion", that Blake, though he believes in the power of the individual, also uses the word self-annihilation as Lussier points out, meaning that although Quinney states, "Even in Blake's Heaven, the individual will not disappear into the universal Oversoul, or live in passive harmony with God (...) the individual continues to enjoy their own visions" (306), Blake does see unification with God as essential— even if it is not a passive thing. Like Buddhist belief, Blake sees no separation between the self and God and therefore there cannot be a passive harmony since we are humans with God within us; we must act on these inspirations and visions, which is exactly what Blake did. In *The Marriage* it is clear that Blake criticizes passiveness and reason that is the depiction of the angel, but it is also clear that he believes passivity and action must meld together to create the divine human experience— just as heaven and hell intertwine. Quinney compares Blake to traditional mystics through his terminology and how mystics saw their visions versus how Blake did. "Blake's visions w[ere] quite different from the mystics', who sought vision by means of severe self-discipline, including chastity and meditation. They regarded visions merely as 'preliminary challenges and graces' en route to a higher communication" (305) which I disagree with since Blake also used his visions for higher communication with his readers and supporters. His visions, such as the dream of his deceased brother could be considered a spiritual vision that brought onto him the process of engraving his works which no doubt allowed for a sense of higher communication. Blake's art and words are highly vivid and descriptive which continues to baffle his audience by the way he communicates in alternative and unique ways. Quinney continues saying, "For Blake, vision springs from the creative imagination unique to each

person, fueled by the same energy that fuels love and desire ...His relation to his own visions is also different from those of St Theresa, Boehme, and Swedenborg in relation to theirs” (305).

Though perhaps it is true that Blake cannot strictly fit into this tight definition of what a religious or traditional mystic is when being compared to precise individuals over history, I think it should be noted that his imagination or visions that were perhaps fueled by love and desire cannot truly be explained as something unique to Blake. Other mystics such as St. Theresa no doubt used love and desire to fuel their good actions. What Quinney seems to be arguing here is that Blake was heavily involved in human emotion, not detached from it much like traditional mystics. Blake vindicates human emotion, not relinquishing those ‘sinful desires’ and impulses that make us human, but instead celebrates many of them, which is unlike the mystical individuals Quinney references. Although Blake sees humanity as the culmination of both divine and flawed – both God and human – he does not attempt to remove the intrinsic characteristics of humanity from the individual even when considering divinity. Quinney points this out to dismiss Blake as a mystic, but this consideration could also be interpreted as Blake simply understanding the nature of being human with all our errors, mistakes and biases. Blake often demonstrates leaning away from being rigid and having a hard-set truth, promoting a more fluid mindset – just as an individual is to be fluid in changing their perception and opinion. Furthermore, comparing Blake to any label is not easily achievable. He does not fit the label of Christian or Buddhist or Hindu nor does he completely fit the label as a New Age thinker. It is challenging to place Blake under one particular label and it should be no surprise that he does not fit completely under the label of the traditional mystic either. Being the imaginative and distinct poet and artist he was, trying to describe him as one thing that is so specifically labeled as to have practiced like St Theresa or Swedenborg would be undermining the unique individuality that sets him apart. It is clear that he

had visions and dreams and insightful prophecies that determined the way in which he created and interacted with the world. Quinney herself notes that “Blake liked to startle the bourgeoisie – common-sensical peers– with shows of visionary enthusiasm, but he never suggested that he failed to distinguish the physical from the imaginative reality. Even when, in the company of his friend John Varley, he sketched portraits of famous dead men he said he saw before him, he showed no signs of succumbing to visionary psychosis...” (305-6). Quinney sees this as vivid imagination, more than ‘traditional’ visions. Quinney ends her chapter with, “For Blake, this kind of being belongs immediately to the human imagination, in and of itself, therefore he is not a mystic” (307). Quinney seems to dismiss Blake as a mystic because of the humanness behind his work and visions as well as his insistence on humanity exercising their imagination.

However, Blake as a mystic should not be so easily dismissed just because of these qualities and in no way should his visions strictly be considered mere imagination. Perhaps he is not a mystic in the sense that Quinney understands mysticism; however, like other scholars consider when studying Blake, the possibility of Blake being a mystic should not strictly be based around the definition of a *traditional* mystic.

The *New Oxford American Dictionary* defines mystic as “a person who seeks by contemplation and self-surrender to obtain unity with or absorption into the Deity or the absolute, or who believes in the spiritual apprehension of truths beyond the intellect” and though Blake does not in any capacity think of himself as being absorbed with God so that his identity no longer exists, he does see himself and other human beings as being divine since there is God in all of us. Blake does not believe in this separation which is evident when he states, “Why stand we here trembling around, calling on God for help, and not ourselves in whom God dwells?” (E. 184). To believe to be completely absorbed by the Almighty would mean there is a

duality or difference between our human forms and the divine within us. But as Blake has made plain throughout his pieces and writings, we cannot be separated from the infinite. We exist with the infinite and therefore cannot be completely absorbed. To Blake there is already a unity with God that we intrinsically have – it is up to us, however, to tap into that connection. And Blake seems to do this with his use of creativity and imagination. So yes, if this is what a traditional mystic is, Blake does not seem to completely fit with this label. However, the definition of mystic also mentions believing in spiritual truths beyond the intellect which can easily be said about Blake. In a multitude of his pieces, Blake refers to the Spiritual realm as reality and very much real. Oftentimes he writes about seeing with ‘The Eye’ rather than getting lost in the murmuring of the mind such as at the end of *Auguries* “We are led to Believe a Lie/ When we see not Thro the Eye...But does a Human Form Display /To those who Dwell in Realms of day” (Blake lines 125-6 & 131-2). Blake’s *vision* goes beyond what is in plain sight and that which is invisible and cannot be explained. He tells his readers not to merely see through the eyes of the human form, but to look through the *spiritual eye*.

However, Berger, like Quinney, sees Blake’s connection to mysticism as something different from the traditional mystic many are used to. “...they [mystics] present certain very striking features which at once differentiate them entirely from the religious visions recognized by the Church, and which clearly distinguish Blake’s mysticism from the mysticism familiar to us in the lives of the saints” (Berger 59). Here, Berger is connecting mysticism to a more religious ideology. This is a fair statement as mystics are often individuals who use, not only prayer, but also practice meditation and mantras – which is not something we know Blake to have done. In Berger’s text, they too attempt to explain the wording of mystic and mysticism– Berger determines it as something where love is directed into a deity or source (whether it be

Christ or angels etc.) (68) On first interpretation, it could be thought of as being in prayer for hours a day speaking to God, which would perhaps determine Blake as not a mystic after all. He does not pour himself into being devoted solely to God in the way we often think of a mystic doing. But absolutely, Blake pours his passions and love into his works which house his (if you want to call it) doctrine. In *The Laocoon*, around the sculpture it is engraved that “Prayer is the Study of Art/ Praise is the Practise of Art... Without Unceasing Practise nothing can be done/ Practise is Art If you leave off you are Lost” (E. 274) which demonstrates that Blake seems to believe and practice prayer, but in a unique way— through his art, and just like prayer, he believes it should be worked at and practiced with the line, “...if you leave off you are lost”. Blake sees art and the continuous dedication to art as a form of prayer, so much so that if the individual should lose their artistry through neglect of said talent then they will become lost which echoes religious doctrine of sticking with prayer and other religious practices and rituals. Berger interestingly calls Blake’s practices ‘*his* mysticism’, demonstrating this understanding that Blake’s mystical qualities cannot be housed alongside those of traditional mystics.

Like others who have studied Blake, Berger notes the poet to be more spiritual rather than religious in his writings and practices. Berger states, “For a man whose sole standard of truth is his own imagination, argument has no force, and any affirmation is possible. The truth is what he sees, or, rather, what he imagines (...) The sole and indisputable proof of any truth, according to him, is our direct spiritual perception of it, a kind of intuitive and instinctive vision” (86). Berger makes a distinction of what kind of mystic Blake would be should he be considered one. Though Blake does not fit into the distinct category of a traditional, that being, religious mystic, his visions, dreams and understanding of reality as well as his devotion through his art to the Divine, points towards him as a mystic of his own type, which is nothing less than we would expect from

Blake. It could be said that, yes, perhaps Blake wasn't the traditional mystic after all, but the mere connection scholars have tried to make with Blake and the practice of mysticism shows that Blake's works were not just religious, but very spiritual in nature and so was his life. I would imagine if Blake fit perfectly under the definition of a mystic, he would not stand out as much as he does. As Frye states, "...if mysticism means primarily the vision of the prodigious and unthinkable metamorphosis of the human mind (...) then Blake is one of the mystics" (Frye 416). Blake's life and work can fall under a plethora of categories, including mysticism. And it is this connection to mysticism that we will now segue into spirituality, specifically Blake as a New Age thinker.

-PART I: THE MIND CREATES REALITY-

“If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite” (William Blake E. 39)

“Remember that your perception of the world is a reflection of your state of consciousness” (Eckhart Tolle PON 198)

I

As mentioned in the introduction, one of the main and most prominent themes of New Age self-help books is learning that the mind can create reality – that what we think or how we choose to think will ultimately shape the reality we see around us. It requires learning to master the mind, specifically the thoughts we have conditioned ourselves to believe we cannot control. Many Mind-Body-Spirit books repeatedly mention this central theme and that bringing awareness to this area is the first step to unlocking the potential of ourselves that self-help books urge us towards.

In the section, ‘we stop ourselves from being free’, Lee makes it a point to highlight the autonomy and responsibility of the individual stating that, “...the individual person [is] accountable for his/her circumstances” (Lee 96). This responsibility that Mind-Body-Spirit books emphasize is that we stop ourselves from being free by the lack of questioning of our mindsets as well as how we perceive the obstacles we face. In the works of both Blake and Tolle, perception is crucial to establishing this self-responsibility that Lee focuses on. It is common to blame other aspects of our lives– that of which we are not in control, or cannot hope to control. Lee gives the example of government (97), and quotes the Mexican author Don Miguel Ruiz who wrote *The Four Agreements* alongside a handful of other books for the New Thought

movement on“...freedom to be who we really are. Who stops us from being free? We blame the government, we blame the weather, we blame our parents, we blame religion, we blame God. Who really stops us from being free? We stop ourselves” (Lee quoting Ruiz 97). By ‘government’, it can be speculated that Lee and Ruiz mean the system of government that, as many are aware of, is functional but has major flaws in terms of equity, dealing with injustices, etc.

What can be noted here, is that Lee seems to suggest that self-help books advocating for New Age Thought seem to dismiss the *real* challenges facing our world. She says the self-help books start at the perspective of “an individual notion of responsibility in [their] allusion to ‘we’” (97). Although this can certainly be seen as the case, personal-growth books and the New Age thought movement in general often call the reader's attention to the fact that the perception of how we are viewing the world plays an important and crucial factor to the reality we experience.

Blake writes about the idea of mind creating reality in his short poem “London” found within *Songs of Experience* that follows this common New Age concept. This poem concentrates on not just human suffering, but how and why the people of London suffer. The speaker almost immediately brings the reader's attention to the cries of men, children and the faces of suffering, anguish and pain at large: “And mark in every face I meet / Marks of weakness, marks of woe. / In every cry of every Man, In every Infants cry of fear” (E. 26-7, lines 3-6). This depiction of human suffering includes all different types of people from infants to grown men, giving the imagery that it is not just a certain demographic that suffers, but perhaps all of London. These lines quoted concentrate on the faces of the human beings that have “marks of weakness, marks of woe”, along with the sound of suffering with the word “cry” mentioned not just for humankind in general but also for infants. It is their faces that bring attention to this pain and fear

that all of London faces. Despite this evident pain on the faces of the people of London, the speaker sheds no light as of yet on what is causing this anguish.

Later on in the poem, Chimney-sweepers, soldiers and Harlots are all mentioned giving the readers the imagery of an array of different demographics of people again, but this time more specific to occupation, not just age. Throughout the poem, the people of London do not appear to be hurt in any physical way, yet continue to suffer in pain. Blake continues, with “In every voice: in every ban, / The mind-forg’d manacles I hear” (E. 27, lines 7-8), telling the readers that the mind is causing much of this suffering the speaker sees and hears. This line in particular alerts the readers to the fact that the mind, which is viewed as something mental or strictly “internal”, can have a real and physical effect on the realities every individual experiences. Blake with this single poetic line points towards the mind being able to create the chains that restrict us, and not only that but it is us who are restricting ourselves which can be compared to the self-responsibility Lee emphasizes, as well as the idea of the human mind getting in our own way.

Tolle says something similar, noting “...this **incessant mental noise** (...) creates a false mind-made self that casts a shadow of fear and suffering” (Tolle, *PON*, 15). In Blake’s poem he too refers to the mind plaguing humanity as noisy: “the Chimney-sweepers **cry**...And the hapless Soldiers **sigh**...But most thro' midnight streets **I hear** / How the youthful Harlots **curse**” (27). Though this is an external element of the poem and is one that is within the physical reality of the city, not in the mind, it is the tormenting of the mind that is causing this incessant noise, hinting towards the fact that the people of London’s minds (their internal worlds) are creating this anguish that is being expelled into their reality (external world). The pain is taking on a real form through sound and sight. Despite the quotation pulled from Tolle referring to negative thoughts as “shadows”, which seems less physical (as you cannot touch or feel a shadow) the

wording Tolle uses still suggests these mind-made thoughts are very much infiltrating our lives—casting a dark form on our reality, thus inhibiting the individual's ability to see the full picture. In our minds these shadows loom over us, striking fear and stress that shapes the way we view our lives. If we are constantly seeing shadows, which the majority of humans are, whether shadows of the past or shadows of the future, Tolle similarly to Blake expresses that these mind-made thoughts do affect our reality, even if they are false. Both authors see how powerful the mind can be to the point where thoughts alone can give us a sense of entrapment that leads us to believe in these 'shadows' and thus live in fear or misery. Both Tolle and Blake focus on the mind's influence and its ability to control. Tolle says “mind-made” while Blake says “mind-forg'd” which indicates both authors find truth in the New Age concept of reality being shaped by the mind's power— specifically the thoughts we have.

Despite the main concept being that of the mind creating this suffering in the people of London, Blake does highlight a threatening hierarchy with the line “Runs in blood down Palace walls”(line 12). Blake mentions how “Every blackning Church appalls”(line 10) and he does (like many of his pieces) blame the Church for the suffering he sees. However this mention of the failings of the Church also points towards the religious institutions as negatively affecting mindset. Tolle in *A New Earth* explains this to a certain degree when he mentions religion as directly relating to the workings of the mind. He writes, “Many ‘religious’ people are stuck at that level [where] they equate truth with thought, and as they are completely identified with thought (their mind), they claim to be in sole possession of the truth ...They don't realize the limitations of thought. Unless you believe (think) exactly as they do, you are wrong in their eyes...” (Tolle *NE* 17) which demonstrates this narrow view that Blake often warns his readers about when it comes to religious institutions. Tolle goes on to say, “The new spirituality, the

transformation of consciousness, is arriving to a large extent outside of the structures of the existing institutionalized religions. There were always pockets of spirituality even in mind-dominated religions, although the institutionalized hierarchies felt threatened by them and often tried to suppress them” (Tolle, *NE*, 17-8) which Blake also brings attention to in not only “London” but also *The Everlasting Gospel* when it is written that, “To be good only, is to be / A God or else a Pharisee ... Wherefore hast thou writ these laws / And created Hell’s dark jaws?” (E. 521 lines 27-8 & 31-2). The Church itself, full of instruction and tradition for the sake of tradition (much like the Pharisees), is what is being criticized. Blake writes that through the creation of these strict laws, the Church itself created the threshold of hell which ironically they try to avoid. This suppression that both Tolle and Blake refer to is based on narrow-mindedness and instruction of institutionalized religion that causes suffering in humanity and therefore creates a type of “hell”. Tolle connects spirituality to consciousness and being able to achieve a higher consciousness that (as he states) many established churches were and would be opposed to while Blake is calling attention to the fact that yes, the mind can ultimately create a suffering that is physical and ‘marks’ every human's face, but the hierarchy of his time being in charge can lead the way to humanity’s mental chains. The oppressive governance of the Church at the time affected the minds of the collective and thus can cause this mass mental suffering.

In the last stanza Blake also calls attention to a marriage that was doomed from the beginning because of this mind-based suffering when he writes, “But most thro' midnight streets I hear/ How the youthful Harlots curse/ Blasts the new-born Infants tear/ And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse” (lines 13-16). He chooses the word ‘blights’ which gives the readers the impression of disease or some infestation that would destroy the marriage. Although it can be suggested that the youthful Harlot giving birth to the new-born infant would ruin a

marriage, Blake's emphasis on Harlot's curse and new-born infant's tear demonstrates that this suffering, the mind-forg'd manacles, creates this domino effect of how one's suffering affects others. The mention of the "Harlots curse" can also be referred back to what Tolle says about 'incessant mental noise' as a 'curse' can be taken as something both internal and external. It can be thought of in the mind or something shouted. The Harlots curse **Blasts** the new-born Infants tear which **blights with plagues** the marriage hearse. The emotions that are expressed from the suffering each type of individual is feeling manifests into physical and real destruction in the relationships of humanity and thus creates this mass human suffering. With the lines mentioned, Blake depicts a chain reaction of how each individual or life that looks to be existing on its own actually creates this suffering and pain for the whole. The illusion of difference between the suffering that is internal or external fades away, becoming indistinguishable at times, hinting towards the New Age concept that the mind has just as much bearing on reality as the external factors do.

Raine also speaks briefly about "London" stating that Blake called experience "a 'deadly dream' into which mankind has fallen; an illusion of those who live not from the divine humanity within, but from the ego" (Raine 150). It is interesting that as Raine mentions Blake refers to it as a deadly dream— which indicates the association to the mind but also the lack of truth behind it. The people of London are in this state that exists from within their mind. Again, just as the speaker of the poem says "mind-forg'd manacles" where the mind creates something physical, Blake too, regarding this state as a "deadly dream" expresses the mind having physical effects. Dreams are usually in the mind and we know they cannot harm us, but stating experience is a *deadly* dream means it indeed affects our lives and even though it is illusionary suffering, it still has very real negative effects on our lives. In that quotation, Raine also directly mentions

ego and this can be directly compared to Tolle who reminds his readers that “Most humans are still in the grip of the ego mode of consciousness: identified with their mind and run by their mind. If they do not free themselves from their mind in time, they will be destroyed. They will experience increasing confusion, conflict, violence, illness, despair, madness” (Tolle *NE* 102). This quotation can be linked to how Blake sees humanity in “London”. The speaker, perhaps not Blake but a voice speaking from the perspective of Experience: in the deadly dream Raine describes, sees conflict, violence with the mention of blood, despair with the mention of cries, and illness with the mention of plagues— all of which are first caused by narrow and limited perspectives of the Church. Blake is not blaming the mind completely nor the Church completely, but he does demonstrate to his readers that the Church deters humanity’s progression by hindering their perception as man is already (in times of suffering) closing himself up, “...till he sees all things thro’ narrow chinks of his cavern” (E. 39). The use of the word ‘his’ here is important to note because again it focuses on the New Age perspective that Lee covers relating to self-responsibility which Blake also seems to highlight, saying it isn’t just chinks of *the* cavern or *a* cavern, but ones that are specifically owned by the individual and therefore suggests this governance the person has over their own life and their own perception.

This New Age concept makes up much of the foundational work of Tolle’s texts that alerts the reader to the reality that we can achieve a consciousness that goes beyond the limitations of the mind. Tolle also speaks to how “your perception of the world is a reflection of your state of consciousness. You are not separate from it, and there is no objective world out there. Every moment, your consciousness creates the world that you inhabit.” (Tolle *PON* 198). Tolle points out that there is no ‘one way’ to look at the world. No one sees the same world around them as it is completely based on that person's consciousness.

Blake also seems to call attention to the idea of there being multiple ways to view the world as well in *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise*. Plate 13 is labeled ‘Fear & Hope are— Vision’, which tells the reader that this active work of perception – or believing in something or allowing negativity to infiltrate our lives – will allow us to see in a certain way. Blake communicates to his readers that the emotion of fear, a feeling that fills us with dread, can create vision and that hope, the feeling of expectation for something to happen also creates a certain vision. Both hope and fear, despite being emotions that often contrast one another, create a certain perception. So here Blake seems to not only mention what can happen with a positive mindset, but also a negative one. In Melanie Bandy’s *Mind Forg’d Manacles Evil in the Poetry of Blake and Shelley*, she quotes Frye in regards to what Blake means by ‘vision’:

“By vision [Blake] meant the view of the world, not as it might be, still less as it ordinarily appears, but as it really is when it is seen by human consciousness as its greatest height and intensity. It is the artist’s business to attain this heightened or transfigured view of things... it is only the direct, metaphorical, and mythical perceptions, which work without compromise with unimaginative notions of reality, that can clearly render the forms of such a world” (Frye qtd. in Bandy 17).

Blake, as clear from this quotation, sees that artists – or those who are frequently practicing creativity and imagination – view the world in an illuminating way. The idea of having the world appearing to “human consciousness as its greatest height and intensity”, as suggested by this quotation, can be compared to enlightenment or awakening that is often associated with challenging one's own perspective.

Blake promotes the creative power of the imagination and how it can also directly affect the way we create realities. In Blake’s *Jerusalem*, “In Heaven & Earth, as in your own Bosom

you bear your Heaven / And Earth & all you behold; thro' it appears Without, it is Within, / In your imagination, of which this World of Mortality is but a Shadow” (E. 225). This is an illuminating quotation because it suggests that if your heart is heaven and earth is your reality, though in your reality there may appear to be things that are invisible and therefore non-existent, with the use of your imagination, the limited world we know, is not nearly what it is. If we see only that which can be seen with our own mortal eyes, we are not seeing reality as it is. It is only a shadow of the bigger picture when imagination is brought forth. For Blake, emotion is not the only factor that can alter the state of mind and thus reality, but also the use of creativity and imagination.

Though Blake takes on the concept that what we think we can create, Tolle speaks of a stillness that forms an enlightened state once the individual stops fighting their thoughts and identifying with their mind. He writes, “Enlightenment means rising above thought, not falling back to a level below thought...you use it (your mind) mostly for practical purposes, but you are free of the involuntary internal dialogue, and there is inner stillness” (Tolle *PON* 24). So in this way, Tolle does not say the common New Age understanding of shifting our thinking; he is saying to silence it. Tolle continues to say, “Thought alone, when it is no longer connected to a much vaster realm of consciousness, quickly becomes barren, insane, destructive” (24), which is similar to Blake who also warns against negativity. Tolle’s idea of what constitutes the ego can be compared to Blake’s Urizen character, specifically in *The Book of Urizen*. Urizen seems to be a character that is entrapped by the mind and does not see with the ‘vision’ Blake often brings forth as crucial. “And Urizen ... /His prolific delight **obscured more & more** / ...Incessant beat; **forging chains new & new/ ...The eternal mind bound began to roll /... In chains of the mind locked up,** / Like fetters of ice shrinking together/ Disorganiz’d, rent from Eternity” (E.

75). The parts of the quotation chosen express how Urizen, through limitations of the mind, creates a sort of destruction and with the quotation “rent from Eternity” emphasizes the idea of being torn away from the boundlessness of the universe through a narrow mindset.

Co-creation

To refer back to Lee, the common notion that human beings are co-creators of their own reality is something that Tolle and other New Age spiritual authors gravitate towards. It is stated in Lee’s article that mind-body-spirit books provide a sense of personal autonomy and choice, by being able to control the external world around you. Lee mentions how true liberation is freedom from the mind and that the individual must be an active participant in a practice that works to make possible an inner sense of being as something beyond the mind (Lee 96), which means there is a sense of creating that starts with the mind but transcends it.

Lee explains that New Age writing expresses that co-creation happens when we shape our own reality by putting forth how we *wish* to create it. She quotes Samaya Roman from her book *Living with Joy: Keys to Personal Power and Spiritual Transformation*, who says, “Every person is free. You may have created an arena of work, and based your life upon certain accomplishments and forms. The path of joy is learning not to be caught by the details of those forms. It is learning not to be trapped by your own creations, but to be uplifted by them. If you have created a job, a relationship, or anything that is not bringing you joy, look inward and ask why you feel you must be in a relationship with anything or anyone that does not bring you joy” (Roman qtd. in Lee 97). Roman’s words suggest this ability to create one’s own life and thus are co-creating whether the individual sees themselves as free or not. There is again this emphasis on the mental where we can *feel* trapped in what we have created for ourselves through the power of

our thoughts, but do not have to remain there as we have conjured up elements of our lives without perhaps fully being aware of it.

In Melanie Bandy's work titled *Mind Forg'd Manacles Evil the Poetry of Blake and Shelley*, she states "They [Blake and Shelley] believed that the perceiver is not simply a passive recording instrument but to a large extent **creates**, through the quality of his perception, the nature of the outerworld" (Bandy 12). An example of this in Blake's work is "The Clod & the Pebble", which is also within *Songs of Experience*, with its comparison of a stone to a piece of clay contrasting the changeability and flexibility of the clod compared to the pebble. The pebble in this short but telling piece is rigid whose perception "...builds a Hell in Heavens despite" (E. 19 line 12) while the clod which has a different perception "...builds a Heaven in Hells despair" (line 4). This tells the readers that for Blake, unlike what the dominating religious institution of his time believed, Heaven and Hell are very much a mindset that depends on the shifting of perception itself. The state of mind of both the clod and the pebble can be chosen by humanity and alters their human experience. Like the pebble, an individual can choose to be rigid in beliefs, choosing to see love as selfish and finding fault with the human experience, believing that "love seeketh only Self to please" (line 9) or, can choose to be more like the clod, who, despite the experiences chooses to emphasize the positive or good experiences we have throughout our lives opting to believe "love seeketh not Itself to please" (line 1). The Clod of Clay, though "Trodden with the cattles feet" (line 6) is still able to change their perception and give themselves an experience more in tune with that of Heaven despite the Hell it has faced. The rigidity of the pebble can be interpreted as speaking to the doctrine of institutionalized religion—unmoving in beliefs and opinion. On the other hand, the clod of clay can be equated to Adam which "...the Lord God formed (...) from the clay of the earth" (Genesis 2:7) meaning

humans are intrinsically supposed to be this moldable substance as God intended. Humanity is meant to be more like the clod of clay. The Clod of Clay has created for itself this heavenly experience because of the shifting in perspective which can point towards the concept of co-creation. Despite the clod of clay seemingly not having a choice in the life it faces, it still experiences heaven because of how it chooses to view the world around it, thus *creating* heaven. It is apparent that both the pebble and the clod have experienced heaven and hell, and there is no doubt that Blake does not attempt to separate these two types of experiences, as both are inevitable when it comes to the lives we live. But what is most interesting is that both have been shaped by the environment and yet have two completely different perspectives on life. The clod is stepped on by cattle while the pebble is thrust about by the brook. Blake does not deny that each individual has their own unique experience, but instead he chooses to highlight these differences and still make the point to let his readers know that despite these differences in their experiences, both have felt heaven and felt hell but the clod concentrates on the heaven—pleasures and joys in life – while the pebble remembers the hell— the struggle and suffering no matter the positive experiences. In this way, both the pebble and the clod are co-creating their realities with their perception that has come with previous experiences.

This idea of co-creation gives us a sense of being divine but in no way diminishes our humanness or sense of mortality. Co-creating in New Age thought often brings attention to the perspective of being creators of our world while being empathetic and understanding of our own human nature. Tolle also touches on this but gives it his own interpretation and terms of Human vs. Being. Tolle believes (like Blake) that there are two parts of ourselves that cannot be separated.

“You are a human being. What does that mean? Mastery of life is not a question of control, but of finding a balance between human and Being. Mother, father, husband, wife, young, old, the roles you play, the function you fulfill whatever you do— all that belongs to the human dimension. It has its place and needs to be honoured, but in itself it is not enough for a fulfilled, truly meaningful relationship of life. Human alone is never enough, no matter how hard you try or what you achieve. Then there is Being. It is found in the still, alert presence of Consciousness itself, the Consciousness that you are. Human is form. Being is formless. Human and Being are not separate but interwoven” (Tolle *NE* 104-5).

Tolle uses the word human for our more mortal forms— we have labels, titles and roles. He refers to our divine nature (the part of us that helps in co-creation) as Being— the part of our essence that allows us to become enlightened, see the interconnection of all things and exist at a more elevated state of mind. Tolle is not saying that one is bad and the other good, nor is he saying that one is more prominent or natural than the other. Through this quotation he explains that the two exist at the same time for the human experience and both are necessary. However, Tolle here does not seem to accept the humanness that comes with the ‘human’ aspect that he speaks about. Although he mentions that we cannot separate ourselves from our labels nor the roles we play in our own and other people's lives, he thinks of the flaws that naturally make us human like fear, jealousy, anger as being a part of something else— being the ego. This perception is incredibly different to Blake’s. While Blake seems to celebrate flawed aspects that are intrinsic to every individual which is evident in *The Marriage* when the devil figure states, “Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and **Repulsion**, Reason and **Energy**, Love and **Hate**, are necessary to Human existence” (E. 34). This demonstrates that these aspects of humanity which can also be

strong emotions like repulsion and hate, are natural to human kind and can breed progress for humanity as a whole. Though Blake does not see *all* human flaws as behaviours worth celebrating, he, unlike Tolle, values righteous anger and desire when he states “And the just man **rages** in the wilds / Where lions roam” (33) as well as on the following page, “Those who **restrain desire**, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained” (34).

Tolle believes what is natural is passiveness that comes with acceptance or lack of resistance rather than the active choice of altering one's perception. Tolle mentions the importance of creation and believes in its power just like Blake; however, Tolle states that “All true artists, weather they know it or not, **create from a place of no-mind, from inner stillness**” (Tolle *PON* 24), while Blake, as expressed in *The Marriage* sees energy and movement as positive to human nature and believes they should be encouraged. “Energy is Eternal Delight” (E. 34). Blake makes it plain that he disagrees with the Christian doctrine of denying the body (which is related to energy) stating that it is believed that “...these contraries [Energy & Reason] spring from what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy”, and goes onto say, “Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy” (34). It is clear that Blake sees energy as an element of being human, and in this case would replace the ‘human’ aspect of Tolle’s analogy mentioned earlier. Blake believes that it should be encouraged and not a passiveness that Tolle seems to gravitate towards, even with creation. Blake seems to value energy and passion and humanlike behaviors that lead us to creating and experiencing. Tolle follows a more Buddhist or even Christian ideal that highlights removing energy and existing in a state of tranquility that comes with stillness, while Blake appreciates energy and movement and chaos to bring about creation that is needed for this human experience. But what should be noted

is that both believe there are these two parts to the human experience (one more human, the other more divine) that cannot be separated. Both writers have this sense of nonduality with each side needing to co-exist with the other, not apart or treated as separate. Blake strongly suggests that Energy and Reason work together and must intertwine for the ultimate human experience while Tolle refuses to separate the human from being. One for each author is considered good while the other is thought to be more flawed or instinctual. But both advocate for this sense that it takes both unsegregated for wholeness and completeness.

Surprisingly, Lee argues that dualism is often highlighted in mind-body-spirit books. She states, “The reference to ‘light and dark within you’ (...) explicitly builds on individualistic focus. Yet also the use of a light-dark dualism per se is notable. This works in a similar way to other forms of Westernized logic– for example, science–religion, male–female, and free will–determinism, where the former is construed as separate from and superior to the latter. (...) If the reader associates with the former part of the dualism and dissociates from the latter part, the text may work ... to promote the message advocated by the author” (Lee, 97). Although Lee’s words are accurate in saying that self-help books of the New Age often touch on dualistic views, this does not mean that they promote dualism. Dualism often refers to a separation between two things that are considered contrasting or in binary opposition to one another. In this case, Lee refers to the concepts of good and evil, or light and dark. This is where I disagree with Lee because although dualism is often addressed, New Age Spirituality sees promise in acknowledging both the “light and dark” aspects of the self and there is often this acceptance that both are needed and work together– not two contrasting principles. As expressed in Tolle’s texts, specifically in the subsection “The Higher Good Beyond Good and Bad”, what is considered good and bad– positive and negative – does not exist. “Good has no opposite” (Tolle *PON* 179),

meaning that even in circumstances that are considered negative there is something to learn or there is good that comes out of it in some sense. This demonstrates that Tolle speaks against dualism that Lee mentions despite being a New Age author. Tolle continues by mentioning that “Failure lies concealed in every success, and success in every failure” (184), telling the readers that both the bad and good, failure and success are intertwined and play off one another much like what Blake touches on in some of his works as he, like Tolle, also speaks for a non-dualistic approach.

Blake in *The Marriage* challenges the concept of Good & Evil being separated when he challenges the very concept of institutionalized Christianity’s understanding of what evil and good really are. Blake explains how the Church and Swedenborg seem to see a divide between what appears to be two contraries: “That Energy. calld Evil. is alone from the Body. & that Reason. Called God is alone from the Soul” (34), demonstrating a dualistic or binary interpretation of what is deemed good and evil. Evil is connected with energy and the body. Therefore anything that comes from the body (such as lust) is evil and thus sin meaning that this idea of evil that houses that which is considered sinful like the body, is therefore distinct from that considered good. “The voice of the Devil” proposes that there is this common ideology especially found within institutionalized religions where the good and bad can be easily distinguished from one another, when it is stated that “All Bibles or sacred codes have been the cause of the following Errors. / 1. That Man has two real existing principles Viz: a Body & a Soul. 2. That Energy calld Evil is alone from the Body & that Reason / calld Good is alone from the Soul” (34). But Blake (or the voice of the Devil) argues against this saying, “Energy is the only life and is form the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy” (34). Whereas to the Church, the soul derives from reason and this reason is considered “good”.

By the Church's standards, our minds are connected to our souls because reason comes from the soul.

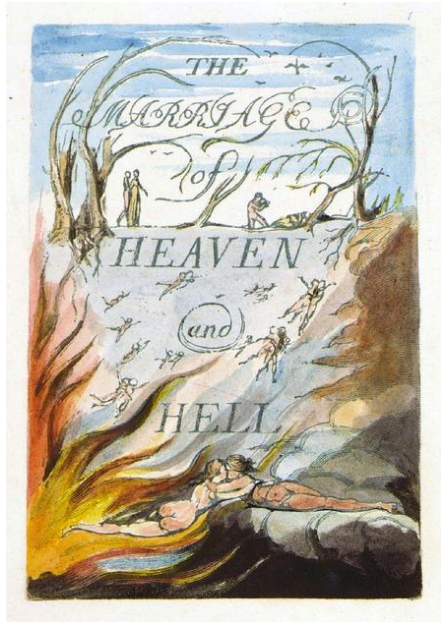


Fig.6. (THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL, Object 1 (Bentley 1, Erdman 1, Keynes 1))

This ability to reason makes us good and thus, if we cannot reason, we are more likely to commit to the body and gravitate towards evil or more primal instincts. However, Blake wishes to debunk this common conception saying, “Man has no Body distinct from his Soul” (E. pg 34) which tells the readers with the word choice of “distinct” that the body and soul, energy and reason, evil and good cannot be separated. Each cannot fit into a specific category as both are intrinsic to humankind. It is clear that Blake sees a lack of dualism unlike the Church and believes in this combination of both body and soul being unable to exist apart, which is similar to Tolle’s chapter of looking beyond the binary labels of good and bad. A strong indication of this advocacy for non-dualism that Blake demonstrates in his writing is the title page of *The Marriage*. On this title page, Blake seems to make an argument for using both Energy & Reason to achieve this greater knowing and greater state of mind.



Blake depicts two figures embracing and kissing each other, one emerging from fire, the other from smoke. In this case, the hell which represents the body and energy can be seen as symbolized by the figure emerging from flames, while heaven which is the soul and reason, is the figure on the cloud (E. pg 34). What is interesting to note is that with the embracing of the soul and body there is a suggestion Blake makes towards ascension with this union. The figures in the back all embrace their counterpart and swim upward to the paradise above. This new land that houses these embracing figures is at the top of the page, showing this elevated state one can only reach with this union. Each figure can be seen as half of a whole – Blake is pointing out that neither Reason nor Energy should exist primarily on their own and that this union between the two is what creates this elevated state. Each of the figures in the background swim/float upward, still embracing one another and the ones at the top still remain close to one another and look at peace. There does not appear to be any violence or anguish, but tranquility that comes with this embrace of both from a non-dualistic perspective. The found paradise is teeming with life through the depiction of trees and soaring birds that came from this embrace of both the smoke and fire, reason and energy that emerged from this union. Although the paradise the couples

swim towards is symbolic of human existence, this is achieved by the awareness and acceptance of being able to merge these two contraries. This paradise can be determined as this new state of mind, or new perception as *The Marriage* is about the emergence of a new way of thinking: one that is not based on binary ideals of good and evil, but a merging of those things which we consider in opposition. Blake notably states, “Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence” (34) The figure representing hell has their back turned toward the viewer while their counterpart has their front facing the viewer as if Blake is saying these figures are but two sides of the same coin. Their embrace shows both sides of the human body and thus points to this symbolism of two halves creating a whole, or two parts of the human creating the ultimate human existence. What this title page and union shows is that Blake is challenging the concept of having a dualistic perspective of human existence and is challenging his readers to look beyond what they have learned from narrow minds such as the established church. This understanding that must be achieved through the intertwining of Reason and Energy, Good and Evil must be achieved through the altering of perception.

Aside from the title page of *The Marriage*, these contraries are further highlighted on the illuminated pages labeled 20 and 21. On page 20, the readers see an image at the bottom of the page with a red/orange background and a sea serpent moving through water. His head points towards the left and is looking upward. This imagery can be contrasted with the human who glows; this image sits on the top of the page with a blue background. Unlike the serpent, the man sits on land, waiting. His head too is pointed upward but his profile is angled to the right. Both these images are opposites and contrast one another. This contrast speaks to the human experience. Although the serpent itself isn't human, as mentioned in the chapter regarding

religion, the Kundalini snake is related to an individual's power (Johnson 182). Although they are complete opposites—bottom of the page vs the top, red vs blue, sea vs land, left vs right, movement vs stagnation—both beings look upward as if to point towards their desire for achieving this elevated state of mind and again merging the two rather than seeing them as completely separate and in opposition to one another.

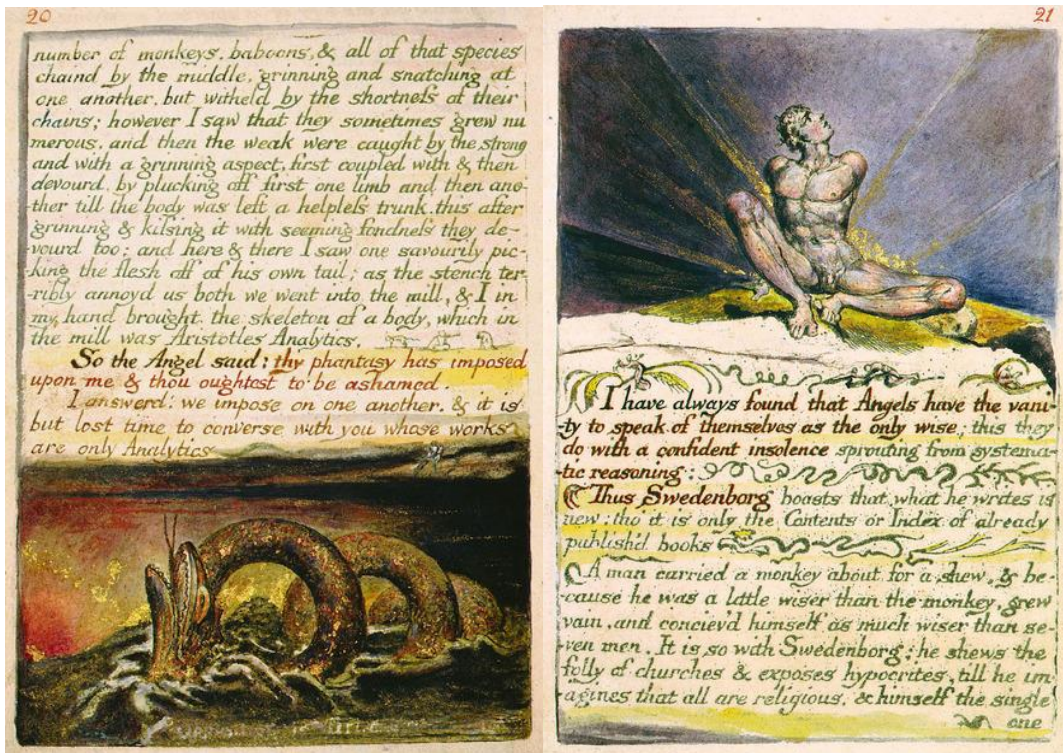


Fig.7. Object 20 (Bentley 20, Erdman 20, Keynes 20) Fig.8. Object 21 (Bentley 21, Erdman 21, Keynes 21)

Blake's Imagination vs. Manifestation

To manifest something into existence in terms of New Age thought means to mentally envision a goal or desire coming true which will assist in making it reality. The process of intentionally and actively creating this thought is based on the 'law of attraction' in which these purposeful positive thoughts will ultimately reap rewards and bring forth the individual's desires; thus, the individual manifests their desires. Deepak Chopra, the author of *The Seven Spiritual Laws of*

Success, breaks the idea of achieving one's desires into two crucial elements: attention and intention. He states, "Attention energizes, and intention transforms. Whatever you put your attention on will grow stronger in your life. Whatever you take your attention away from will wither, disintegrate, and disappear" (70). He goes on to say that "Intention lays the groundwork for the effortless spontaneous, frictionless flow of pure potentiality seeking expression from the unmanifest to the manifest" (72). This points towards this notion of the power of the mind, specifically the use of imagination to be a key tool in creating these more desirable realities since giving thoughts attention as well as putting in efforts to be intentional with such thoughts are intrinsic parts of imagination and creativity. In New Age practice, to perform manifestation successfully, there are online affirmations that one can listen to in hopes of reprogramming the mind as well as certain meditations that can allow the individual to enter that state of consciousness to begin visualizing the goals they wish to manifest into reality. This type of intentional visualization can also be compared to the urgency Blake gives to imagination and its power.

It is stated in Blake's *Jerusalem*, "I know of no other Christianity and of no other Gospel than the liberty both of body & mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination. Imagination the real & eternal World of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow" (E. 231). Breaking down this quotation, the first mention of bringing "liberty to both of body & mind" through, not only imagination, but practice, which is clear with the use of "exercise" as well as referring to it as a "Divine Art". Readers are alerted to the fact that this piece points towards imagination being a skill that can physically affect reality with the mention of liberty of body and mind. Much like how Tolle expresses this self-healing, it is pointed out here that imagination can have similar capabilities. The next line, claiming that imagination is real, suggests that what can be imagined

is reality and thus echoes this idea of manifestation, since manifesting is using the very real power of visualization to alter the physical world. The quotation continues by stating that imagination broadens the perception of the whole of the world – what we see from reality is only a mere shadow, something obscure, hidden or not completely seen, when imagination is not in the picture. The word “vegetable” is also interesting here because it has to do with the limited perception of seeing nature as merely material and something separated from the spiritual.

Later on in the same passage, ‘Mental Gifts’ are mentioned, which can be interpreted as creativity or imagination. It is stated that it should be remembered that “He who despises & mocks a Mental Gift in another, calling it pride & selfishness & sin; mocks Jesus the giver of every Mental Gift, which always appear to the ignorance-loving Hypocrite, as Sins” (232) which sounds a lot like desire being visualized as it is described as something from the mind that is intentionally imagined. The institution of the Church, for example, sees mental gifts as something only for the self that can be mistaken as sin because it is considered self-serving which in relation to manifestation, is something the practice can be used for. These mental gifts seem to have some correlation to Jerusalem – or Blake’s heaven, since later on it is stated, to add to his argument of mental gifts being something that should be celebrated that “every Christian ... [should] engage himself openly & publicly before all the World in some Mental pursuit for the Building up of Jerusalem” (232). This points towards the idea that a mental pursuit of some kind, that is the use of the mental gifts mentioned previously, will ultimately assist in creating a form of heaven. It is being argued there that with practice of visualization of one's desires, is for the greater good of “building up” a heaven, meaning creating a bridge between the physical and spiritual. There is a suggestion of ascension here that is brought on by exercising the power of imagination. Thus, the careful practice of using imagination for Blake can create something

heavenly. It should be noted also that it is not stated that the mental pursuit will build a 'mentality' of Jerusalem. The use of the word Jerusalem, the name of a real place on this physical plane can be said to point towards building a heaven that is *real* – to manifest something into *this* reality. Blake often creates names and myths, so it is peculiar, the use of the word 'Jerusalem' to symbolize a type of heaven. This heavenly state does not appear something of the mind only, as there is no pointing towards it being a 'mental state', which tells the readers that the mental gifts humankind are naturally given can manifest the building blocks to a heaven that can be real and noticeable in the physical world. Here, Blake points towards a sort of heaven on earth that starts with the power of the imagination creating something real. Again, Blake encourages his readers to engage with the power of their mind to form their reality.

-PART II: INNER TRANSFORMATION-

“Without Contraries is no progression.” (William Blake E. 34)

“Attention is the key to transformation- and full attention also implies acceptance.” (Eckhart Tolle, PON, 120)

II

We now come to the comparison of Blake and Tolle in terms of inner transformation. As mentioned in the introduction, Lee refers to another central theme in mind-body-spirit books, which is ‘Transformation and Liberation’. She explains how mind-body-spirit books of the New Age take on the idea that there is a true nature of being that must be realized and practiced in order to achieve the state of pure joy and liberation we have been desiring (Lee, 94-5). After the individual begins to understand that our mind or mentality can be responsible for holding us back in terms of giving us a sense of entrapment, the realization of how to go about freeing the self from the mind is what causes their inner transformative process to begin. Lee states, “The person is the focus of change in this discourse. It is the person that needs to disassociate from the mind, to ‘topple the mind’ in order to experience the true nature of being and achieve freedom. Moreover, it is a specific form of liberation that is... a person-based psychological or psychic liberation” (95). It is evident that this transformation is at a personal level. The individual must go within themselves to observe their own mind in order to achieve this personal liberation. Once you begin to shift, or at the very least, understand how the mind can alter your reality, you can begin putting the steps in place to create joy and inner tranquility within your life. The individual will begin putting into practice recognizing certain thought patterns that before would go

undetected and begin putting in place this new understanding of the power of the mind which will then lead to this inner transformation.

Suffering: is it necessary for inner transformation?

There is a common idea in many religions that suffering brings about a transformative state that leads to the betterment of our lives. Many times, suffering is seen as the only bridge that can lead us to the changed life we seek. Buddha was said to eat only one grain of rice a day and sleep on a bed of nails to gain enlightenment (or Inner transformation) through purposeful suffering. Jesus had to suffer and die for our sins in order to give us salvation and so he could return to the Kingdom of Heaven. In a multitude of religions, fasting is said to bring about suffering that will lead the individual closer to God and themselves. Although it is also done for health reasons, in religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, etc., fasting allows the individual to focus on prayer and becoming more in touch with their faith by denying the body.

Tolle addresses this and refers to it as ‘the way of the cross’, stating “ It means that the worst thing in your life, your cross, turns into the best thing that ever happened to you, by forcing you into surrender, into ‘death’...to become as God” (Tolle *PON* 225). Although Tolle makes it clear that suffering can create this inner transformation that will lead to this elevated state of being when he says “to become as God”, it isn’t the only way one can achieve this. He goes on to say that “Enlightenment through suffering— the way of the cross— means to be forced into the kingdom of heaven kicking and screaming. You finally surrender because you can’t stand the pain anymore, but the pain could go on for a long time until this happens. Enlightenment consciously chosen means to relinquish your attachment to past and future and to make the Now the main force of your life” (Tolle *PON* 226). What Tolle expresses here is that in

Christianity, at times suffering is something that can be forced onto an individual as the only option. So it is not so much a willingness to go through a transformation for the good of the self, but done so because it is the way we are *supposed* to find enlightenment. Tolle calls attention to the notion that in order to achieve this salvation one “will only awaken through further suffering, and enlightenment as a collective phenomenon will be predictably preceded by vast upheavals” (Tolle *PON* 225) which he argues is not the case.

As mentioned in Part 1, Lee calls attention to this self-responsibility and change in perception or consciousness as a choice. This also applies to the inner transformation and Lee mentions that “In the main body of the texts, the constructions of transformation and liberation are built on assumptions about human nature and responsibility as well as the relationship between the person, the social world, and the global environment. These constructions place the person at the centre as the one who is in control of, and responsible for, improving his/her own life’ (Lee 94). Though it will be discussed how the personal can effect and transform the global in Part 3, for now, we will be discussing the element of choice that Lee places into the conversation. This proposition of choice is not saying that those who suffer in the world are choosing this and if they change their way of thinking they will never suffer again. But what is being said is that we further our own suffering— often by resisting it and being unaccepting towards it despite it being inevitable to existence. When we concentrate on our own suffering and make the choice to further it by dwelling on it, or seeing it as only dark or negative, we increase our suffering. The main issue here that New Age books touch on is the resistance to suffering. Tolle states, “The Truth is that you need to say yes to suffering before you can transcend it” (Tolle *NE* 103) – that suffering must come with this state of acceptance. It has to be an active choice to allow it to pass rather than muscling through it or suffering simply for the

sake of reaching salvation. Tolle answers the question, “Is suffering really necessary?” “Yes and no” (Tolle SS 145). His explanation is that if we had not suffered from all that we did as human beings, we would not have the compassion or the depth that each of us has as an individual. (145) Tolle states, “Suffering cracks open the shell of ego, and then there comes a point when it has served its purpose. Suffering is necessary until you realize it is unnecessary” (145). Though it is true that suffering can bring about inner transformation that leads to a better life for the individual, the myth behind suffering being the only way to achieve this state is addressed by Tolle and other New Age authors.

William Blake also seems to have a similar perspective to Tolle. Blake looks to suffering as a means of transformation but, similarly to Tolle, seems to highlight conscious suffering or suffering that is accepted. There is this indication in some of Blake’s works that show the readers that the individual must choose to allow suffering to create radical transformation of the self. In *The Marriage*, as mentioned previously, the angel figure was transformed by the devil. But I think it is worth noting how the angel transformed. “When he [the devil figure] had so spoken: I beheld the Angel who **stretched out his arms embracing the flame of fire** & he was consumed and arose as Elijah” (E. pg 43). In this passage we can understand that the angel figure chose to be consumed by the flames, and after this acceptance of symbolic suffering, his form altered. Though his transformation was a very visible thing, from an angel to a devil (44), what transformed him was a new perception – a new way of seeing the world that granted him access to this transformation and thus he was able to embrace it and accept it. This is very similar to Tolle who mentions that saying yes to suffering will allow the individual to transcend it. Both Blake and Tolle see suffering as this process of transformation, but it is this choice or embrace of

the suffering that creates this inner-transformative power that leads to an elevated state of consciousness or being.

Blake through his illuminated pages and writings seems to use fire as a transformative element to depict this idea of transformation and rebirth. *The Marriage*'s title page also gives us insight into this. There is the combination of smoke and fire on the title page, but it should be noted that the couples who are emerging and going up to the surface, or new found paradise, are emerging from the flames. This indicates that fire to Blake is used as a transformative element. Though it is the intertwining of fire and smoke (energy and reason, evil and good, etc.) that creates this elevated state, it is the fire – the suffering – that the couples emerge from and begin to rise to this elevated paradise. It should also be noted that these couples swim/float to the land above of their own choice. They are the ones purposefully removing themselves from the flames of suffering and the ones bringing themselves to the surface by their swimming/floating. What is even more curious is that the figure in fire is also a symbolic representation of the body. As mentioned in the text, “Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy” (E. 34), which means that the figure the body is the one that expels the energy while reason is what emanates when energy is brought forth. What this tells the readers is that the body is what houses the energy and thus where suffering and inner transformation occur. Frye mentions that for Blake, “the transformation of the body into a spiritual substance is the Christian doctrine of bodily resurrection. Job puts this doctrine in the form of its essential paradox: ‘And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God’. There is no soul imprisoned within the body evaporating at death, but a living man armed with all the powers of his present body, infinitely expanded” (196) which demonstrates that this death-like state and resurrection that comes with inner transformation – as

in the removal of old belief systems for a new and heightened sense of awareness – is a process with the mortal body.

Tolle mentions this in his book as well, stating “Transformation is *through* the body, not away from it” (Tolle *PON* 114) which indicates for both Blake and Tolle that transformation must come from our physical forms. It is not something purely metaphysical or mental, but something that must be experienced and then overcome to attain a transcendent state. Tolle also brings up the good point of how Jesus demonstrates the importance of the body when it is stated “your whole body will be filled with light (...) Jesus never relinquished his body but remained one with it and ascended into ‘heaven’ with it” (115). It is indicated here that Jesus not only remained in his body during his ascension, but also was filled with light– in other words, energy, much like what Blake argues. The similarities continue as Blake also mentions Jesus’ resurrection and brings up the symbolism of fire as well. Referring again to *The Marriage*, “Jehovah of the Bible being no other than he, who dwells in flaming fire. Know that after Christ's death, he became Jehovah...” (E. 35) Blake calls attention to Jesus’ suffering allowing for his transcendence. The idea of “dwelling in flaming fire” also refers to the devil which further connects the idea of impulse and creative action with that of divinity. It should also be noted that Jehovah is a specific name for God which further points towards this fiery transformation as being the catalyst for an elevated state of being.

Furthermore, in the Apostles Creed it states, “[Jesus] **suffered** under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he **descended to hell**. The third day he rose again from the dead. **He ascended to heaven...**” (Apostles Creed). In the Apostles’ Creed, just like in the title page of *The Marriage*, there is this suffering that is associated with fire and this emergence from it that leads to a higher state of being. The figures on the title page can also be thought of as having

suffered within the fires of hell, only to embrace them and emerge to the paradise above. There are a plethora of religions that use fire as a symbol throughout art pieces and texts. Although there is the mention of fiery hell in the bible, fire is also considered at times the presence of God. In many depictions of Jesus and saints, their heads are lit by a small flame or a halo-like glow emanating from them. Going back to Hinduism, fire or *Agni* is also considered an important element and in Hindu tradition is personified as a deity. Agni is also one of the four impermanent elements that are connected to the human body. “Agni is at the centre of sacrifice. As messenger of the gods, Agni is mediator between humankind and the heavenly realm” (Bowker). This is interesting to note because not only is fire a very significant symbol in Hinduism, but also connects fire and the body to heaven (or an elevated state). This demonstrates that both Tolle and Blake draw on Eastern and Western religions that use fire as symbolic of suffering and transformation.

Another indication of this connection between the transformative fire and the body is from Blake’s *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise*, specifically plate 5. However, the four other plates before it and the one after seem to tell a story of human development that indicates how Blake may have considered suffering and inner transformation.

Starting off with the “Frontispiece” already demonstrates this expectation that is placed on the youth right at birth. With the caterpillar hovering over the new child and the caption “What is Man!” with “The sun’s light when he unfolds it Depends on the Organ that beholds it” shows that each child, whatever their potential, can only reach it depending on how the guardian of said child sees them and *their* perception. Throughout this piece, we see that Blake at times blames the ignorance of the guardians who begin and at the same time hinder the transformation that comes with suffering that every human must face as a part of the human experience.

Then we arrive at plate 1 which is titled “I found him beneath a Tree” and there we see what looks to be a mother plucking her children from the earth as if they are crops of some sort. The indication of a tree is often symbolic of generations and family— and with the use of the word “found” it seems as though Blake is arguing that despite the mother bringing the children into the world, there is this separation like the children are not truly hers. She *found* them. The woman's face looks severe even as the children smile. In plate 2 titled “Water ¹<Thou Waterest him with Tears>” we see an elderly figure allowing rain (that is not rain but tears) pour on the child under the ground. What this demonstrates is that Blake is making the point that right from birth and into infancy, children are suffering from what their parents did not overcome in themselves and putting their own suffering and expectations onto them. This causes the individual to suffer right from childhood and creates this struggle for them.

In plate 3, we see the now adolescent figure underground with the caption, “Earth <He struggles into Life>”, demonstrating that the guardian is the one who put him there, much like a seed being planted. The plate shows darkness and the youth trying to outstretch his body and free himself while his face remains in anguish. The youth must become stronger in order to break free of the soil (or darkness) that surrounds him despite not knowing what is above. Like the addition “He struggled into Life” suggests, this struggle is a part of the human experience and often inflicted on youthful individuals by the control of their guardians.

Despite the fourth plate, “Air <On Cloudy Doubts & Reasoning Cares>”, appearing as though it does not belong with the others because although the figure was once underground he suddenly appears in the sky amongst the clouds. The audience sees the young man holding his head sitting on a cloud in fear which could be interpreted as the figure still being underground in

¹ These symbols indicate an addition.

the dirt, but is now being depicted in his mind, doubting himself and his ability to overcome his experiences. Similarly to how people question if their seed will grow while it's under the soil, he may be doubting himself and his ability to grow and transform. This image can be seen as “Head in the Clouds” kind of imagery– the clouds demonstrate he is not thinking clearly and holding his head shows this fear that dwells within the mind which is reminiscent of what was discussed in part 1 in terms of letting the mind alter one's perception and how the mind affects our surroundings – which perhaps is why the viewers are taken to a cloudy location (mental state) while the figure is still actually on earth (physical state).

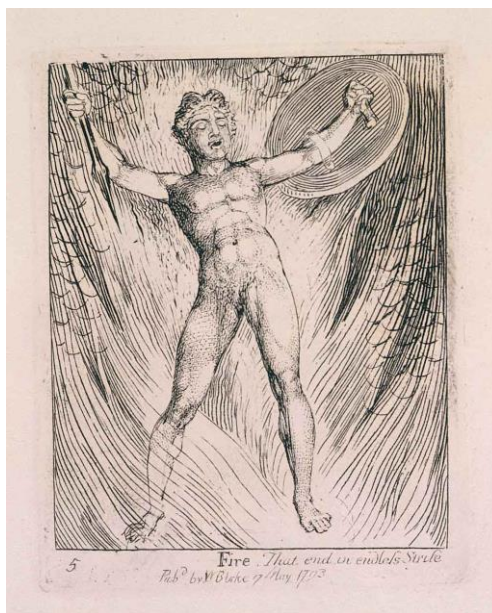


Fig.9. (Erdman Newly Revised Edition 262)



Fig.10. Object 7 (Bentley 7, Erdman 5, Keynes 5),

The two images above, although both being plate 5 labeled “Fire” and seeming similar in nature, cast very different interpretations. The image on the left is from *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise* and includes the additional wording and the image on the right is from *For the Children: The Gates of Paradise*. In the image on the left, the figure is bursting forth, surrounded by flames. In this version, his eyes are closed and he holds weaponry in each hand, his arms spread and imagery of scales can be seen behind him. He appears to be illuminated by the fires

encapsulating his body. The words below the image read “That end in endless Strife”, and “Fire” is the last element in the series of images. This indicates that this is the last form (for now). After the doubt and fear and suffering that seems to be highlighted in the other images before plate 5, the words, “that end in endless strife” point toward the end of a cycle. The individual has overcome what he needed to and has burst forth as this transformed being, but other challenges will inevitably follow which is suggested by “endless strife” which points to transformation (which is symbolized by fire) as a process that never truly ends. It emphasizes the idea that we are reborn over and over with new major experiences. The idea of fire being the ultimate element for inner transformation is backed up by Tolle when he states “The fire of suffering becomes the light of consciousness” (Tolle *NE* 73) so this figure emerges from the fires of suffering but in the process, has awakened a transformation within him.

What is crucial to note is that despite his eyes seeming closed in the Erdman edition, this is not consistent throughout different versions of plate 5. Erdman’s looks as though the figure is, as Tolle puts it, accepting of this suffering. His eyes appear closed and his arms outstretched shows this embrace of it much like the angel figure who turned into a devil. It radiates an acceptance that leads to this transformation. However, in the other version (image on right), the figure looks to be in anguish. Though they are very similar in gesture, their facial expressions are complete opposites. The earlier version seems afraid and not accepting of the fire around him. His eyes are now wide open and his expression more severe. His eyebrows are hunched upward giving him a worried expression while the other seems at peace amongst the flames. It should also be noted that there are no scales around the second figure– as if to show that there isn't this feeling of protection any longer. He also does not glow as brilliantly as the first figure which makes him out to be consumed by the flames rather than among them. In this version, the figure

does not seem to emit light from his body – in fact, the fire seems to be brighter, making it so it looks as though the fires of suffering are consuming the figure without the acceptance that both Blake and Tolle seem to deem crucial to the transformative suffering process. It is also interesting to note that for the figure on the left, his body is very well defined. There is detail in his muscles as well as shadowing. In the second image, the figure’s body is much less defined and the most defined part of him is his face. We can see his eyes and the lines on his face are quite noticeable. As we have gathered so far, transformation must be done through the body, as Tolle says and Blake seems to agree on. The first figure seems to demonstrate what the Inner transformation is like should the individual come at it from a place of acceptance while the second figure, with a face more detailed, seems to be in their mind. Their “transformation” is through the mind – which could mean their focus is on resisting suffering. They are trapped in “mind-forg’d manacles”, suffering in the flames, while the first figure seems to be emerging more victoriously. It should also be noted that on the second plate, there are no words to accompany the plate number. This shows that perhaps this suffering for the second figure may be prolonged, with no “end” to “endless strife”, due to this inability to transform through his body. Though he too has weapons in hand, his demeanor is much more fear-based and represents exactly what both Blake and Tolle tell their readers about, which is that being in the mind prolongs and creates *more* suffering when it is not necessary. Although both authors deem suffering inevitable, they both seem to point towards a more effective way of going about the process that proposes a mindset that allows for a lack of resistance.

Although New Age Spiritualism does not necessarily depict fire as a symbol of inner transformation, Blake and Tolle both hold similar ideas about the New Age central theme of

transforming the self on an inward level by *accepting* suffering to take place as being part of the human experience.

Blake, 'The Senses'

Throughout Blake's works he seems to both praise the senses as well as see them as a hindrance which can either aid the individual in their personal transformation or, through limited sense perception, hinder it. Robert F. Gleckner in his article "Blake and the Senses" investigates Blake's seemingly contradictory views of the senses. Gleckner mentions that Blake makes an obvious distinction between sense perception and imaginative perception— a stark difference between seeing *with* the eye and seeing *through* the eye (1). What Gleckner points out is that this contrasting seems to go against the non-dualist perspective Blake seems to often argue.

However, it is noted in the article that "For Blake imaginative or total perception is not merely a matter of 'sight' as opposed to 'vision'; it is a fourfold integration of the whole man (what Blake calls "the human form divine"), and this involves all the senses" (2) which means Blake makes it apparent that there is simply seeing with the physical eye, and using *vision* with the whole form.

As noted in Part 1, perception for Blake is often to do with mentality— not with the senses. However, Gleckner references Frye when he says that Blake saw "imagination", "intelligence" and the "mental" as interchangeable, which means that perception with the mind is also imagination. Here, Blake connects imagination to having total perception. Gleckner points out that Blake suggests that "man's senses can become 'more numerous and enlarged' so that he will be 'able to discern a larger portion' of reality than he can with only five senses. And cleansing the senses (...) means 'raising them to the heights of their sensual power'" (2). This demonstrates that Blake sees the main senses (the five) as being limiting if we only look and navigate the world through those parts of our physical body. Though the physical form is

important, Blake makes it apparent that the mind and body must work as one. Therefore, using the very physical senses *without* the imaginative perception causes limited sight or lack of understanding of reality. This is evident in the passage located in *The Marriage* that Gleckner calls attention to. He references the section on Isaiah and Ezekiel in one of the “Memorable Fancies”. Gleckner references the line said by Isaiah, “ ‘I saw now God, nor heard any (...) in a finite organical perception; but my senses discover’d the infinite in every thing’ ” (3). This line with the use of words that pertain to the physical senses, like ‘saw’ and ‘heard’, demonstrates that Blake believes if we are to use only the physical senses, our perception is very limited. We cannot see or hear God; we should listen or look for him with our eyes and ears, yet, if we open our perception of imagination – the other senses that are not a part of our limited organs – we can see all things, and thus God in all things. Here, it is evident that Blake does not tell his readers to dismiss the body, but work with it and enhance it with the mind/ imagination. Because we are human, we are prone to having a limited perspective, but with the use of our bodies in conjunction with the senses that are not affiliated with the physical organs of our bodies, we can see God through all things and we are no longer looking through “narrow chinks of a cavern”. Gleckner says that Blake calls these otherworldly senses “Spiritual Sensation” (3) so there must be this union between the physical senses and the spiritual ones in order to access a broader and truer perception of our reality.

Eynel Wardi in their article titled “Space, the Body, and the Text in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*” mentions how in *The Marriage* Blake points out the futility of using binary logic and instead “...celebrates the imaginative possibility of provisionally or partially overcoming the limits and limitation of sense-perception as well as of tyrannical conceptions and logics that narrow, divide and rigidify the fallen mind” (253). Blake challenges this binary

thinking of having boundaries between the senses of the body and imagination. Although Tolle does not mention imagination like Blake does, he too challenges the idea of ignoring our bodily vessel. Tolle brings to light how “They [religions] began to disassociate from their body. They now saw themselves as *having* a body, rather than just being it” (Tolle PON, 114). Like Blake, Tolle questions the very religious understanding that we must not recognize our body as being a part of us. It is often seen as a limitation that houses our mistakes and sinful nature. Tolle goes on to say that,

Even the Buddha is said to have practiced body denial through fasting and extreme forms of asceticism for six years, but he did not attain enlightenment until after he had given up this practice. The fact is that no one has ever become enlightened through denying or fighting the body or through an out-of-body experience. Although such an experience can be fascinating and can give you a glimpse of the state of liberation from the material form, in the end you will always have to return to the body, where the essential work of transformation takes place. (114)

Therefore, this limitation of using only the physical senses can hinder an individual’s perception and ultimately affect their transformative process. Though Blake recognizes the limitations of the organs, through *The Marriage* the poet demonstrates that we cannot deny the body, but can enlarge our senses by the combination of the physical and mental. Tolle also argues that transformation must come from a place of merging the two, saying “Collective human consciousness and life on our planet are intrinsically connected. “*A new heaven*” is the emergence of a transformed state of human consciousness, and “*a new earth*” is its reflection in the physical realm” (Tolle NE 23) demonstrating that there is this interconnection between both

the mental and physical, just as Blake argues. By both realizing the limitations of the physical senses and honing in on our spiritual senses, the process of inner transformation can ensue.

Opposition vs. Passiveness

One of the main aspects of Blake's work that does not fall into New Age thought or Tolle's teachings is how the poet views opposition. Within the New Age Spiritualist perspective, having a level of acceptance and a more passive attitude towards certain aspects in life is often promoted. Tolle advocates for a lack of action through observation and acceptance. The New Age author states, "you cannot fight the darkness...trying to do so would create inner conflict and thus further pain" (Tolle NE 39). Most New Age spiritual authors are more in line with what Tolle says. Deepak Chopra, another famous and influential spiritual teacher writes in his book *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*, that the fourth spiritual law is "Least Effort. This law is based on the fact that nature's intelligence functions with effortless ease and abandoned carefreeness. This is the principle of least action, of no resistance. This is, therefore, the principle of harmony and love. When we learn this lesson from nature, we easily fulfill our desires" (Chopra 53). These ideas are the exact opposite of what Blake argues, that "Opposition is true friendship" (E. 42). Although it was mentioned earlier that in order to be able to have this inner transformation, Blake believes in the active choice to embrace fire and flame, he no doubt argues for action and defiance, which is unlike New Age spiritual teachings.

Blake, being drawn to revolutionary ideas, believed there was a place for action and a time to use oppositional force. This is evident when in *The Marriage* he refers to the bible when referring to those more like angels and those more like devils stating, "Jesus Christ did not wish to unite but to separate them as in the Parable of sheep and goats! & he says I came not to send Peace but a Sword" (E. 40). This greatly contrasts Tolle who states "Pain can only feed on pain.

Pain cannot feed on joy” (Tolle *NE* 37). Blake’s passion for liberty (especially away from the Church) coaxed Blake into being drawn towards revolutionary ideals and being interested in the French and American Revolutions. Peter A. Schock, in his piece “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: Blake’s Myth of Satan and Its Cultural Matrix”, mentions how “In Blake’s work, the myth of Satan emerges in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and in the revolutionary prophecies of the early 1790s – *America* (1793), *Europe* (1794), and *The Song of Los* (1795). In these works, Blake develops the satanic figures of the Devil and Orc into mythological vehicles of desire and energy; the two figures embody a moral and political rebelliousness identified with apocalypse” (Schock 442). Blake’s work often expressing revolutionary ideas and cutting against the grain truly shows that unlike many passive spiritual teachers that are influential to New Age thought, Blake believes in the requirement of opposition and acting against oppressive forces which is in great contrast to Tolle’s approach of nonaction. The fiery figures he depicts are also related to this oppositional thinking which is clear in *Milton* when the speaker declares, “I will not cease from Mental Fight, / Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand / Till we have built Jerusalem / In England’s green & pleasant Land” (E. 95). From this quotation, though we can gather that the speaker mentions a ‘mental fight’ meaning something within the mind, there is still this feeling of physical opposition with the use of the word ‘sword’. The speaker here, unlike Tolle, battles against limitations of the mind as well as physical restrictions, whereas Tolle prefers to listen to the negative thoughts and become more as “the witness of the thought... the thought then loses its power over you and quickly subsides” (*PON* 19). He continues by saying, “you experience a discontinuity in the mental stream –a gap of ‘no-mind’ ... when these gaps occur, you feel a certain stillness and peace inside you” (19). Tolle, unlike Blake, argues for finding peace within through this mental stillness while Blake seems to favour an oppositional mindset even when

facing the inner workings of one's own mind. Blake does not see inner transformation or progression of humanity lying within passivity (that which is associated with angels), but in the active and energetic power of the human form to continuously challenge rules, laws and concepts to move humanity ever forward.

Blake celebrates human emotion in his short poem "A Poison Tree" within *Songs of Experience*. What this poem argues is that the suppression of anger can ultimately transform into feelings of something much stronger—hate and resentment that can fester. The first lines, "I was angry with my friend; I told my wrath, my wrath did end" contrast to later lines, "I was angry with my foe:/ I told it not, my wrath did grow./ And I waterd it in fears, / Night & morning with my tears...In the morning glad I see; My foe outstretched beneath the tree" (E. 28). With the first couple of lines, the speaker used his voice, expressing his feelings to his friend and the feelings of anger subsided which gives this imagery that despite Blake celebrating human emotion, he also recognizes that it can be fleeting. "I told my wrath" means the speaker mentioned his grievances and speaking this truth brought his wrath to an end. Later on in the poem, there is a flip side of the situation or an alternative reality where the friend is a foe. If the speaker does not tell his feelings, the feelings not only remain but begin to grow. One of the most prominent lines in this poem is "And I waterd it in fears" meaning, his wrath grew not only because the speaker did not voice his concerns, but also because he allowed it to grow by increasing his wrath with fearful thoughts. The watering of the wrath happens not only by day, but also by night giving us this image of overwatering as well. These fears cause the speaker to kill his foe. Especially in contrast to the first part of the poem, this seems extreme, but Blake argues that feeling our human emotions and expressing them is healthier for the self and others, and the suppression of these emotions can be harmful, especially when we begin to add harmful thoughts to the already

existing negative feelings. This speaks against many religious beliefs, not just Christian (despite the original title being “Christian Forbearance”), that suggests ‘negative’ human emotions are sinful.

In comparison, Tolle writes “whenever you feel negativity arising within you, whether caused by an external factor, a thought, or even nothing in particular that you are aware of, look on it... the slightest irritation is significant and needs to be acknowledged and looked at; otherwise, there will be cumulative buildup of unobserved reactions” (Tolle *PON* 192). Which, like Blake, provides this imagery of the ‘increasing’ of these negative emotions. While Blake uses the word “grow”, Tolle uses the word “buildup”, both hinting towards this increase of harmful emotion when it is ignored. Both Tolle and Blake hint to this emotion at first being “the slightest irritation” – something small at first, but as Blake points out, it can lead to something more vengeful and ultimately become so strong it is no longer a cumulation of fearful and hateful thoughts but a heinous act. Although yes, there are similarities between what Blake and Tolle say about these negative emotions, Tolle also believes that “Negativity is totally unnatural. It is a psychic pollutant, and there is a deep link between the poisoning and destruction of nature and the vast negativity that has accumulated in the collective human psyche” (Tolle *PON* 189). This expresses that Tolle not only sees emotions such as anger and resentment as a behaviour that is against our nature, but causes a very real destruction. While Tolle wants his readers to release the need to control and allow their minds to quiet even in the face of that which brings out their ego, Blake challenges the audience to question traditional viewpoints and radically transform humankind by stepping into the power of the body with the embrace of certain human emotions.

Although both writers agree that the body cannot be denied as it is a part of our human experience, they have different ideas of action. Blake believes action and constantly facing

inevitable opposition will lead to self-development while Tolle believes being able to let go of the righteous minds' need to challenge obstacles will set forth this sense of freedom in the self which will transform the individual through peaceful acceptance.

-PART III: PERSONAL GROWTH CREATING SOCIAL CHANGE-

“A dog starvd at his Masters Gate / Predicts the ruin of the State” (William Blake, Auguries of Innocence E. 493)

“If you get the inside right, the outside will fall into place” (Eckhart Tolle PON 77)

III

For the third and final section of this piece, a central theme in New Age Spiritualism that will be covered is the conception that personal growth amounts to social change. When an individual works on their personal growth, and begins transforming themselves from within, this creates growth on a macro level as well – not just benefiting their own lives, but also those around them. The idea is that as you change your thinking– unlearn certain thought patterns and begin to allow the inner-transformative process to shift the way you view your life – this growth that you experience from this change will begin to aid others in doing the same and propel society forward. Lee’s article does a substantial job covering this section under the subtopic ‘Transformation: from personal to global’ and is summed up in the line, “the assumption is that by working at a personal level, the world can be changed” (Lee 98). Lee goes onto say that “the meaning of transformation here is based on an inter-relationship between personal and global and a linkage through a collective or ‘totality’ of consciousness” (99), meaning that what we experience and how we shift our understanding of the world and ourselves, will inevitably affect the world as a whole.

Although Blake does not state so directly that the personal transformation an individual experiences will ultimately have a global effect, his frequent mention of seeing all things as undoubtedly connected (as stated in the religion chapter) in itself argues the idea of the singular

affecting the whole and that God being in all things makes all things God, again, supporting that idea of the individual (singular/mortal) being one with Everything (God/ omnipotence).

Unlike the more Western ideologies of the time that gave greater heed to the independence of the individual, Blake's perspective that "Everything that Lives is Holy" points again more towards Eastern religious traditions that influence New Age spiritualism. Tolle uses the example of nature when he states, "All things in nature are not only one with themselves, but also one with the totality" (Tolle *SS* 95), which urges the readers to look to nature to see how it all exists as one. Blake no doubt believes in something similar as his works often combine ideologies of Monism and Pantheism (that all things are one and God is everything). In Raine's text, she mentions a letter Blake wrote to a clergyman who criticized his art for "being too 'visionary'" (Raine 25). The poet wrote back and ended with, "Some see Nature all Ridicule & Deformity, & by these I shall not regulate my proportions; & some Scarce see Nature at all. But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself" (E. 702). It is clear that Blake sees Man and Nature as one since he parallels "Man of Imagination" and "Nature is Imagination itself", meaning Man *is* of Nature and thus connects humanity to the grand scheme of things much like the New Age perception taken from Buddhism that every being is connected to the greater workings of the whole.

Tolle takes on a similar view of nature as Blake seems to from this letter. He writes, "When you perceive nature only through the mind, through thinking, you cannot sense its aliveness, its beingness. You see the form only and are unaware of the life within the form – the sacred mystery. Thought reduces nature to a commodity to be used in the pursuit of profit or knowledge or some other utilitarian purpose. The ancient forest becomes timber, the bird a research project, the mountain something to be mined or conquered. When you perceive nature,

let there be spaces of no thought, no mind. When you approach nature in this way, it will respond to you and participate in the evolution of human and planetary consciousness” (Tolle SS 99).

What Tolle says here seems quite similar to what Blake expresses in his letter, though it should also be noted there is a contrast between the idea of Blake’s “imagination” and Tolle’s “no mind”. Blake frets that some don’t see nature at all and Tolle also mentions that some cannot sense the ‘aliveness’ of nature. Blake also mentions that some see nature as “Ridicule & Deformity”, which suggests something that needs to be altered or fixed, much like how Tolle explains that sometimes humanity has the nasty habit of seeing nature as something that is only there to be turned into something *else* –to be altered or fixed for human use. As Blake connects Humans to the wholeness of Nature, so too does Tolle see nature as something that can alter the whole. There again is the removal of the individual vs. the whole.

Looking at *Auguries of Innocence*, Blake’s first few lines are the ones that are often recited or referenced:

“To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour...”

In these four lines, Blake connects something small– almost microscopic (being the grain of sand) to the wholeness of the world. In each line he takes something that is often seen as small, or limited or insignificant (a grain of sand, a wild flower, an hour) and gives it a direct relation to something that is unfathomable (the entire world, Infinity, Eternity). It very much reflects this New Age concept of the singular creating waves on a multitude level where when you interact with the individual, you are also interacting with the global. Thus when the singular alters in any

way, that being perhaps an Inner transformation, it will inevitably transform the world since neither can be separated from the other.

Hagan in her article also references this part of Blake's poetry before naming some key users of Blake's work for their memes. Hagan mentions a writer, teacher, physicist, and psychologist, all of which used Blake memes in their work to help explain how the New Age can dissolve all dualisms and the boundaries of the self through Blake's incorporation of wholeness and expanded awareness" (Hagan 215). This part of the article expresses that Blake and his pieces cannot only be connected to New Age concepts, but used to *explain* the New Age itself. Much like Tolle's work and other New Age authors, Blake gives insight on how to achieve wholeness with the universe at large and expansion to human awareness and, as Hagan mentions, remove "boundaries of the self". Through this short but often quoted part of *Auguries*, Blake attempts to shift the reader's perspective with his understanding of 'single vision' by elaborating on looking at one singular object or thing or moment in time: what is being beheld is more than that. This poem expresses Blake's concept of 'fourfold vision'. When an individual beholds a tiny aspect of the universe, they are simultaneously beholding the entirety of the universe.

This concept of all things and beings being in relation to one another can be drawn to Blake even further when looking at his piece *For the Sexes*. On the last plate it is stated, "I have said to the Worm: Thou art my mother & my sister" (E. 267), which again takes this idea of closeness and relationships to all things. Though it can be noted that this quotation is a biblical reference to Job 17:14 and the worm is a symbol of death, it is still relevant that there is this element of all beings as being connected. However, it can also be speculated that this idea is intrinsic to Romanticism, as Hagan mentions: "...New Age Blake memes in particular, rehearse key philosophical debates that took shape in the Romantic period..." (217). And this could

further be speculated when comparing the Romantic poet to another – Anna Laetitia Barbauld – who writes something similar in her piece, “The Mouse’s Petition”: “Beware, lest in the worm you crush,/ A brother's soul you find...”. This line is quite similar to Blake’s as it connects the idea that what is perceived as an insignificant worm is not only important, but in direct relation to the reader or individual. Lussier points out that Romanticism seems to have arrived at a similar insight that can be compared to Buddhist thought – that the idea of ‘the self’ being separate from all other identities is unreal (Lussier quoting McCort 5). Lussier is explaining that in the Romantic era selfhood itself is questioned and criticized. A single identity that does not affect anything or anyone else is impossible. It could be that Blake drew from the enthusiasms circulating at the time, nonetheless his incorporations of these ideas bear similarity to Buddhist practice and thus, also to New Age thought. In *The Marriage*, “I then asked Ezekiel. why he eat dung, & lay so long on his right & left side? he answered. **the desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite this the North American tribes practise**” (E. pg 39). Although at first inspection this line does not seem to hold much meaning, it points toward Blake wanting to help others understand how they can limit their own consciousness and perspective. Blake did not only have visions and had a desire to allow his imagination to run rampant on pages and canvas, but also brings up this inclination to change the perceptions of others from a “single vision”, to that of infinite perception, which is a practice from long ago as well from many cultures which again, is something that New Age spiritualism does. Therefore, this idea of seeing all this as interconnected and wanting to shift the way people see the individual or singular aspect is something beyond the Romantic concept and uncoincidentally coincides with the New Age concept of expanding the mind beyond individual experience and knowing it also shapes changes on a global scale. A similar aspect between Blake and Tolle is that both also express that

because all things are connected and thus personal change affects social change, so too will the obstacles one faces within oneself be something that affects others. Tolle in *NE* labels this subsection as “Individual and Collective”. He goes into the strong unhealed emotions and remnants of pain that begin to pile up onto an individual’s life through the array of experiences inevitable to the human experience. “The pain-body, however, is not just individual in nature. It also partakes of the pain suffered by countless humans throughout the history of humanity, which is a history of continuous tribal warfare, of enslavement, pillage, rape, torture, and other forms of violence. This pain still lives in the collective psyche of humanity and is being added to on a daily basis, as you can verify when you watch the news tonight or look at the drama in people’s relationships” (Tolle 142-3). Tolle expresses that not only does the individual’s pain affect the whole, but also pains from the past done onto humanity *by* humanity negatively affect the individual as well. He brings this awareness to his readers that sometimes the pain they are feeling is also the pain of the collective.

The similarity we can draw between Tolle and Blake is that both use the example of the parents-child dynamic as a common relationship where the individual affects others. Starting off with Tolle, he writes,

It is true that some babies cry a great deal because they are not given enough love and attention, but others cry for no apparent reason, almost as if they are trying to make everyone around them as unhappy as they are— and often they succeed. They have come into this world with a heavy share of human pain. Other babies may cry frequently because they can sense the emanation of their mother’s and father’s negative emotion, and it causes them pain and also causes their pain-body to grow already by absorbing

energy from the parents' pain-bodies. Whatever the case may be, as the baby's physical body grows, so does the pain-body (Tolle 143).

Blake, too, makes a direct connection from a guardian's pain onto their child. At the end of *Marriage*, in the section "A Song of Liberty", there is a contrast being made between the older generation and the newer one.

In her trembling hands she took the new born terror howling; 8. On those infinite mountains of light now barr'd out by the atlantic sea, the new born fire stood before the starry king! 9. Flag'd with grey brow'd snows and thunderous visages the jealous wings wav'd over the deep. 10. The speary hand burned aloft, unbuckled was the shield, forth went the hand of jealousy among the flaming hair, and ... hurl'd the new born wonder thro' the starry night./ 11. The fire, the fire, is falling!/ ... 13. The fiery limbs, the flaming hair, shot like the sinking sun into the western sea (E. 44-5).

Jealous of this "new born fire" that exudes potential and youth, the king throws him into the starry night— meaning to force the child down the path (the starry one) that the *starry* king endured. The previous suffering of the king that came to him through his own experiences, he is placing on this new born child. The newborn being "shot like a sinking sun into the western sea" expresses to the reader this destruction of the youth's fiery potential put onto him by the king who "glanc[es] with his beamy eyelids", showing that he does not use Blake's 'vision'.

Another example of this is "Aged Ignorance: <Perceptive Organs closed their Objects close>" (E. 265) from *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise*.



Fig. 11. (Object 15 Bentley 13, Erdman 11, Keynes 11)

This depiction of youth in opposition to the experienced demonstrates that Blake sees this hindrance in growth and ultimately freedom when it comes to the passive upholding of generational cycles that is depicted by the old man with the scissors. He cuts at the young cherub's wings to prevent flight which could symbolize freedom. He wants the young individual to remain flightless and stationary like he does. Though the figure wears glasses, his eyes appear to be closed – showing this lack of insight and perception that the old man is using. The title “Aged Ignorance” tells Blake’s audience that with age does not always come wisdom – in fact, oftentimes beliefs are upheld without question. When Blake writes, “Perceptive organs closed their objects close”, this speaks to what Blake believes about expanding our senses. In a multitude of his works, he warns against closing our senses and perception to the world around us. In this plate, Blake warns that with the old man's closed eyes he is not opening himself up to expansive perception which leads him to restrict and cause suffering to the cherub. The cherub figure attempts to run or leap towards the sun (which can be seen as another symbol for transformative fire), but the elderly man grabs him by the wings and with a calm expression in

his stationary form tries to snip his wings off. Blake warns about this limited perspective because perhaps even though it looks like the cherub figure will get burned (much like the story of Icarus) the lack of experience that his guardian allows him to have will hinder his growth and begin these generational cycles. These limited perspectives individuals impose on others (especially younger generations) will ultimately hinder their transformation as it takes away from the inevitability of suffering needed for the human experience.

Much like what Tolle expresses, the guardians' pain and learned behaviour can negatively affect those of the youth, moving so far as to say they can negatively affect future generations. In this way, Blake also points towards how not only personal growth affects the whole, so too do the difficulties of the individual affect social change which can keep generational cycles in play.

Tolle also mentions this change on a personal level equating to changes and shifts on a mass level, though he instead focuses on removing the traits that come directly from the ego.

“...non reaction to the ego in others is one of the most effective ways not only of going beyond ego in yourself but also of dissolving the collective human ego. But you can only be in a state of nonreaction if you can recognize someone’s behaviour as coming from the ego, as being an expression of the collective human dysfunction. When you realize it’s not personal, there is no longer a compulsion to react as if it were.” (Tolle *NE* 63). Here, Tolle makes a direct connection of the self to others. The transformative nonaction of refusing to respond to the egoic nature in others will in turn affect how the ego functions as well and will be brought not only to oneself and the ones around the self, but also to the “collective ego”, meaning, the egoic nature that exists in all of us. Tolle shines awareness on how the world, relationships and reactions and thoughts act much like a mirror. Earlier in his book, he mentions that “How you are seen by others turns into how you see yourself (...) How you are seen by others becomes the mirror that

tells you what you are like and who you are” (Tolle, *NE*, 45). Transforming the perception of others and oneself seems to work off one another. And this can be either positive or negative depending on the perception. Tolle is then arguing that if we see others in a negative light, we are feeding that perception and they will begin to feel that way about themselves. Moreover, if it's reversed, meaning if we see ourselves in a negative light (whether it's being lazy, ignorant or obnoxious), the way we perceive ourselves will rub off on others and thus they will see us as this as well. Therefore, it can be said that Tolle sees this connection between transforming the self (with nonaction or change in consciousness) to affecting the collective (and vice-versa). This natural connection between the self and others, Tolle warns, can also feed those thoughts and adverse feelings. “Anything that you resent and strongly react to in another is also in you. But it is no more than a form of ego, and as such, it is completely impersonal. It has nothing to do with who that person is, nor has it anything to do with who you are. Only if you mistake it for who you are can observing it within you be threatening to your sense of self” (Tolle *NE* 74).

Chopra refers to this connection as a law of cause and effect– and more specifically, draws on the Buddhist understanding of Karma to explain this. Chopra seems to have similar views to Tolle in that there is the aspect of our self-responsibility in our everyday lives that help shape it. It is stated, “Karma implies the action of conscious choice-making” (Chopra *SSLS* 39). He goes on to say, “By becoming a conscious choice-maker, you begin to generate actions **that are evolutionary for you and for those that are around you** (...) As long as karma is evolutionary– **for both the Self and everyone affected by the Self**– then the fruit of karma will be happiness and success” (Chopra, *SSLS*, 48), meaning there is this transformative element that happens for the individual but also others. Both the individual's and the masses' growth is naturally connected. There is no choice of positively changing those around you– it happens with

personal change— but it is the individual's choice to work towards personal change and begin to reform their way of perceiving the world.

Although Blake makes this clear argument that the self and the whole are intrinsically connected—“...that everything that lives is holy because God is incarnate in every human life” (Raine 19), he never really states that the change one individual makes on themselves can affect the whole. However, this could be for an important purpose. As mentioned earlier in this piece, Blake refutes dualism. He not only believes in this natural connection between humanity and the divine but also sees them as inseparable just as the soul and body are inseparable. Lussier goes into further detail about this when he states, “Blake’s process of self-annihilation as the vehicle for inner revolution just as clearly intersects Buddhist ecological thinking as well, since both recognize that ‘distinction between ‘self’ and ‘other’ is purely illusory’” (Matthieu and Thuan qtd. in Lussier 145), meaning Blake makes this argument of there not being separate entities of self and other. By not specifically making this distinction, Blake is showing the interconnectedness of all things and thus when the individual is changed, so too are the masses. Lussier also states that “Blake’s image of collectivity moves toward a wider awakening that will achieve enlightenment by overcoming inner and outer forms of selfhood, which are the vehicles for all suffering in the world” (133). Lussier expresses here that, to Blake, the very idea and nature of selfhood must be transformed in order to achieve this higher elevation or transformation. Blake’s understanding of selfhood involves being enclosed in the self – “a false body” (E. 142) that “must be put off & annihilated away / To cleanse the Face of [the] Spirit by Self-examination” (142). Blake sees “the collective” as something meshed with the self where the individual and the expanded universe not only cannot be separated, but are also indistinguishable. Lussier is saying that the way Western society often views selfhood is heavily

limiting our perception. When we think of the self it is this very isolated thing that is imagined to be in its own bubble – it is separate from ‘the other(s)’. But what Blake is working towards achieving in terms of informing his readers is that this isolated state is an illusion and there is no such thing as the self vs. the collective. The collective is the self and the self the collective.

-CONCLUDING THOUGHTS-

Blake writes, “Rouze up, O Young Men of the New Age!” (E. page 95), in his preface to *Milton*. Although it can be speculated that Blake is referring to Swedenborg’s New Age which was said to begin the year Blake was born (Berger 24), this does not dismiss the fact that Blake was indeed speaking for a new and alternative future – one he believed was coming in his lifetime. It is interesting to note that Blake refers specifically to ‘young’ men which suggests Blake is looking to a future generation, or perhaps a future audience. In Raine’s piece, she refers to the preface to *Milton*, saying “...Blake’s new age was something more radical than the innovation of a new style in art (...) [it was not] a farther development of existing knowledge but a reversal of values, a change in the premises of knowledge itself” (Raine, 5). Blake’s mythology and creativity are no doubt aligned with certain aspects in New Age thought that challenge the reader to shift their perspective on how they are told to interpret the world, the power of mentality and how it affects themselves as well as the whole.

In my exploration of information during the writing process of this paper, I would say that any research that links or compares William Blake to the *Age of Aquarius* and New Age concepts has not been studied enough despite Blake’s words being directly comparable to the New Age Movement. As Raine states, “It is the young men of the ‘Age of Aquarius’ who chalk on the walls the Blake’s native London, ‘The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction’ and other aphorisms from the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. If fifty years ago the problem of an editor was to vindicate a neglected poet, the mystery now to be explained is why Blake’s works should take their place among the sacred books of a ‘new age’ (Raine 4-5). Far beyond his time Blake has had his hand in shaping a new way of thinking and perceiving the world. Not only has he been studied by English University students, but his words have been quoted to produce change specifically for promoting the *Age of Aquarius*.”

In New Age Spiritualism the use of tarot or oracle cards is common and only begins to grow in popularity. Blake’s art has been used to create tarot cards, each image representing one of the 22 major arcana. There is also an older deck by Ed Buryñ that has multiple versions created. Interestingly, the creator of the tarot cards also has the cards on an online tarot card reading website which is significant. Blake’s art not only being turned into tarot cards but also being included on a site with other decks (including more traditional styles) shows how he is recognized in the field of New Age thought and the practices that come with it.

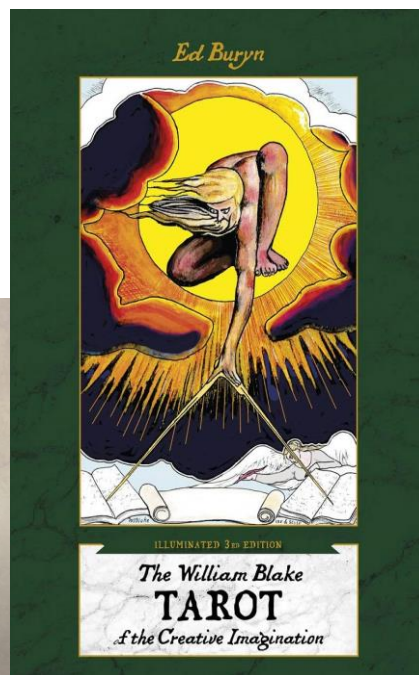


Fig.12. (William Blake Tarot Major Arcana Tarot Deck Fortune - Etsy Canada)

Fig. 13. (The William Blake Tarot of Creative Imagination v3 - blaketarot.com)

His work has also been featured on the Gaia network which is an alternative spiritual and mystical streaming service that promotes ideas of meditation, manifesting and altering one's perception. Specifically, his frontpiece to *Europe* called “The Ancient of Days” has been shown in a feature called *Sacred Geometry* which speaks about connecting to God / Source through the natural geometric forms of the universe. There is also a book titled *A Tree Full of Angels* written by Macrina Wiederkehr which is a direct reference to Blake’s vision of a tree full of angels he

experienced as a child. Although this text is more of a religious read rather than that of New Age content, it is about “seeing miracles in the ordinary”, which speaks to Blake's idea of altering perception through how we choose to view and experience our everyday lives. His works not only demonstrate the troubles of his times and his passions but can also teach his readers these concepts that are constitutional to New Age thought through the truly unique lens Blake provides. Despite Blake’s works being unintended for the times we live in today, his influence is not only within the academic realm and world of art, but still very much relevant to the twenty-first century and coincides with much of the New Age concepts that continue to be taught and practiced.

As scholars, academics and this paper demonstrates, Blake and his works can be connected to a plethora of categories and therefore should not be labeled. He uses teachings from both Western and Eastern religion, has been interpreted as a mystic and prophet, and as my paper demonstrates, can be connected to New Age thought, specifically the teachings of the New Age author Eckhart Tolle. Although it can be argued that this is because all those categories draw from one another, it shows that placing Blake and his works that he produced over his lifetime should not be fixed under one label, as they have relevance in religious teachings expressed centuries ago while simultaneously still being pertinent to concepts within New Age thought that circulates today.

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