

Chapter 14

The Individual Nature of Universal Creation

Topics in this Chapter:

- * Seeing life with a spiritual worldview
- * Exploring the nature of universal creation
- * Understanding where you fit into the bigger picture

In this chapter, I introduce you to one way of looking at the world with spiritual eyes. Many of the ideas in these pages come from an ancient spiritual science called *Kashmir Shaivism*, along with other traditions.

The beginning of this chapter is a little more technical than other chapters in this book; it describes a theory of universal creation that can be helpful in expanding your awareness into new vistas of possibility, with an inclusive view of the universe that makes logical sense and has a scientific flavor.

Consider

As you move forward on your spiritual journey, check out religious and philosophical ideas that resonate with your understanding and interests and bring those ideas and theories together with your own stream of inner wisdom to build an intelligent, individual, personal view of life that continues to grow and evolve.

The Spiritual Science of Universal Creation

I'm astounded by people who want to "know" the universe when it's hard enough to find your way around Chinatown.

—Woody Allen

When you're talking about universal creation, you have to move into a bigger picture view that goes beyond just one planet, one time frame, and one physical dimension. The theory of universal creation I introduce to you here offers a big picture view of the universe that has a place for just about anything you can possibly think of.

Whether you're talking about Christian ideas of heaven and hell, Tibetan descriptions of different realms of existence, new age messages from the "other side," or various worlds of gods described by the cultures of Greece, Egypt, and India, all these different realms can coexist within the theory of universal creation that I share with you in this chapter.

Different ways to view life

Each religious tradition has its own ideas about the nature of life. Different people and traditions see life differently, whether as a game, as a series of challenges, as an opportunity to grow, or as a divine play. Some believe that life is made of suffering, while others say it is of the nature of supreme bliss.

Seen from a more universal perspective, these views are neither right nor wrong, but merely different faces of the ultimately unknowable nature of life.

One common analogy used to describe how seemingly opposing theories can fit together within an unknowable bigger picture is the story of six blind men who came upon an elephant.

The first man touched the elephant's leg and announced, "The elephant is a pillar." The second man touched the tail and disputed the first, saying, "Oh, no, it is like a rope." The third touched the trunk of the elephant and said, "It is like a thick branch of a tree." The fourth touched the elephant's ear and said, "It is like a big hand fan." The fifth blind man touched the belly of the elephant and declared, "It is like a huge wall." And the sixth man touched the tusk of the elephant and said, "It is a solid pipe."

Different philosophical approaches to the nature of the universe are like the different interpretations of these six blind men. All these blind men are both right and wrong, with each giving a different piece of the puzzle of what an elephant really is. Each viewpoint is valuable to consider and contemplate, but you wouldn't want to limit your understanding of the elephant or the universe to any one definition or close the door to other possibilities.

Consider

Instead of trying to memorize the specific details covered in this section, let the words enter your awareness gently, without straining or feeling frustrated if you don't fully understand the stages of creation being described. This kind of teaching is not meant to be memorized as you would study for a test, or to be used to build a rigid belief system. Theories of universal creation should be used to bathe your mind in higher-concept spiritual philosophies that have the potential to transform your outlook and uplift your life.

The map in Figure 14-1 is based on the philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism, which is said to have developed around 900 A.D. in the state of Kashmir, which is in the northwestern corner of India. This chart shows how divine universal Consciousness becomes all the levels of creation, down to the physical world and your experience of it.

Now, even though Figure 14-1 may look like a sequential process that moves from supreme consciousness at the top to the physical universe at the bottom, the truth is that the whole chart is happening all at once. Universal Consciousness is always there — pure, eternal, and unaffected by the creation that is described as being projected like a big multidimensional movie upon its screen. And just as a movie screen is unaffected by the nature of the movie being projected on it, so the screen of pure consciousness remains unaffected by all the universal creations that play upon its screen.

Don't worry if you don't fully understand how this process of universal creation works. Sages from many traditions have spent decades of intense spiritual practices to catch even a glimpse of a higher universal view of creation. Just to come upon elevated spiritual teachings shows that you've already achieved a certain resonance with higher truth and are ready to open up to its gifts in a new way.

Is Figure 14-1 a perfectly accurate and all-inclusive map of reality? No, of course not. Is there such a thing as an all-inclusive map of reality? No way. If a map were all inclusive, it would not be a map, but the thing itself. Is this graph of universal creation a set of ideas that can open many doors to understanding how the entire universe — including you — can be divine? Yes indeed!

The following sections describe each stage of creation as numbered on the chart. Again, these stages are both sequential and eternal: They take place in order and are also happening all at once. The goal of spiritual efforts in the context of this philosophy is to move your awareness from the bottom rungs of this ladder of universal creation — representing the physical world and sensory experience — up to the higher realms of spiritual realization and universal freedom.

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A Simple Chart of Universal Creation

Based on the Philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism



Figure 14-1: A map of the stages of universal creation.

Stage 1

In stage 1, pure Consciousness exists as the underlying field of all creation. Universal creation begins with a blank slate of *pure Consciousness* – existence without content, potential without expression. This indefinable source of all creation is like the space within a tiny seed that contains the energetic potential of a huge tree, complete with branches and leaves.

Even after it becomes the physical universe, this Consciousness remains pure and eternal. Jesus expressed his identification with the eternal nature by saying, “Before Abraham was, *I Am.*”

Stage 2

In stage 2 of creation, the separation from oneness begins. The move to creation begins with an initial energy pulsation, a subtle throb of and a hint of creation to be. You could think of this stage as being like the initial process that takes place in a cell that will one day become a living animal or human being. This stage is like the moment when the spark of creation is struck in a cell, before it begins to multiply.

In stage 1, you have the cell of pure Consciousness. Once this creative spark enters that cell in stage 2, it divides into two cells, which are represented in this chart by stages number 3 and 4.

Stage 3

During stage 3, a glimmer of the world begins to take subtle form. You can think of this stage as being similar to the state of your computer right after you push the button to turn it on. None of your individual folders or icons are visible or available on the screen, but the computer’s processor is starting to access the information, and is humming with the promise of your upcoming computer experience.

Stage 4

In stage 4 of this chart of universal creation (see Figure 14-1), awareness begins to take form. The experience of this stage of universal creation is similar to the experience you may have just before waking up, as your awareness prepares to move from the darkness of deep sleep into the colorful world of your bed and beyond.

When you’re about to awaken from a good night’s sleep, a vibration of your upcoming wakefulness starts to pulsate through the still field of your sleeping, unconscious mind. You begin to grasp a subtle remembrance of a world outside yourself, without feeling any separation between yourself and the world. You’re in a peaceful state of awareness that is free from the complications, expectations, and judgments of ego-based thoughts and desires. The scheduling, thinking mind is not yet in place to diffuse your peaceful awareness into the upcoming responsibilities and concerns of the day.

At this point, you're still one with pure creative Consciousness and free from any sense of limitation. You're completely powerful, with nothing holding you back in any way. You sense a world that exists outside of yourself, yet at the same time you know that you're completely one with everything.

Stage 5

Once creation gets to stage 5, *maya* enters the picture, and that's when everything hits the fan. The Sanskrit term *maya* is often translated as "illusion," which is the closest English translation for this deeply metaphysical word. *Maya* comes from the root verb *ma*, which means "to measure, limit, and give form," and is sometimes translated as "that which measures." The idea is that the measurements of time and space are the basis of *maya*.

With *maya* in the picture, time and space are now measured and therefore limited. Within the previously all-pervasive and eternal universal Consciousness, five cloaks of limitation come into the picture and reduce universal freedom to limited experience.

Until this stage, universal Consciousness is unlimited, pure, and perfect within itself — eternal, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, and perfectly contented. Now, with the forgetfulness that comes from the power of illusion, the dream of this world begins. Universal Consciousness becomes covered with the five cloaks, which translate into Sanskrit as *pancha* (five) *kanchukas* (cloaks), or *pancha-kanchukas*. (I always like to share the fun-sounding Sanskrit terms with you.) And these *kanchukas* do pack a punch! The five powers that become limited by these five cloaks are omnipotence, omniscience, perfection, eternity, and omnipresence. These cloaks act like veils that cover and limit the full powers of supreme Consciousness.

Once the cloaks are in place, supreme Consciousness can do certain things but not others, can know some things but not others, can be in some places but not others, is satisfied with some things but not others, and can exist in one time but not others. When your true nature as universal Consciousness is covered by these five cloaks of illusion:

- **Omnipotence (universal authorship) becomes limited abilities.** Your previous ability to do anything and everything turns into limited action, where you can do some things but not others.
- **Omniscience (universal knowledge) turns into limited knowledge.** Your omniscience of being aware of everything at once becomes limited knowledge, where you know some things and don't know others.

Before this stage of creation, you were all-knowing, but now you have to study to learn things. Without this cloak, there would be no need for schools or universities, because the awareness that is everyone would already know everything.

- **Perfection (universal satisfaction) turns into limited desires.** Supreme Consciousness has no need for the roller coaster of fulfilled and unfulfilled desires. It experiences perfect satisfaction and contentment within itself. However, once this cloak of limited satisfaction comes into place, the universal experience of perfect contentment is compromised by desires, fears, fulfilled and unfulfilled hopes, attachments, aversions, and expectations.
- **Eternality becomes limited time.** Before this stage, supreme Consciousness experienced everything all at once as an eternal awareness and presence, but now it is limited by time constraints of past, present, and future. This limitation of time brings a whole slew of problems.

When your true nature as eternal Consciousness becomes bound by the illusion of time, you begin to hope for something in the future or worry about things that happened in the past. You become locked into an idea of yourself as a separate being in time. From within this limited experience of sequential time, you can't see things objectively or from a bigger picture perspective, but only in bits and pieces and in time-based succession. With this cloak, you feel that you belong only to this time, that you didn't exist before, and that you won't exist in the future.

- **Omnipresence becomes limited placement.** Before this cloak, you were completely free and all-pervasive. You existed everywhere all at once. Now, you have to travel to go somewhere, and you know how much of a hassle that can be.

One modern analogy for the experience of omnipresence is the world wide Web of the Internet, where everything is existing and available to tap into all from one place – your computer. But once the cloak of limitation is placed over omnipresence, you can only be in one place at a time instead of being everywhere all at once.

This fifth stage of creation is where all-powerful Consciousness becomes trapped in its own dream, so that it appears to be at the mercy of outer forces over which it has no control. This stage sets the stage for the dance of limited world experience to take place.

You may wonder why supreme Consciousness would give up its divine freedom and take on these illusory limitations. The answer may be that only through these cloaks of limitation can the supreme all-knowing Consciousness get to have exciting limited experiences such as being surprised, happy, or disappointed – in and as you and everyone else. Only through forgetting that it is the dreamer of the dream of creation can universal Consciousness experience the play of the world, with all its colorful and exciting twists and turns (not to mention pizza).

My oh maya!

Like an artist, it is the nature of Supreme Consciousness to create. *Maya*, also known as universal illusion, brings the paints with which Consciousness crafts its colorful masterpieces of world creation. But maya also brings some not-so-pleasant side effects along with all the entertainment.

Once maya begins to blossom, universally free Consciousness starts to experience the sense of limitation. All of a sudden, omniscient, omnipresent Consciousness starts to feel, “Oh, I can’t do that,” or, “I want this, but it’s not coming to me,” or “I want to know this but it is difficult to understand.” Before this level of maya came into manifestation, your awareness knew everything and could do anything without any effort. Now, just look at yourself!

Seriously, look at yourself and your life and see all the creations of maya expressing in and as your life. Learn to watch, explore, and find entertainment in the play of your life.

Stage 6

With the cloaks of illusion and limitation in place, your mind, intellect, and self-awareness take form. In this stage of universal creation, the all-pervasive, infinite, eternal pure Consciousness becomes you, as you know yourself to be. Shrouded by illusion and forgetting its own nature, the limited individual experiences a world of duality through the mind’s faculties of self-awareness, mental comprehension, and intelligence:

- **Self-awareness:** In this stage, the self-conscious ego takes birth, which is not the sense of “I” as the highest “I Am” consciousness, but rather the ego’s “I am this but not that” awareness of being a separate, limited individual who thinks of everything in terms of: me, me, me, me, and me.
- **Mental comprehension:** Along with this limited “I” consciousness comes a thinking, perceiving mind, which is also called the “lower mind.” This thinking mind builds worlds of experience from the internal and apparently external materials of images, concepts, and words.
- **Intelligence:** Mixed in with this mental bundle at stage 6 is the superior mind, or intellect. In Sanskrit, this higher intelligence is called *buddhi*, which is related to the name of the spiritual figure Buddha, who is said to have achieved the great unfoldment of this superior mind.

The buddhi brings forth intuitive perceptions and intelligent understandings that penetrate deeply into the nature of things. This superior intellect can become the doorway for the lower, limited person to re-enter the higher realms of experience.

Consider

Calming your mind and ego by reading potent spiritual philosophies and doing practices such as meditation and inward reflection can help to strengthen and polish your higher intelligence.

Stage 7

Once your mind, intellect, and ego are in place, the senses and physical world take form. On the bottom rung of this creation ladder are the physical senses (smelling, tasting, seeing, feeling by touch, and hearing), the physical universe, which is composed of elements such as earth, air, fire, water, and ether, and all the actions each person expresses into the physical world.

Tadaa! Perfectly free universal Consciousness now takes the form of all the strange and amazing creations in this world.

Waking up from the illusions of maya

You can think of the experience of awakening from maya as being like the experience of awakening from a dream where you were running from a gang of criminals. Upon awakening, you realize that the whole storyline and experience was an illusion. The criminals didn't exist, nor was anyone really chasing you.

Nevertheless, the experience wasn't completely unreal. Certainly, your fear and pounding heart were real. This is where a subtle distinction comes regarding the unique nature of maya versus the common use of the word illusion. Illusion is generally used to refer to something that doesn't exist but is falsely portrayed as existing. Maya, on the other hand, is existent and non-existent at the same time.

The experience you had while running for your life in the dream was real while the dream was occurring; therefore, the maya of this dream can't be called non-existent. Yet, through the sobriety of wakefulness, you can see that the dream was an illusory world.

The only problem is that there is no objective experiment you can run to prove that the waking state you're experiencing right now is any more real than last night's dream — which probably also felt completely real at the time. If you *are* in a dream right now, I hope the alarm doesn't go off until you finish this chapter!

Don't Forget

Even though the chart in Figure 14-1 appears to show a sequential transformation of consciousness moving down the chart over time, the whole multi-leveled process is also happening all at once.

It isn't so much that pure Consciousness stops being pure Consciousness when the world takes form. Rather, even as pure Consciousness descends into the lower stages of having personal experiences in a physical reality, it never moves from its highest state of pure being.

A popular Indian prayer says, "That highest Consciousness is perfect; and this creation is perfect. Perfection arises from perfection. Even if you take some of the perfect from perfection, still it remains as completely perfect."

Spirituality in Action

Imagine moving your personal consciousness up the chart in Figure 14-1, walking back up the ladder of creation from the physical world and senses, through the mental conditions, beyond illusory limitations, and into the great freedom of your true nature as universal Consciousness. Imagine being an enlightened person who can live in the entire map of creation all at once, being aware of all the levels of consciousness at the same time.

What is the world made of?

This universe isn't just some kind of inconsequential, random spark that has blasted through a big black hole somewhere beyond the space/time continuum. I mean, it may be that, but it is also much more than that. In all of its reality and unreality, its confusion and confidence, its love and hate, creation and destruction, this universe is magnificent and unfathomable — more brilliant than can be beheld or understood by mere senses or mind.

One view echoed in many spiritual and scientific traditions is that the entire universe is, as Buckminster Fuller described, "Energy radiantly manifest at relative rates of regarded speed." This description means that all the things you see, hear, feel, taste, smell, know, and touch are nothing but different energy vibrations.

According to science, these vibrations are imported through our sense organs and transformed by a complex electrochemical cocktail of brain functions, including cognition and memory, along with a touch of unquantifiable personal consciousness, to create what is basically a mirage of subjective experience that represents an apparent outer world. Neuroscience says that we aren't so much perceiving as creating what we experience.

This scientific theory fits in well with ancient spiritual assertions that this world is maya – a kind of waking-state dream that continues to manifest itself merrily, merrily (and sometimes not so merrily or gently!) down the ever-flowing stream of worldly life.

Scientists have discovered that what you see as visual images of different colors are not inherently those colors but rather different amplitudes of light wavelengths impinging on little receptors called rods and cones in your eyes and translated into the subjective experience of red, blue, and other colors by your brain.

Even solid objects can be considered as solidified vibrations — frequencies so deep and dense that they take form as tangible objects. Just think of what happens when someone (not you, I'm sure!) blasts his or her music so loud that the whole room or car shakes. The sound vibrations take on physical forms that are strong enough to move objects around. If you take these vibrations a few notches deeper down the energy vibration spectrum to the point where your ears can no longer translate those particular waves as sound, voilà! You've got yourself a solid object.

How this world is like a movie

Consider an actor who plays a scary bad guy in a horror film. When you watch this awful, evil man on the screen, you're having an experience that is similar to the kind of illusion called maya.

While watching the movie, you're afraid of this man. You may even hate him. You want bad things to happen to him, because he is such a bad guy.

Yet, at the same time, you know that he's really an actor who is probably a very nice fellow with lots of money who goes to Hollywood parties and such. Certainly, you don't really hope a bomb will explode in his face, nor do you want him to die so that his poor victims — who are probably also feeling quite fine in their own Hollywood homes — will be freed from his scripted wretchedness.

Spirituality in Action

Think of someone in your life who has played the “bad guy” for you. Now imagine that the same universal Consciousness has created both this bad guy and you, and is playing both roles, perhaps to give Itself a bit of challenge to experience and work with.

While immersed in watching a movie, you can see how easy it is to even voluntarily allow yourself to fall for objects that seem to exist, but don't really. In the case of this movie, you may despise the evil character being portrayed by the actor, even while knowing deep down that if you saw him on the street, you would probably want to ask him for an autograph.

This scenario is similar to what life feels like when you start to see beyond the illusions of life. It doesn't mean that nothing will ever surprise, disturb, or scare you, nor does it mean that you won't see what appear to be negative events or people. However, with a more enlightened perspective, you know that all the joys and sorrows, colors and textures, and ups and downs of life are not quite, totally, ultimately real.

With a vision of Universal Creation, you experience the situations of your life and enjoy the plot twists. You know that a divine actor is playing every part in this movie of life. Behind every personal interaction, you can sense divinity winking at divinity through all the players involved.

Consider

Watching your life as you may watch a movie is a state of awareness that some ancient scriptures called *witness consciousness*. Witness consciousness doesn't mean that you just space out and disengage from the world, but rather that you watch the play as a witness even while you enthusiastically perform your role in the play.

Just as universal Consciousness is both watching and creating this universe, so you are also watching and creating your universe, your personal expression, and your role in this play. Sometimes you're watching a comedy, sometimes a romance, and other times it may even be a horror story. Yet, your deepest inner state remains constant throughout all the stories.

Don't Forget

In this reality show of your life, don't forget to smile for the "camera"!

Rising above illusions

Some religious and spiritual traditions guide you to withdraw from the world and to hide yourself in a cave or go to a mountaintop where you can escape the illusions of life. This approach can help to keep your mind and heart focused on greater matters, however it is not always the most practical approach, nor is it the only way to become free from the bindings of illusion.

You may renounce your home, family, friends, job, clothes, and anything and everything else that you own, however this kind of outer renunciation does not guarantee spiritual liberation or freedom from illusion.

What needs to be renounced is the ego, the self-interest, the petty desires, and sense of ownership. What needs to be renounced are the false ideas about who you are – thinking that all you are is an individual body with a mind that is separate from the universe, from God, and from everyone and everything else. This limited identification is the main illusion that keeps you from entering into higher spiritual awareness.

If you have a luxurious mansion with several expensive cars, closets full of clothes, and all the fortune anyone could want, and you remove your attachment and identification from all these achievements and objects, knowing that they are just flickers on the screen of supreme universal Consciousness – then you are able to rise above illusion even while enjoying all the benefits and blessings of an abundant life in this world.

Why God created the world

Okay, I'll admit it. I thought it would be fun to make a sidebar called "Why God created the world." Nevertheless, one reason proposed by spiritual sages is that God separates from His own eternal oneness and becomes you so that He (or, if you prefer, It or She) can love Himself, experience Himself, and create amazing worlds within Himself.

That one divine light not only appears to become separate from its own profoundly perfect self, but it also creates all these different forms, like you and me, so there are many others to love – or in some cases, to learn to love!

Or maybe, like this sidebar, He creates it all just for fun.

Spirituality in Action

The following exercise can help you to rise above the illusions of your own life-movie by giving you a way to practice controlling your levels of absorption in the illusions of a theatrical movie.

1. **Go to a movie theater and watch a movie — with friends or alone.** Intense dramas are especially good for this exercise, but any movie will do.
2. **Let yourself settle in as the movie begins.** Enjoy your popcorn or soda as you would on any movie occasion. Watch the opening credits and the set-up scenes.
3. **Ten minutes into the movie, close your eyes and gently pull your conscious awareness away from the story you've been watching.** Take the reins of your mind into your conscious control. Instead of just letting go into wherever the movie has been guiding your mind, use the power of your will to become consciously aware of who and where you really are.
4. **Take a moment to remember whatever events have just happened in the past hour or so — how you arrived at the theater, any interactions you may have had with your friends or other people, and so on.** The idea behind this part of the exercise is to reaffirm who you are in the nonmovie reality, even while the movie is playing.
5. **Now open your eyes and let your awareness go back to the movie.** Sorry if you missed an important clue for the surprise ending, but it's worth the sacrifice to know how to do this!
6. **Let yourself become fully absorbed in the movie for 30 or so more minutes.** A particularly dramatic moment during this part of the film is the best time to go to Step 7.

7. **Right in the middle of a dramatic moment, pull your attention away from the movie again, but this time, look around the theater.** See the forms of people sitting in the audience. Listen to the crunching and sipping sounds and people shuffling their feet around. Smell the air in the theater. Take a sip of your drink and let all your senses take root in the reality that you're sitting there in the movie theater. You can do this for a few minutes or however long you'd like.
8. **Go back to watching the movie with the goal of enjoying it fully, but at the same time, consciously remembering throughout the rest of the movie that you're sitting in a theater watching a movie.** To do this step, you have to access two different mental viewpoints at the same time. You may find yourself bouncing back and forth from awareness of the movie to awareness of sitting in the theater, which is fine. You're exercising your mental muscles of staying in witness consciousness during dramatic events.
9. **When you leave the movie theater, you can take this exercise to the next level.** Remember the feeling of having the two co-existing viewpoints, and apply that sensation to the events that unfold around you. Talk with your friends and enjoy your dinner, but keep a simultaneous awareness that you are a seat of divine conscious awareness watching the movie of your life as it unfolds. Even if you don't fully believe or understand that this is what you are, it's still fine to do as an exercise.

Life is but a dream

Spiritual Wisdom

Wake up! At least now, wake up, o foolish one. Consider this whole creation as a mere dream. This world is like a flower in bloom; as you watch it, it wilts right before your eyes. So, why are you attached to it?

—Brahmananda

One way to describe the nature of this world is to use the metaphor of a dream. When you're dreaming, you experience all these objects and events. You have perceived histories with the people in your dream and may go through conflicts, communications, responsibilities, and phases of good and bad fortune. In the dream state, your unconscious mind can create any scenario and characters it desires.

What are your dreams made of? What are the people in your dreams made of? Who are they really? What are the situations and obstacles in your dreams made of? Every one of them is made of nothing but your own consciousness.

Think about it – you pick something up in a dream, and feel that it's solid and separate from you, but it's neither solid nor separate from you. It's your own consciousness manifesting as the illusion of that object and all the other objects in your dream.

If a spiritual person came up to you in your dream and said, “We’re all one!” your dream persona may think the person is a little strange or “out there.” But the person would be absolutely right. Everything in your dream is created from the same creative consciousness of your so-called “unconscious mind.”

This dream metaphor is similar to what some of the world’s most profound philosophies say this entire universe is. You are one with the creator of the whole thing, but you disguise yourself and cover the truth. Then you get to experience your life as real and existing outside of yourself. It’s exciting because you never know what will happen next!

Don’t Forget

Above all the goals and concerns you may have within your waking-state-dream, the foremost goal from a spiritual perspective is to know that you’re dreaming and to WAKE UP!!!

Interpreting your life-dream

You walk out of the door one day, and every person you meet is smiling at you with beaming looks of love. A puppy runs over to greet you. Every traffic light seems perfectly timed to turn green just when you want it to. An unexpected gift comes in the mail, and that song you love comes on the radio. Have you ever had days like this?

Then there are those other kinds of days, where everything seems to go wrong — from big things to little things, right down to the bad-hair day and lost car keys. Sometimes you may even think that a big meeting was held for everyone you know, where they were all given instructions on how to make your life difficult!

One way to apply a higher perspective viewpoint to your life is to realize that, just as in your dreams, your waking state is also filled with a rich tapestry of symbolism. Without a spiritual view, the world can appear to be quite drab and meaningless. However, after you begin to appreciate the profound symbolic nature of your waking state dream, even difficulties or boring times can become fascinating and educational. Everywhere you look are lessons, omens, patterns, and synchronicities to discover.

Shifting into a Higher Perspective

Shifting into a higher perspective means living with a “universe is Consciousness” attitude. This shift means that you know it’s all God even when it doesn’t all *feel* like God.

This shift doesn’t mean that you have to follow a certain set of behaviors. Being in a higher perspective doesn’t mean that you never feel sad or weep, but that when you weep, you weep fully; and when you’re done weeping, you stop.

When you live in a “universe is Consciousness” perspective, you’re not trapped by the past or afraid of the future. You have equal respect for everyone and everything. You know that everyone who comes before you is a manifestation of Consciousness – even telemarketers (although it is fine to cut conversations short with certain forms of supreme Consciousness!)

Spiritual Wisdom

Swami Lakshman Joo, one of the great teachers of Kashmir Shaivism, said, “You can recognize Lord Shiva through the universe, not by abandoning it, but by observing and experiencing God Consciousness in the very activity of the world.”

Does the world really exist?

Philosophers through the ages have considered this question: Does the world really exist, or does it not really exist? According to some spiritual philosophies, the answer is both. The world exists, and it doesn't exist. One scripture uses the analogy of a reflection in a mirror to describe what the manifested world is like.

You have a mirror that is showing an entire city in its reflection, but without there being any actual form of the city in front of the mirror. There's just the reflection. So the question is – does that city exist? Well, it does exist, because the reflection is there. But does the city exist independent of the mirror? No. Can the contents of the image of the city change the mirror at all? No. Does the mirror care if the things being reflected in it are beautiful or ugly? Probably not.

This is where the idea of equality consciousness comes in (see Chapter 11), where you see this whole universe as a reflection in the perfectly pure Consciousness that exists before, during, and after all creation. That mirror of Consciousness is your true nature, and upon the face of that mirror plays the whole saga of this world and your life. To the pure, elevated part of yourself that is Supreme Consciousness, it doesn't matter if you have pleasant or unpleasant experiences. These events and experiences are merely reflections playing upon the pure mirror of your soul.

First cause versus second cause

Spiritual Wisdom

What if you slept? And what if in your sleep, you dreamed? And what if in your dream you went to heaven and there plucked a strange and beautiful flower? And what if when you awoke, you had the flower in your hand? Ah! What then?

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge

A vase that sits on a table in your dream is made of your very own consciousness. It may take on the appearance of glass, metal, or clay, but the first-cause “substance” of which the vase in your dream is made is consciousness. You could call the other perceived qualities of the vase second-cause.

If you drop a glass vase in your dream, it is likely that the vase will appear to shatter and equally possible that you may cut your dream-finger while picking up the glass fragments. Aha! Physical evidence that the experience is real, right?

Here are observations of the first and second causes in this dream experience:

- **Second-cause:** The shape, color, and sharpness of the glass shards are *second-cause qualities* of the vase.
- **First-cause:** Your own creative consciousness is the *first cause* behind the dream vase as well as your bleeding dream finger. According to the ancient spiritual sages, a higher-level form of the same first-cause consciousness that creates your dreams has also created your waking state and the so-called real world.

Universal first-cause is the mother of this whole creation. First-cause can change anything, create new worlds, and answer any prayer. (See Chapter 15 for more on how this first-cause power manifests in your life.)

With an awareness of the divine nature of this world, you can look at everything as an opportunity to interact with the Divine. Look for God in all the right places, which is everywhere. Touch God, feel God, taste God inside and out. See God in nature, in trees, in birds and other animals, in the sun and the rain, and in the moon and stars that shine at night. See divine Consciousness manifesting in and as your loved ones, your not-so-loved ones, and of course yourself.

Spiritual Wisdom

Jesus said, “I am the light that is over all things. I am all: from me all came forth, and to me all attained. Split a piece of wood; I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there.” (Gospel of Thomas v.77)