“Wire, Briar, Limber Lock:
Further Notions for a Dynamic Discussion Board”

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“Only Connect”
   --E. M. Forster, *Howards End*

Story about Nathan, “Can you feel the difference?”

Three features of the Discussion Board

1. Stabilizing Coherence
   Clarity of themes
   Examples from the two courses offered
   Noting the “gap” between lectures before and after
   Midterm in “Worldviews and Values in the Bible

2. Destabilizing Creativity
   “to imagine otherwise”
   Bringing in examples relevant to discussion, to amplify
   the base structure of material
   Dead Sea Scrolls

3. “The Arrow of Sense Ahead of Us” -- Paul Ricoeur
   helping “possibilize” relevance of course material beyond
   the class, down the road, out into the world
   variety of religions intimated, readied by conversation,
   travel, issues encountered in careers

   “What new thing might come your way now that we have
   met?” -- Ralph Waldo Emerson
Week Seven's invitation is to post insights that come to mind regarding Ivan Ilych's journey to awareness in light of his "bourgeois" life lacking compassion at almost every turn as his career advances. Here are some questions to get the ball rolling: what does Peter Ivanovich "see" on Ivan Ilych's dead face in Ch 1? What is suggested by the way Gerasim steps, busily doing his chores, as people arrive to pay their respects? For what does Ivan Ilych "fall?" What metaphor does Tolstoy employ to suggest Ivan Ilych's spiritual condition in Ch 4? Of all the people in Ivan Ilych's world, he only wishes that Gerasim, the butler's assistant, be near him in his illness. Why? Whose voice does Ivan Ilych hear near the end of the novella in his throes of very real pain and suffering? What does this voice ask of him? Why "twelve" chapters? Why not, say, eight or twenty?

Week Six Discussion of Frontline's "From Jesus to Christ"

Along with two films for this week, I thought it would be rewarding for us to scroll through and explore a very rich "external link," the audio and images drawn from a famous PBS presentation on Jesus and the world in which he moved and breathed. You'll find a trove of insights offered by the best Biblical scholarship of our day (Wayne Meeks, Elaine Pagels, John Dominic Crossan, Elizabeth Clarke, Paula Fredrickson, et alia). It is just first rate throughout. Go into this site, travel around a bit, learn about the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Roman Empire, the immediate world of Jesus and his confreres, and discuss! discuss! discuss!

Discussion of Lecture Five: Pilgrimage towards Covenant

Invitation to post insights from material discussed in Lecture Five, the story of a nomadic unknown bunch of nobodies who over time and hardship find themselves united to a God of Covenant, a covenant championed by prophets and very very hard to keep. Most of us in class, whether Jew or Christian, Hindu or Muslim or agnostic, draw much from this water-table narrative tradition. Also included for discussion is Part One of a famous Film Series narrated by Abba Eban, a renowned statesman and historian: "Heritage: Civilization and the Jews: A People Is Born." Feel invited to discuss any of the above!
**Discussion of film, "Legendary Trails: Footprints of the Buddha"**

Invitation to post insights we find worth noting on this film following the pilgrimage route from Khatmandu down to Lumbini (the Buddha's birthplace), Sarnath in the Varanasi district (where the Buddha preached his first sermon), then through Patna (where the Buddha preached from a high overlook to some five thousand) to Nalanda (where the film focuses on the ruins of an ancient Buddhist university) and finally to Bodh Gaya, center of the Buddhist universe and the place where the Buddha attained enlightenment. This film is loaded with images, rituals, traditions, narrow roads, chants, young monks, pilgrims from Canada, candlelight, stupas, Keanu Reeves (!), prayer wheels, and a stirring image of reincarnation. In what ways do these images assume meaning in the film? in your viewing of the film? Discuss! [You will notice I have included a second film on Buddhism, part of "The Long Search" series; you do NOT have to view it, it is not a requirement, but I include it for those who wish another angle into this fascinating wisdom tradition. I will include two extra credit questions from this film for the midterm.]

**Siddhartha and his Quest for Meaning**

Invitation to post insights we have on Siddhartha's pilgrimage to awareness, friendship, wisdom. Note the symbols: river, shadow, bird, dreams, lover, son, forest, city, snake, moon, raft. In what ways do these images assume meaning for you as a reader? What other symbols to you see that I haven't listed?

**Discussion of first film, India: Empire of Spirit**

Inviting all to post reflections, insights from the film, India: Empire of Spirit

**General**

Use this discussion board to address items having to do with the class in general (assignments, deadlines, etc.). Instead of emailing the instructor, use this forum. Anyone should feel free to provide answers or suggestions to various questions.

**Discussion of Review for Midterm [midterm is open from this Thursday through next Monday (22 April through 26 April 2010)]**

Notice the dates open for the proctored midterm: 22 April through 26 April. Let us engage this forum for postings of questions, discussions, thoughts relevant to our "gearing up" for the midterm exam: the format of the midterm, nature of terms, ideas, dates, etc. The quality of this "space" in our class of course will be determined by our participation.
**Week Eight: The Long Search: Islam: There Is No God but God**

Week Eight finds us rounding the turn for home. Islam is the last of the historic religions we study, and it is the clearest to understand as we begin thinking about the Final Exam. The assigned reading for this week is clear as well: the chapter in Smith and two brief chapters in Porterfield--not required, but interesting). Pay particular attention to the idea of "jihad," since the media give it a different turn than our texts. Remember to visit a form of worship other than your own--the Worship assignment is due the Monday of Week Nine. Beginning today, all are welcome to discuss insights from viewing of film on Islam in "The Long Search" series for Week Eight.

**Tayo and his Quest for Meaning: Weeks Nine and Ten**

Ahh, yes, now you know the routine! Feel invited to post insights from your reading of Tayo's "journey to the center." Be sure to consult in Lecture Eight what I have spread out on the ground for you to consider from Silko's novel--a run-down on the characters, the plot, the sense of the feminine threading through the narrative, and then hie thee back to this Discussion Board and share your thoughts on Ceremony! Although Tolstoy's Death of Ivan Ilych is extra credit, Ceremony is not, so be sure to set aside some time to engage this narrative. It may well be the most moving, intriguing bit of reading you "do" in our little class this term. I'll post some further notes on Ceremony beyond Lecture Eight as an announcement Thursday of Week Seven.

**Review for the Final: Open from 6-9 June 2010**

This will be the site where we can post and discuss any questions we might have as we prepare for the proctored final (the Final will be open from 6 June (Sunday noon) through 9 June [Wednesday 9:00 pm]) of Finals Week. Still unclear about a word, term, subject, date? Ask it here. Not sure which chapters you should reread? Ask it here. I will do my best to respond in a timely way. Good luck to everyone! Hope you have enjoyed the class. (And remember to submit course evaluations!)

**Just getting off the ground**

I encourage everyone to post their first insights from Huston Smith's "Introduction" in the course textbook, The World's Religions

**Introductions**

Let's get acquainted. Tell us about yourself.
Weeks Seven and Eight Discussion Topic: Post Twice

Outside the Temple: James Joyce's Portrait of the Idea of God

Joyce is the first modern author to make secular use of the religious notion of "epiphany," or as his earlier incomplete novel has it, "a sudden spiritual manifestation." So he is a wonderful illustration of where one finds oneself when the old formulations, orthodoxies about "the idea of God" seem to be fading over the horizon. Travel with young Stephen to feel where he gets the material for his religious view of reality "outside the Temple," out in the flotsam and jetsam covered ordinary world of today. Try to provide an image, scene, notion you could share with others in the course that might elicit creative dialogue as we near the end of our postings for this course on "The Idea of God."

Week Six Discussion Topic

The Protestant/Reformers Idea of God

This material will look very very (very!) familiar to those influenced by the dominant Christian traditions of Protestantism which had such a formative hand in shaping the history and ideals of America's self-understanding.

Week Five Discussion Topic: Philosophical and Mystical Ideas of God

Famous Philosophical Arguments for the Idea of God and Chapter Seven's discussion of the Mystical idea(s) of God

This is the week where the rubber meets the road, in a course sponsored by the Dept of Philosophy. In the Middle Ages, theology was seen as the "queen of the sciences." "The Idea of God" was important as a goal of unaided reason. That is, the human mind, without the aid of revelation, could be persuaded of the existence of God. See if you can distinguish the merits of each of the three famous arguments for the idea of God: the ontological, the cosmological, and the teleological. All three are famous, all three have their current supporters, and all three are seen by many as not nearly as persuasive as they once were. Such arguments as these are clearly different than mystical understandings, which are served up in Armstrong's Chapter Seven as a clear, "graspable" contrast.
**Week Four Discussion Topic**

The Muslim Idea of God

From media coverage to the declaration that Islam is our clearest example of "one God," "the God," from the greatest world event of pilgrimage to the fastest growing of the world religions, there is I am sure much we would welcome to discuss in this week's subject.

**Week Three Discussion Topic**

The Christian Idea of God: Three or One?

The theme of this Post is doubtless close to home for most of us in the course, the growing self-understanding of Christianity, both historically (Armstrong discusses the roots engagingly) and philosophically (Armstrong and Eck), touching the mystery of the three faces of God (and Judaism's and Islam's suspicion of Christianity's slippage into polytheism because of it). Eck's third chapter [on the syllabus assigned for Week Four, but you might wish to get a jump on it] is particularly good in inviting us to think about "oneness" and "manyness," and the ease with which Hindus celebrate the abundance of divine manifestation. This is where we could also discuss what Eck, following James Hillman, calls "the myth of monotheism" (one God, one nation, oneness as somehow clearer than plurality)

**Week Two Discussion Topic**

Eck's First Chapter: A River Knows the Idea of God

The goal of this Discussion Board topic is Diana Eck's welcoming first chapter, and the way(s) she gets the ball rolling by focusing on religion as more like a river than a stone. She uses a lot of "process," "flow," "change" metaphors, and is very willing to include stories of her own upbringing in Montana--what she saw, what she did, what she (in hindsight) didn't see. This book has worn well in other courses I have taught--how do you find yourself easing into the subject matter of Eck's volume--where are the watering wholes? what might be different about your own background, and does your background have its own basket of key notions, metaphors, rivers? Should prove fascinating to discuss. This Topic will be open for engagement through the end of the third week.

**Introductions**

Let's get acquainted. Tell us about yourself.
**Week One Discussion Topic**

Thinking About the Idea of God: Judaism in the Beginning

The goal of this first week's discussion board topic is our engagement with "beginnings," especially as noted by Armstrong. Why would she begin with a Catholic scholar's theory about earliest writings? Are we naturally drawn to "the idea of God" when reflecting on the origins of the cosmos? earliest stories of a people? our earliest memories of our own lives? This would be a good place to begin (naturally!) discussions of the religious significance of myth, too. This site will be "open" for engagement through the end of Week Two.

**General**

Use this discussion board to address items having to do with the class in general (assignments, deadlines, etc.). Instead of emailing the instructor, use this forum. Anyone should feel free to provide answers or suggestions to various questions.

**Review for the Midterm**

**Week Nine Discussion Topic**

The Idea of God: Inclusivist, Exclusivist, or Pluralist?

In case there is creative "spillage" from your third homework assignment, there is room here to post and dialogue further about the key chapter/argument of Eck's wonderfully voiced book, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras*

**Week Ten Discussion Topic**

What New Thing about the Idea of God Has Come Your Way Now that We Have Met?

This is the final hurrah, the final wrap, spun differently: rather than invoking Emerson's quote as a quickening launch into a week's discussion, "What new thing has come your way since last we met?" I invite us to volley forth a final swan song in response to "What new thing 'might' come our way now that we have met?" And thanks for being in the class, one and all. See you down the road.

**Review for the Final**