

SAFFRON ROBES & PHYSICS

A Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Arthur M. Suggs
Preached on February 1, 2015

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

“We are spiritual beings, we have always been spiritual beings, and we will always be spiritual beings. The difference is that now we are becoming aware of ourselves as spiritual beings, and that is making all the difference.

“Every action, thought, and feeling is motivated by an intention, and that intention is a cause that exists at one with an effect. . . . In this most profound way, we are held responsible for every action, thought, and feeling, which is to say, for our every intention.

“Before it incarnates, each soul enters into a sacred contract with the Universe to accomplish certain things. It enters into this commitment in the fullness of its being. Whatever the task that your soul has agreed to, all of the experiences of your life serve to awaken within you the memory of that contract and to prepare you to fulfill it.” *[Ed.: The preceding paragraph was omitted from the spoken sermon.]*

“Your emotional reactions to the evil you encounter and your judgments of it show you what you need to change in yourself. Changing those parts of your personality that judge, react in fear, and cannot love into acceptance, fearlessness, and love is the journey you were born to make.

“The decisions that you make and the actions that you take upon the Earth are the means by which you evolve.

“You cannot, and will not, encounter a circumstance, or a single moment, that does not serve directly and immediately the need of your soul to heal, to come into wholeness.” – *The Seat of the Soul*

Quotes from Gary Zukav

Dancing with My Spiritual Teacher

Today I am beginning a sermon series on modern saints and spiritual teachers. Gary Zukav is today, and Mother Teresa is next Sunday. And so it's going to be a mixture over the coming weeks, a mixture between the famous and the not-so-famous (I've got a feeling that some of you have never heard of Gary Zukav, but you have heard of Mother Teresa.), between Christian and

not-so-Christian, and between western and not-so-western. But as I have pondered this series, and I have for several weeks now, I thought it best to begin at the beginning.

Outside of my parents and my minister, Gary Zukav was my first spiritual teacher. And it had to do with a book that I bought, largely having judged it by its cover, called *The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics*. It was 1979, and I had not yet met my Waterloo in physics. It was at hand, but not yet. Of course, I had not yet even entertained the notion of seminary. The book was fantastic. It was about physics, yes, but it was about so much more than that. It was about what this New Physics *meant*. How do we interpret it? And dare I say it, it was about a spiritual understanding of what everyone was learning about the New Physics.

My professors were loathe to speak of meaning, much less spirituality. For them, their mantra was, “Art, do your homework! Learn the math! Study! Don’t worry about this stuff!”

And here was this book with its arresting title, and sort of a Hindu Goddess cover, and as I dove in, I was barely able to come back up for air. I was smitten with the ideas in it. Little did I know that I would first become a student of the meaning of the New Physics, and then as the decades passed, I would become an evangelist.

My Jump from Physics to Evangelism

But then came one of those crisis events in a person’s life. There was a fork in my path, and I needed to decide which path to take.

As I mentioned, that book, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*, was published in 1979. (Wu li, by the way, is simply Chinese for physics.) Zukav is also, more famously, the author of a book called *The Seat of the Soul*. That came out a number of years later, and it is Oprah’s number-two favorite book, her number-one favorite being the Bible. *The Seat of the Soul* is on her nightstand, she says. (Talk about an endorsement!)

Anyway, he publishes this book in 1979, and immediately wins the American Book Award for Science. He becomes famous, with lots of copies printed and reviewed in *The New York Times* and *Scientific American*. Zukav is *not* a physicist, but rather he was becoming a spiritual teacher, writing rather journalistically about physics. His physics, however, was spot-on, because, in the process of being written, the book was reviewed by a team at the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratories. Having accomplished that, he’s no slouch.

So the Physics Department at Purdue University invited Zukav to be a guest lecturer in 1980. I had read the book and was superexcited about having him come to speak. I reread the book and finished it the night before his lecture. I attended the lecture sitting in the back of a packed auditorium. Toward the front, were many of the professors in the Physics Department. I was a bit disappointed when Zukav gave the lecture because pretty much all he did was to give us a synopsis of what was in the book.

Well, what happened next was about halfway through, when one physics professor after another after another after another got up noisily and walked out in the middle of Zukav's talk. It was beyond rude. They had invited him. He was their guest, and beyond that, they're the ones telling *me* to do my homework? He didn't say anything that wasn't in his book! *They* hadn't read it! They hadn't done *their* homework!

I was disillusioned mightily. Embarrassed. But at the same time I was hooked by those ideas that I had found in the book, and so, this was the fork in the road. My days in physics were numbered. I would go on to read *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Robert Persig, 1974, and Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics* (1975), and my path, apparently, was chosen.

The Ideas that Hooked Me

What are they anyway, and why should we care? There are many, but let me offer three of them:

1. **Oneness.** I have spoken with you in the past about oneness, perhaps ad nauseum. This is one of Zukav's ideas:

It is the notion that the universe is not composed of many things. It is one thing with many facets. The notion that came from the early part of the Twentieth Century was that the universe is composed of matter and energy. But Einstein said matter equals energy. $E = MC^2$. And it began to dawn on people far and wide throughout the century, Wait a minute, it's like the same stuff.

And so by the end of the Twentieth Century, people were beginning to get the idea that, no, it's not matter and energy, it's just simply energy, taking all these different forms. And the boundary between something physical, something wooden and something glass, was a false boundary. The notion of a boundary between this particle and that particle was a false boundary that actually was one thing that melded into the other. And that those things that we call physical are just simply condensations, where there was density here and a lack of density there, but it was one thing.

And then in the late Twentieth Century, due to the work of John Bell and a number of others, they began to realize that there is this incredible, mind-blowing connectivity between it all, so that if you fiddle with this particle, another particle knows about it, not at the speed of light, not if it's 500 light-years away, and therefore 500 years later, it learns about it. No, it's instantaneous that there is this connectivity between each part of the universe all the time, instantaneously.

And then early in the Twenty-First Century, there was proof and reproof and proof again that the phenomenon of oneness exists. And now we're left with the

question, What does this mean? So in 1979, Zukav was showing that there exists a oneness to the whole of it, which was heretofore unimaginable for the average reader to comprehend.

Through Annihilation, the Birth of New Particles

The second idea that hooked me was more artistic, shall we say. Even the book's main title is *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*.

- 2. The Dance.** In the book, Zukav had just explained how subatomic particles collide and annihilate each other, and from those annihilations new particles are born. Consider the following excerpts:

“Subatomic particles forever partake of this unceasing dance of annihilation and creation. In fact, subatomic particles *are* this unceasing dance of annihilation and creation. This Twentieth-Century discovery, with all its psychedelic implications (This is 1979.), is not a new concept. In fact, it is very similar to the way that much of the earth's population, including the Hindus and the Buddhists, view their reality.

“Hindu mythology is virtually a large-scale projection into the psychological realm of microscopic scientific discoveries. Hindu deities such as Shiva and Vishnu continually dance the creation and destruction of universes while the Buddhist image of the wheel of life symbolizes the unending process of birth, death, and rebirth which is a part of the world of form, which is emptiness, which is form.

“Imagine that a group of young artists have founded a new and revolutionary school of art. Their paintings are so unique that they have come to share them with the curator of an old museum. The curator regards the new paintings, nods his head, and disappears into the vaults of the museum. He returns carrying some very old paintings, which he places beside the new ones. The new art is so similar to the old art that even the young artists are taken aback. The new revolutionaries, in their own time and in their own way, have rediscovered a very old school of painting.”

And so, in his process of applying meaning to the new physics, Zukov found that some of the oldest spiritual traditions known to human culture provided the clearest insight into the physics.

The Third Idea Is Hardest

- 3. Intention.** Remember that quote at the beginning about intention?

"Every action, thought, and feeling is motivated by an intention, and that intention is a cause that exists at one with an effect. . . . In

this most profound way, we are held responsible for every action, thought, and feeling, which is to say, for our every intention."

What I'm going to ask of you now, and it's a bit hard, but in your mind, try to combine that idea of intention being a cause that exists at one with an effect. Take that idea and combine it with the original idea of the oneness of the universe. What Zukav was proposing was that the oneness of the universe – the way in which it is one thing and it only appears as many – also includes you and me. Consciousness, awareness, relationship, love, intention, mind, idea, are part of the oneness too. Every thought you have ripples out into the whole of the universe as much as fiddling with a particle or a planet.

One of the MIT physicists (This will have to remain for some other sermon.) has latched upon this idea and has been writing that the universe is not composed of matter and energy, as we thought a century ago, nor is it composed of just energy, as we tend to think now, but rather it is composed of math. Which is nothing more than expressions of the relationship between this and that. And math is an idea. And an idea is always born of consciousness.

Here Is Why You Should Care

Three ideas. Well, I'm at my limit now. I've told you everything I know. Gary Zukav was one of my earliest spiritual teachers, and I feel deeply indebted to him.

Humanity has been praying for centuries for many things: Solutions to problems, material abundance, for this team to beat the other team, for world peace, for food and shelter for the poor, for an end to conflict and hostilities, guidance for world leaders. A whole lot of prayers over the centuries.

But how would it affect you to learn that you are not so much the creation, and God is the creator, but rather that you are a creator also. What if being made in the image of God means that God made us creators just like he is? What if world peace is up to us and not something to be granted eventually by a reluctant God. Many, many good and righteous people have been praying for peace, and God, in His wisdom, continues to just say, No?? What if we are the co-creators and in the past we have wanted war, and we have made it so, and now we are ready to choose otherwise? What if it is up to us? Peace, hunger, war, poverty, the whole of it.

It is an unbelievably radical idea. And I suggest to you that it is very much in your interest to discern if it is true or not. If that is truly who you are in the image of God, or not. If your intentions carry with them divine power, or are they so much chaff in the wind?

What say you, child of God?

Amen.