

Introduction

In our technologically driven postmodern world, does it make sense anymore to speak of the human soul? Can a fresh new inquiry into this topic make a difference? I fervently believe so, given that so much is now at stake in our time of crisis, chaos, war—and widespread soullessness. I also sense an urgent need for such an investigation because of recent advances in neuroscience, consciousness studies, paranormal studies, and integral theory. The findings in these disciplines serve to make the issue of the nature of self and soul all the more relevant. *Your Evolving Soul* is one among many books that examine this topic. But it is unique as well, not only because it draws from all these disciplines but also in its reliance on an unusual esoteric source.

To get started with such an ambitious inquiry, we'll need to get inquisitive. We will want to ask questions such as: When we speak of the soul, what exactly are we referring to? Do we mean the subtle self or the *psyche*? Or, is the soul some aspect of the deep unconscious mind? Is the soul merely another name for our identity, or perhaps our true personality? These considerations also raise the crucial question of whether the soul is the same as—or distinct from—what some have called the inner spirit, the divine spark, the Buddha-nature, the *atman*, or the Self.

This possible distinction between soul and spirit, in turn, brings forward the issue of whether the soul is just one component of a larger self-system. If it is, how do we identify and define the other parts that may comprise that system? In other words, how would we describe our overall human design in relation to the human soul? And if a soul exists and is knowable apart from other aspects of selfhood, how should we understand it today—beyond the sometimes

outworn definitions provided by the world's religions, and in the light of the current findings of scientific psychology?

Additional issues lurk around these questions. These include the classic problem of determining whether this entity we call the soul somehow survives death. And if we answer that question in the affirmative, we find ourselves compelled to consider whether the soul ascends to higher realms or perhaps returns to Earth in a new human body.

On the more practical side, does the soul evolve somehow in response to the kind of life we live? Answering that leads us to inquire about the technique of its evolution as well as the religious issue of the soul's destiny. And finally, if the soul is evolving toward an ultimate goal, might it be possible that the soul's movement in this direction contributes something important to the collective evolution of consciousness? If so, what practices can help us improve the personal soul and the collective soul during this life, and even in the afterlife?

Evolutionary religions and philosophies have developed doctrines in their well-meaning attempts to answer such questions. Some of these teachings about the soul are profound, and some are less so. But the research and analysis I will share make it clear that far too much of what is taught about the human soul in these traditional religious philosophies is vague and inconsistent. And the result in our time seems to me rather tragic. For centuries we have remained divided and confused on the central question of the nature, purpose, and destiny of the human soul—even while physics, for example, has achieved great success in sharpening its definitions and methods and has developed a worldwide consensus regarding its fundamental laws. *Your Evolving Soul* will present a unique model of the soul—and the larger self-system that contains it—in the hope that a new consensus may develop regarding the soul's fundamental definition and the best methods for enhancing its evolution.

And yet, the long legacy of the world's wisdom traditions is not to be scorned. Innumerable saints and sages of the past have been inspired and have built exemplary communities of faith. Many have displayed paranormal feats of body and mind and have performed miraculous healings. Along the way, they have offered teachings

about self, spirit, soul, and human purposes that are so insightful and so helpful that their followers came to believe these teachers to be superhuman or their teachings and writings to be true revelations. And indeed, sparks of genuine divine revelation are contained in the evolving streams of wisdom known as Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and many esoteric and philosophical systems. In fact, I believe that each of these evolving religious communities provides a container for an ongoing stream of personal revelation that is gifted to their adepts, prophets, and mystics. In turn, these men and women find ways to distill their brilliant discoveries to meet the real needs of believers within their particular tradition.

According to the thesis of *Your Evolving Soul*, we are being graced once again by revelation suitable for our time, but in this case it's the gift of *epochal revelation* rather than merely personal revelation. This teaching provides what I believe is a revolutionary new picture of the human soul and self and also offers a profound new portrayal of the nature of the evolving cosmos, and of Deity itself. The Urantia Revelation has, in my view, set in motion a futuristic wisdom stream that is commensurate with the needs of the entire modern world, even though this mysterious text is chiefly seen as pertinent to Christianity. Establishing this bold claim is one part of the core argument of the present book. And because of this belief, *The Urantia Book*, a 2,097-page tome first published in 1955, will be a crucial reference to guide our discussion, but not the only one. (It will also be referred to in this book as the *UB*, the Urantia Revelation, the revelation, the Urantia Papers, and the Urantia text)

Part I of *Your Evolving Soul*, "Introducing an Epochal Revelation," unfolds the basic teachings and tenets of the Urantia Revelation, especially as it pertains to the soul, the self-system, and the cosmological basis of soul evolution. Several forms of evidence for the existence of our soul are examined in chapter 1, "Soul Glimpses: Poetic and Paranormal." In it I highlight intuited notions of the soul arrived at by poets, but I especially focus on the innumerable accounts of life reviews during near-death experiences (NDEs) that seem to validate aspects of the *UB* concept of an evolving soul. Chapter 2, "The Grand Cosmos: A Universal Theatre for

Soul Evolution,” is devoted to a general overview of the Urantia text with special reference to its cosmology, theology, and psychospiritual teachings.

Among the many vital teachings presented in the Urantia Revelation, and the one that has stood out most prominently for me, is the description of the soul’s nature, origin, evolution, and destiny. In particular, *The Urantia Book* states that a “sacred triad” (a simplifying phrase I have coined) comprises the human self. This threefold endowment, which I sometimes also call the inner trio or inner trinity, is the spiritual core of our God-given human design. It is composed of the *evolving soul* and the *Indwelling Spirit* (which is called by many names, including *God Fragment* and *Thought Adjuster*), and its third component is what I like to call the *unique personality* or *personhood*. In the *UB* each of these three elements is depicted as a distinct substance or ontological reality.

Nevertheless, this inner trio works together as one, not unlike the classic Christian conception of the divine Trinity—a threefold but indivisibly one God, wherein, paradoxically, each participant has unique and specific functions. In addition, our sacred triad has a mortal vehicle, the body-mind system, which, along with the trinitarian self-system, creates the conditions for soul evolution, personality unification, and the eventual eternal fusion of the sacred triad—a key topic of chapter 3, “The Synthesis Hypothesis.”

From the strictly human point of view, our evolving soul is the heart of the inner triad, and its growth is largely under our control because of our precious endowment of free will, which is an integral feature of our God-bestowed personhood. According to the account offered in the Urantia Revelation, our soul is a nonphysical transcript of the valuable and salvageable elements of the experiences we choose to have. It is slowly cocreated on a daily basis by virtue of our spiritually significant thoughts, feelings, decisions, and subsequent actions, as these are recognized by the Indwelling Spirit and preserved, immortalized, *in and as our soul* by this divine action operating from within. These elements of real human experience get converted to personal soul memories and become a potentially eternal possession of the individual. In addition, our soul is able to survive death. In fact, it is the only purely personal asset that we

possess going forward into the afterlife, if we later choose to ascend to higher realms.

These higher domains are described in the *UB* as a nested, sequential series of increasingly more advanced worlds upon which we sojourn in an afterlife of ever-more-rich education, socialization, and spiritualization. According to the Urantia account—easily the most detailed elucidation of the life after death in world literature—in this afterlife journey we eventually achieve *God Fusion* or *Father Fusion* (referenced earlier as eternal fusion), a status that assures eternal life and qualifies us for even more advanced challenges and cosmic experiences in our continuing ascent.

Meanwhile, here on Earth our chief evolutionary duty and, more important, our highest joy, is to engage in two core practices or activities that lead us to this goal. The first of these I like to call *soul-synthesis* or *soul-making*, and the second I call *circle-making* or *self-perfecting*—phrases I coined to stand for balanced personality integration, or what the *UB* sometimes calls *personality unification* or *cosmic individuation*. These topics are covered in chapter 4, “Cosmic Individuation: The Circles of Self-Perfecting.” That chapter provides a wider psychospiritual framework for understanding personal evolution and our post-fusion ascension in the afterlife.

The activities of soul- and circle-making are, in my view, the core practices of the cosmic spirituality of the Urantia Revelation. Through such spiritual endeavors we each contribute toward what Teilhard de Chardin once called “the omega point”—the exhaustive realization of all possible experiential meanings and values through the actualization of all cosmic evolutionary potentials. In the *UB*, we are taught that humans truly are perfectible beings, both as individuals and as the collective of all conscious beings. But the journey to perfection described in *The Urantia Book* is far more complex, inclusive, engaging, and lengthy than anything conceived of in previous evolutionary cosmologies. This includes those of G. W. H. Hegel, Sri Aurobindo, Teilhard, or Alfred North Whitehead and his followers, all of which are evolutionary panentheistic systems comparable to the Urantia Revelation.

Our soul growth and self-perfecting continues into our eternal future. And this reality—this phenomenon of the collective

evolution of trillions of evolving humans, from our world and from planets like ours—is the secret of what the *UB* calls the Supreme Being or the Finite God, the so-called evolving Deity of time and space. The Supreme is the God of cosmic evolution. “As we view the ceaseless struggles of the creature creation for perfection of status and divinity of being . . . these unending efforts bespeak the unceasing struggle of the Supreme for divine self-realization.” [117:4.1]

The *UB* reveals that the grand evolution of the Supreme is (in part) constituted by—and is a cosmic summation of—the accumulated evolutionary growth of all beings on all worlds, including the angelic agencies and subinfinite Deities of the evolving realms that we briefly meet in chapters 2 and 3 and elsewhere in this book. This reality of experiential evolution, when combined with the physical evolution of the universe itself toward a state of conscious overcontrol, is the stupendous story of the Finite God who personalizes and future-eternalizes at the end of time, just as our soul personalizes and immortalizes within the very heart of this evolving Deity. And this face of the absolute—one of many facets of the divine—should be regarded as the space-time complement to the changeless, eternal, creator Deity that we worship as God, the Universal Father and Mother. God is infinitely more than a person, but cannot be anything less than a self-aware personality who is the Creator of a far-flung cosmic family of evolving personal beings destined for perfection in eternity.



Consider the fact that you and I are always in search of *more*—more truth, more beauty, more love and goodness. Informing and motivating this adventure is “the impulse of evolution,” an apt phrase used often by evolutionary thinker Barbara Marx Hubbard, a friend who has been an inspiration for the writing of this book. As she might put it, our evolving soul is powered by this all-encompassing urge. She further points out that this same impulse animates the space-time universe as a whole. Likewise, the *Urantia Revelation* teaches that “*progress* is the watchword of the universe.” [105:6.5]

But *Your Evolving Soul* is more than pantheistic—that being the typical metaphysical commitment of so many of today’s evolutionary theorists. It is instead *panentheistic* in its theology. I conceive of the Divine Person as the utterly transcendent, all-loving Creator who at the same time is a full-time resident in his evolving universe by virtue of his choice to literally indwell each of us, both as a pure fragment of Godself—the nonpersonal Indwelling Spirit—and also as the *imago dei*, the distinct gift of personhood.

Underlying this theology is the claim that our self-system as a whole is a reflection, a true microcosm, of a much greater macrocosm. Our inner triad blends both evolutionary and eternal realities. It reflects the rough-and-tumble life of an evolving planet as well as attributes that stem from its origin in the central universe, a phrase soon to be defined. (You can also look up all such technical terms in the glossary). A key theme of the Urantia Revelation is the dialectical encounter of eternity and time—if you will, the *yin* of that which is originally perfect and the *yang* of that which is in the process of perfecting.

But big claims, especially about epochal celestial revelation, require big evidence. So, in this book I will treat my claims about the evolving soul as a hypothesis that I call the *soul-synthesis hypothesis*. We will test our hypothesis against common sense, logic, and what we know and believe to be the case as a result of the current findings of paranormal studies, the human sciences, the history of philosophy, and the finest ideas and ideals contained in previous spiritual teachings around the world. Toward that end, Part III, “A History of Self and Soul—East and West,” provides several chapters that examine the intellectual history of the ideas of self, soul, and spirit, narrated with special reference to the unique definitions provided for these terms in Parts I and II of this book. Chapter 5 catalogues the dominant notions in the West, chiefly sourced from Plato, Aristotle, Apostle Paul, Augustine, and Aquinas. Chapter 6, “Gnosticism, Eastern Christianity, and *The Urantia Book*,” covers crucial teachings about the self that were marginalized in traditional Western thought but have uncanny affinities with the Urantia Revelation.

My Part III survey of the best of evolutionary thought culminates in chapter 7, “Self and Soul in Modernity and Beyond,” whose mission is to compare the highly original *UB* teachings about soul evolution and cosmic individuation with today’s comprehensive theories of human development, especially as these are propounded by philosopher Ken Wilber and his associates.

Just as with chapter 6, chapter 7 points out a strong affinity between a particular feature of evolving thought (in this case, Wilber’s theories of integral spirituality and integral psychology) and specific teachings of the Urantia Revelation. And the parallels in this case are significant. The *UB*’s psychospiritual teachings as well as Wilber’s integral spirituality require our willingness to “wake up” to expanded states of awareness, “grow up” to higher levels of consciousness, and “show up” through incorporating the insights of science, culture, philosophy, and spirituality into our personal worldview—if I may borrow a few the terms used by today’s integral theorists. In addition, I compare the *lines of development* in each system by tracking the role of our feeling, thinking, and willing faculties in our personal development. In particular, I take up the critical issue of which faculty or set of faculties of the self constitute the central line of human development. In this chapter I also invite the reader to entertain the possibility that the integral culture now flowering worldwide around the work of Wilber and his followers might be a suitable home for the Urantia teachings, given the similarities between the psychologies and philosophies of these two schools—with one system arising from evolving thought and the other from a revelatory text.

Part IV recapitulates the previous arguments of the book through the vehicle of a more advanced definition and detailed discussion of each element of the sacred triad. It begins with chapter 8, “The Nature of Personality Reality,” a discussion that is necessary because of the intricacy and centrality of the *UB*’s teachings about the ontological nature of unique personhood, the theological import of the concept of personality, and the future destiny of human persons. Chapter 9, “The Gift of the Divine Indwelling,” goes into greater depth on the crucial topic of the God Fragment, the divine spark plug in the engine of soul-making dynamics. This

chapter also delves further into the core theme of the equal role that feeling, thinking, and willing play in symmetrical personal growth—with special emphasis on the faculty of feeling. Chapter 10, “Cultivating Contact with Spirit,” continues on this general topic but with strong emphasis on those spiritual practices (including meditation and prayer) that enhance thinking and willing.

The concluding chapter, “Evolutionary Deity and Cosmic Spirituality,” focuses especially on the self-perfecting mission of eternal life as this is uniquely revealed in the Urantia Revelation. It also explicates the doctrine of evolutionary Deity—the Supreme Being, in *UB* parlance. She is the emerging oversoul of all inhabited worlds and the nonlocal home of all evolving souls. Gaining an understanding of the Supreme provides the basis of a new cosmic spirituality based on the duty *and* the privilege of soul-making and self-perfecting in the light of truth, beauty, and goodness.

In essence, the Urantia Revelation explains the source, growth, and destiny of the soul in terms of our very personal relationship with the capacities of the sacred triad, as chosen in the mind and as worked out in our life experience. Our evolving soul is the ultimate repository of all of these experiences. The path of cosmic spirituality is the great quest to evolve an immortal soul that is rich in quality and broad in extent because of our life experiences. But the journey also contributes at each step to the evolution of all *other* selves and souls, here and throughout the universe, and into an endless future.

After the final chapter, *Your Evolving Soul* closes with what I call the Special Supplement, which contains five shaded sections. This background material is followed in turn by four appendices and a glossary.

The Supplement opens with an *apologia* that explores in more detail my views about the revelatory status of the *UB*. In this section I offer justification for my stance that the Urantia text was primarily authored by celestial beings. In addition, I take the position that these unseen writers performed an unprecedented feat: in association with human beings, they architected a revelatory scripture for the postmodern world that points the way to a unification of science, philosophy, history, and religion.

Because the *UB* is indeed a cocreative product, it makes sense to examine both its celestial authors (often referred to as the “revelators”) and its so-called “human sources”—and I do just that in the following two sections. In my discussion of the complex issue of human sources, I offer an overview of the story about how several thousand exemplary ideas of human origin were selected by the revelators and then incorporated into the early drafts of the Urantia manuscript, providing a kind of skeleton of meaning around which the celestial writers wove the *UB*’s revelatory discourse. As I understand it, their method was to distill much of the best of the world’s previous ideas in a wide variety of fields into a pool of acquired human knowledge, which they organized into a vast series of topics. These “gems of mentation” (as the *UB*’s authors call them) were then significantly augmented or very often superseded by superhuman input, thereby producing a blend of revelatory content with the finest “evolutionary” content available up until the time the manuscript was completed, which was no later than 1945.

As a result, many of the *UB*’s statements traceable to human sources—such as its coverage of sociology and anthropology—are now outdated or simply partial, if confronted with advances in the human sciences; and this is especially the case with regard to some of its physics and biology. On the other hand, a large body of avant-garde ideas that first appeared only in the Urantia Revelation when it was published in 1955 have now been validated. The revelators boldly assert that, although some of the *UB*’s scientific facts are only provisional and heuristic, its teachings about history, religion, theology, and spirituality will stand the test of time.

In Section 4 I provide a summary of the crucial and fascinating story of how the Urantia Revelation physically came into being as a manuscript in the hands of a half dozen devoted individuals based in Chicago in the mid-twentieth century who worked directly with the revelators and their angelic assistants over several decades. Following this, in Section 5, I broach the fascinating issue of the historicity of the *UB*. Any purported revelation will reflect, to some degree, the mentality and needs of its immediate audience. This is also the case with the *UB*, though I think far less so than any previous text of its kind. In many important respects, the Urantia

Revelation remains *ahead* of our time, even when we factor in its use of human sources.

While the Special Supplement, as well as many other parts of *Your Evolving Soul*, may read like an apologia, that doesn't mean we can't critically probe and skeptically test this material for veracity and usefulness. In particular, there is a great need to engage in comparative and critical analysis of the *UB's* teachings in relation to current human advances in knowledge. That is one of my key aims in this work—and a task that has been admirably attempted by at least one other writer, my friend Sheila Keene-Lund, author of the monumental *Heaven Is Not the Last Stop* (2010). Because many key issues can't be resolved in a short book, I often suggest lines of inquiry for further research. It is my great hope that *Your Evolving Soul* will inspire others to follow in the footsteps of Sheila and me by delving more deeply into these topics, an activity that I believe is long overdue.