

# The Sacred Rule of Life: The Idea of Hierarchy

John Hinds

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## Summary

This article looks briefly examines the notion that life is not random but rather has an order and meaning, a purpose, and that this viewpoint is perfectly compatible with a scientific approach to phenomena. Most religious traditions include belief in teleology, but the idea of a personal god is not necessary for such a belief. The idea that life is interconnected and interdependent (the ancient idea of a “great chain of being”) and that human evolution may be an evolution of consciousness is discussed.

Human evolution as the unfolding of greater, more inclusive and creative states of being implies the strong possibility that states of consciousness exist far in advance of what we think of as the normal human state. Indications of such awareness are seen in the most evolved and creative human beings, and the possibility of individuals’ being able to cultivate such higher states of awareness to receive help from higher states of being and consciousness is part of nearly all religious traditions and is consistent with the notion of a “sacred order” or hierarchy in the universe.

## Introduction

The universe is either nurturing or it is not; it is either meaningful or meaningless; it is either “alive” or it is “dead.”

Many people today are “hungry” in spite of an abundance of possessions; they are hungry for greater meaning. This is a spiritual hunger. Some people find meaning in a blind unquestioning religious faith. Others feel that blind faith, a faith unexamined, is little more than superstition—a comforting illusion—and cannot be satisfied with that approach. Many intelligent, educated people are finding the traditional dogmas of various churches no longer believable or acceptable. But they often think

that the only alternative to dogmatic religious belief is some form of materialism. After all, materialism is the dominant “religion” of our society and is promoted on all sides. We are judged by how we look, what we may own, how much money we have, not by our values or the goodness of what is in our hearts. The signs of “success” are purely material ones. “Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die.” Yet many people who have achieved this kind of “success” have found it does not bring them the fulfillment they thought it would. They feel empty or so overstressed that life seems meaningless.

If neither the old theologies nor materialism can satisfy the human need for meaning, is there any other way that can? Is there a third way?

There are two basic ways of looking at the universe. There is the material one and there is one that might be termed “spiritual.” The materialistic view is the view of science. Science (rightly) starts with what can be directly seen and known and this is the world of forms. The usual assumption that scientists make is that the universe began “randomly” and that life and even consciousness are simply “accidents” arising from combinations of matter. However, many scientists as well as traditionally religious people see even in science evidence of an “intelligent design.” Things fit together

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## About the Author

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too well and the balance between different parts of life, and different orders of existence too intricate to assume it is random. (In fact, randomness is nearly impossible to achieve and is in some ways “unnatural”.) This brings in the second major way of looking at things, which for want of a better term is called “spiritual.” The spiritual view says that the world we see, the world of matter and forms is the *result* of an unseen or spiritual cause. There is an “invisible world” of causes; the world we see and know, the material world, is a world of “results”. This is a basic premise of most religions and Platonic philosophies. To some extent, this view is also adopted by science.

Science now holds that our common-sense notions of reality do not hold and the world of the senses is the result of unseen forces. The main difference is that science still holds matter to be the supreme ultimate principal.

Since matter is energy, all it would take is a wider and deeper notion of what this mysterious “something” called energy is and what are its possibilities to arrive at a meeting of the minds

between the scientific and religious views in their broadest and most inclusive forms.

## **Spiritual View of Life**

Accepting the idea of an intelligent design does not (necessarily) mean the existence of a *personal* God. Intelligent design in the universe may mean that there is an intelligent unknowable source or cause of all things. This is the philosopher’s God, the unmoved mover, the causeless cause, the thing that is not a thing and is utterly beyond our ability to imagine. On the other hand, this view does not negate the possibility of a personal creative “agent” or “agents” who implement and express the underlying qualities of intelligence, love and pur-

pose of this ultimate source or **Grand Overall Design**. Other possible views include the idea that energy or matter is inherently “intelligent” and potentially “conscious” without any theoretical limits in its expression. Let me suggest that all of these are simply different ways of thinking about the same thing. The new scientific paradigm is that there is no one “true” paradigm of viewpoint. No one viewpoint is capable of fully encompassing reality. From the human point of view, there are only *useful ways of thinking about things*. No one truth is completely true, but for any given situation there are ways of thinking about it that are use-

ful in varying degrees. If science realizes that its methods cannot express *all* truths and the spiritual approach does the same (for both can only deal with human understandings of One Reality, and human understandings, even of the Absolute, are relative understandings). Thus, a spiritual point of view need not conflict in any way with a scientific one

What are the implications of the spiritual view of life? First, forms are not fundamentally separate

but come from a single invisible cause and are therefore in some way connected. This science too acknowledges but seldom emphasizes. We are used to looking at life as a competition in our Western societies, and certainly there is a part of life that seems to operate on that level but some degree of cooperation and interdependence seems needed to make life possible. Lewis Thomas, author of *Lives of a Cell*,<sup>1</sup> remarked that if life were found in a remote corner of Mars the curious thing would not be finding life on Mars but in finding it only in one small corner of it. Life does not seem to operate that way. On Earth life is found everywhere from the polar icecaps to nearly boiling waters around hot springs or subterranean volcanoes. Truly life is everywhere. And each “higher” form of life depends for its suste-

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nance on the “lower” ones. The vegetable kingdom depends on and transforms the elements of the sun, water, air and the minerals of the soil into organic life forms that feed the animal and the human. We in turn help the vegetable kingdom propagate and evolve new forms. The same relationship holds between the human kingdom and the animal with the additional relationship of humans with domestic animals and pets in which a personal relationship is often established and we “learn” from animal behavior and pets often absorb human traits by their close contact with their owners. Both sides benefit.

If life is interconnected, and it is obvious that it is, why should anyone assume that humans are the highest types of creatures possible? If evolution stopped at the level of average humanity today we all would be in trouble, the planet included. It may be that humans are the highest material beings on the planet but does evolution necessarily *stop* there? Each new stage or evolutionary leap forward (sometimes called a *kingdom*: — mineral, vegetable, animal, human) has expressed possibilities that could not have even been imagined based solely on past developments. What a great leap forward the mobility and intelligence and adaptation of an animal is over that of plants. How much greater is the intelligence and imagination of a human being over that of the highest animals. Can you imagine the most intelligent dog or monkey or even a dolphin creating art, symbols, philosophy, religions, or higher mathematics? And within humanity itself, look at the range of awareness and abilities. Does a DaVinci, an Einstein, a Christ, a Buddha not represent practically a different order of human being from the average person? Yet in humans this difference is not one of *form* but represents an expansion in consciousness, spirituality and the range of creativity. Perhaps this is an indication of where the future evolution of humanity lies, perhaps it is one of consciousness and not so much of form? Perhaps this is what Jesus meant when he spoke of the rule of God being within us or when he said, “you are gods” and “greater things than I have done shall you do”? Perhaps this is what the poets,

artists, saints, mystics and philosophers have sensed and have searched for?

## The Next Step Forward

If evolution of consciousness does not stop with us, what might the next step look like? Judging by the most advanced and creative individuals, the next step would include not only greater mental perception but also greater creativity and greater intuitive, as opposed to analytical, abilities. Most creative people, scientists included, will tell you that their creative insights usually come through an intuitive insight which is then checked and tested by reason. An inclusive, synthetic awareness might be a next stage of development after the analytical mind has reached the limits of its development. If we are to judge by the consciousness reached by the greatest spiritually minded people, the spiritual teachers and true philosophers, the next step ahead must also include a greater awareness of the whole. Not losing any of our individuality or identity, our sense of self seems to *expand* with evolution to include a connection to *all* of life. In such a state we would be one with both ourselves and with the greater whole. Many people have occasional flashes or glimpses of this state of awareness. Certainly, it would seem that more of this kind of awareness is needed if we are going to survive the ecological and political crises we are faced with. And what, if not selflessness, was most characteristic of all the holy ones and the spiritual leaders of humanity?

Before our modern times the idea that life was a “great chain of being” was the widely accepted way of looking at life. In this view what happened “above” affected what was “below.” Perhaps it is time for a modern reformulation of this idea.

If evolution in humans becomes an evolution of consciousness and if one can see examples of such evolution in the most advanced members of the human race, is it not possible then that there are those who have developed subjectively and spiritually to such an extent that they might be considered members of a new “spiritual kingdom” so far ahead in conscious

ness to the average person as to constitute a whole new order of being?

The traditions of all major religions of the world speaks of such beings. They are those who have entered the spiritual kingdom, the kingdom of god, or heaven as Christians put it. It is important to realize that this concept is not about an organization but is a *subjective unity of minds*. This is the Christian “communion of saints.” It is sometimes called the Society of Illumined Minds. In the Eastern tradition it is sometimes known as the Buddha and his Arhats. Theosophists talk of the Masters of the Wisdom and the Spiritual Hierarchy of the Planet (using hierarchy in its original sense of “sacred order”).

## The Spiritual Hierarchy

A natural question would be: “If there really is such a thing as a group of advanced beings, why is humanity in the mess that it’s in and why aren’t they helping us solve our problems?” This is a reasonable enough question. There are many ways to answer it but basically it comes down to human free will. Throughout the ages, teachings have been given, warnings made, guidance offered. Great spiritual truths have been spoken by advanced spiritual teachers such as Krishna, Buddha, Christ and others. The fundamental message has always been the same: Know yourself, overcome the limitations of selfishness and make yourself at-one with the divine or higher mind that exists within you. It is up to each of us, collectively and individually, to search out such wisdom and make it our own. No true spiritual guide ever imposes on human free will. Guides can offer guidance and inspiration and even some forms of knowledge but it is up to us to accept it and apply it and make it our own. The world situation is not the result of whim but is the

result of our own collective ignorance and selfishness and it is by human hands and human feet alone that the situation can be changed. Those who have achieved spiritual mastery are ready to help us to help ourselves. No one can save us from ourselves but ourselves. Everyone who has ever attempted any kind of self improvement knows this to be a fact.

The spiritual hierarchy works for the good of *all*, not for any one sectarian group at the expense of another. The teachings and inspiration they offer can be found in all fields, science as well as religion and philosophy. Their teachings can be recognized by their note of

inclusion, their recognition of the *potential* for divine expression within all of us (sometimes called our spirit or soul consciousness), and the fact that there is a *purpose* and a *plan* both for the betterment and evolution of humanity and of all the lesser lives on our planet. It is up to each of us, therefore to develop our ability to recognize and respond to the note of

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By the cultivation of our soul side, our spiritual side, by freeing ourselves from our personal biases, fears and limitations we can free ourselves to know and cooperate with the spiritual guides and masters who are trying to help us evolve. The way of approach is that taught by all religions and philosophies: Know yourself, free yourself from fear, from greed and hate,

learn to love, develop within yourself tranquility of mind and then you will be able to know “the kingdom of God” that is within you.

*Man, Know Yourself  
And you shall know the Truth  
And the Truth Shall Make You Free*

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas, Lewis. *The Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher*. New York: Viking Press. 1974.

