

*I Am a Part of Infinity*

I *am a part*  
*of*  
Infinity

*The Spiritual Side of Albert Einstein*

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## Synopsis

Albert Einstein remains renowned around the world for revolutionizing our understanding of the cosmos. Everyone recognizes him as the quintessential quirky genius, but very few realize that this dedicated rationalist was also deeply religious. Even as his phenomenal mind was trying to fathom the farthest reaches of the physical universe, he was devising a down-to-earth spiritual system that saw the divine dancing in every little detail. Einstein felt that one wondrous force was woven through all things everywhere – and every aspect of his existence, from his marvelous science to his passionate pacifism, was inspired by this profound sense of the pervasive sacred. Underlying his endless efforts to unify physics and unite humanity was a longing to go beyond all apparent duality and show that every person was a part of Infinity.

Einstein dreamed of discarding the age-old religious dogmas and introducing a dynamic new notion of the divine that would mesh well with a modern mentality. And although he believed humankind was “hungry for spiritual nourishment,” he also accused his age of being “barbarous, materialistic, and superficial.” A century later, we’re still in a similar predicament. In our increasingly secular and cynical era, many of us search for ways of being “spiritual but not religious.” We yearn to satisfy our intrinsic religious impulses without sacrificing our reason or integrity – or our creature comforts.

And in some ways, we’ve succeeded. Science and spirituality seem closer than ever. Buddhist monks hop in brain scanners; the Dalai Lama holds regular dialogues with researchers; and mindfulness meditation has become a mainstay of mental health. Everywhere, secular people engage enthusiastically with spirituality. But we’re still a long way from feeling Einstein’s reverence for reality. The revolution he hoped for in our religious feelings remains unfinished; his almost-unknown teaching lies buried at our feet, forgotten. Countless books have chronicled his life and work, but the real story of his radical religious views still remains to be told.

*I Am a Part of Infinity* will finally do justice to both the strength and subtlety of Einstein’s spirituality – and reveal its enormous debt to “the enlightened Greeks and the old Oriental sages” he revered. Drawing on little-known conversations, recently published letters, and new research in the Einstein Archives, the book will show, for the first time, what Einstein really believed, which religions really inspired him, and why his spiritual views are still so important today.

With lucid and lively prose, *Part of Infinity* will explain how Einstein brought together the best from many traditions – East and West, ancient and modern – to create a spiritual system he called cosmic religion. The spirituality Einstein envisioned was so radical that he dismissed every one of the world’s existing religions as beyond redemption. But his vision was also so inclusive that Catholic saints like Francis of Assisi, ancient atheists like Democritus of Abdera, modern heretics like Baruch Spinoza, and Eastern sages like Gautama Buddha could all be counted among its enlightened exemplars.

Neither a nostalgic revival of Western faith nor a naïve imitation of Eastern philosophy, Einstein’s spirituality was something more: an almost alchemical amalgam of mind and matter, a novel synthesis of noble spirituality and exquisite science. Uniting pantheism and Pythagoras, Taoism and the Upanishads, Einstein fashioned a vibrant worldview which revered all life,

## *I Am a Part of Infinity*

honored human ingenuity, and was wonderstruck by our remarkable world. And the culmination of this curious cosmic religion was a call for unification – not just of all people, but of every individual and the Infinite.

Studies of Einstein’s spiritual side have so far shown little interest in Eastern influence, preferring to focus on more familiar schools of thought. Prominent scholars insist that his system “chimes in with the Christian faith”<sup>1</sup> and that “Einstein never showed any interest in Far Eastern philosophy and never expressed any sympathy with Oriental religious thought.”<sup>2</sup> But when it comes to understanding Einstein’s spirituality, the Judeo-Christian tradition isn’t just inadequate – it’s essentially irrelevant.

*Part of Infinity* will show that, in every essential, Eastern thought suffused Einstein’s views – and at every opportunity, he told us as much. There was no person he admired more ardently than Mahatma Gandhi; no virtue he valued above the Indian ideal of nonviolence, *ahimsa*; and no enlightenment he held in higher esteem than experiencing firsthand the ancient axiom of the Upanishads, *Tat tvam asi*: consciousness and cosmos are one.

Einstein absorbed Eastern wisdom from countless sources. The writings of his favorite modern philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer, were saturated with the nondualism of the Upanishads and Mahayana Buddhism. His fellow physicists, like Niels Bohr and Erwin Schrödinger, were steeped in Eastern philosophy. And Einstein himself, a lifelong bookworm, had a personal library packed with books on Buddhism and Taoism, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. Mesmerized by the teachings of the East, Einstein even publicly maintained that “most philosophers are indebted to the Hindus.”

But it wasn’t just what he believed, or what he read, that reveals his real religious sympathies; Einstein’s actions also accentuate his affinity for the East. When he heard he’d won the Nobel Prize in 1922, he didn’t bother to accept the award in person. He’d already been invited to visit Japan, and had “immediately resolved to embark on such a great voyage that must demand months.” It was an easy decision. “I would never have been able to forgive myself,” he felt, “for letting a chance to see Japan with my own eyes pass unheeded.” So he skipped the Nobel ceremony in Sweden to satisfy his “yearning for the Far East.”

Everywhere he went, he displayed a deep interest in Eastern religion. His travel diaries tell us he visited Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka, China, Malaysia, and Japan. And by no means was he just a bored and bewildered tourist courteously taking a cursory look at all the big sights. On the contrary, he was a curious and astute observer who noted how “lofty Buddhist thought” was embodied in the “larger than life-sized Buddhas.” He took time to meet with “very friendly monks” at a temple in Tokyo. And on a visit to the renowned shrines and temples of Nikko, where “nature and architecture [are] magnificently united,” he hiked through “forests with splendid views” and had “conversations about Buddhist religion along the way.” Many years later, he was asked what he thought about meditation and the monks who practice it. “I saw some

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<sup>1</sup> Alister McGrath (2019). *A Theory of Everything (That Matters): A Brief Guide to Einstein, Relativity & His Surprising Thoughts on God*, p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> Max Jammer (1999). *Einstein and Religion: Physics and Theology*, p. 236.

## *I Am a Part of Infinity*

of them when I was in India,” he recalled. “I was very impressed by their serenity and selflessness.”

And when it comes to the Western tradition, it wasn't monotheism that interested Einstein. He felt a far stronger affinity for philosophers like Pythagoras and Democritus – proto-scientists who were also profoundly spiritual people. Einstein saw all science as a sacred search for Truth, and he traced this venerable tradition to the sages of ancient Greece. His own lifelong quest for the mathematical simplicity at the center of reality exemplified his very Pythagorean faith in the power of pure thought. And the ancient Greek effort to provide a seamless synthesis of science and spirituality provided a near-perfect prototype for his own project.

Even more than the ancient Greeks, Einstein's favorite Western philosopher was the heretic Baruch Spinoza, the “god-intoxicated man” who saw the divine disseminated everywhere. Einstein praised him as “one of the deepest and purest souls our Jewish people has produced,” but Spinoza was no normal theologian. Almost all students of Spinoza's philosophy have noticed striking similarities between his pantheism and Oriental thought, and for centuries he's been seen as a sort of spiritual prodigy whose true home was the East. Even Einstein saw the similarities and spoke of Spinoza and Buddha in the same breath as “enlightened.”

By looking at what he wrote, what he said, and even what he read, *Part of Infinity* sheds much-needed new light on the evolution and essence of Einstein's eccentric spirituality – and its enduring importance for an increasingly secular society in search of meaning. The book is held together by hundreds of direct quotations from Einstein's letters, essays, interviews, and conversations. This central material is supplemented with readable explanations of the thinkers and philosophers beloved by Einstein but often unfamiliar, even unknown, to people today. *Part of Infinity* will explain the key concepts in plain language, point out why these particular beliefs were so important to Einstein, and dig deep to figure out just where he found his favorite ideas.

The book's novelty lies in letting Einstein speak for himself in his own often-eloquent words; in revealing, for the first time, the deep roots his spirituality had in Eastern religion; and in presenting all this academic research in a readable fashion accessible to the general reader. The book's distinctive style will provide great depth and detail without becoming ponderous or pedantic. Clear and conversational, it will keep readers engaged and also convey the curiosity and wonder Einstein felt for our world. At the same time, it will provide an important resource, and set a new benchmark, for serious scholars of Einstein's spirituality.

The book will begin with an introductory Chapter 1: An Unfinished Quest, which shows what Einstein's spirituality was all about, why he was a role model worth emulating, and why we should still take an interest in his teachings today. The essential message is that Einstein saw science and religion as the inseparable strands of a single spiritual quest – one that was still unfinished.

But in order to appreciate where Einstein saw spirituality going, we need to understand where he thought it came from. Chapter 2: The Third Phase introduces his “religion of the future.” It shows how his cosmic religion links up with the long-term evolution of religious systems; how

## *I Am a Part of Infinity*

he absorbed Eastern influence; and what he meant when he always insisted he was “not an atheist.”

After thus setting the stage, five core chapters focus on the foundations of Einstein’s religious-philosophical worldview. Chapter 3: World of Wonder reveals that a sense of wonder for our marvelous world was the center of Einstein’s spirituality. He insisted we have “holy curiosity” about our remarkable reality and also our own mysterious minds – and he saw the search for truth as a sacred duty for both the scientist and the spiritual seeker. But being awestruck wasn’t enough; Einstein knew there had to be a method to all our marveling.

Long ago, a strange sage named Pythagoras had posited that math was the correct path to the One he worshipped as the wondrous source of existence. Chapter 4: The Hidden Harmony highlights how Einstein likewise saw mathematics as both scientific method and mystical path. Somehow our tiny, localized minds derived laws of nature that were applicable always and everywhere. For the cosmic religion, these mathematical truths were temples that would stand for all time, monuments raised to Reality by reverent minds. And Einstein himself would prove to be the pinnacle of the Pythagorean tradition. His wild hope was that his unified field physics would reveal, with scientific rigor, exactly how a single sacred “arch-force” manifested in the material world all around us.

For Einstein, this force filled all things; divinity was immanent in every atom. And he insisted that “veneration for this force is my religion.” Chapter 5: The Immanent Divine details how this perspective was inspired not just by the pantheism of Spinoza and the Pythagorean worship of the One, but also the nondualist notions of China (Taoism) and India (Advaita Vedanta). Despite widespread public disapproval, Einstein dismissed the conventional conception of God as a “childish legend.” His focus was never on any faraway, phantomlike Creator; instead, his feet were always firmly planted in the immanent and omnipresent sacred. “My God,” he maintained, “appears as the physical world.”

Human beings had a hallowed responsibility to reflect this holy reality. Chapter 6: A Higher Calling explains how, for Einstein, the obvious ethical imperative implied by our mutual interdependence was the ancient Indian ideal of *ahimsa* – “nonviolence.” He felt that the way forward was “by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.” His famous pacifism was part of a religious vision which required reverence for all life – indeed, all reality. And yet Einstein also insisted that ethics had no supernatural source. “Whatever there is of God and goodness in the universe,” he thought, “it must work itself out and express itself through us.” We had no alternative but to set our own standards and select our own aims.

For Einstein, the ultimate aim was to dissolve the ego and embrace Infinity. “The one issue of true religion,” he felt, was finding freedom from “the fetters of the self.” Chapter 7: Part of Infinity explains how Einstein found ample opportunity for self-transcendence. Scientific reflection, solitude in nature, and service to humanity led him to many “moments when one feels free.” During these intimate experiences with Infinity, he described how “life and death flow into one, and there is neither evolution nor destiny; only being.” And although he was always

## *I Am a Part of Infinity*

adamant that “individuality is an illusion,” he declared that our “highest destiny” was not merely to recognize our affinity with the cosmos, but also to “co-create with its laws.”

Even though Einstein encouraged passionate participation in the pageant of life, he didn't expect we'd ever unravel the enigma of existence. Chapter 8: The Ultimately Unknowable closes the book with Einstein's humble appraisal of human limitations. Just as science never quite reached the roots of reality, Einstein saw that spirituality, too, would always be a work in progress. But despite our deplorable ignorance and our plodding moral progress, Einstein never succumbed to cynicism. Instead he insisted we continue the quest and “be proud of being the mean between macrocosm and microcosm.”