CHAPTER ONE - METAPHYSICS AND THE NATURE OF REALITY

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER

Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that is concerned with investigating the nature of the truly and ultimately real. In its broadest sense the study of metaphysics explores areas which are considered to be above and beyond the physical sciences.

In this chapter we will define our understanding of metaphysics from a Unity perspective and discuss our beliefs about the nature of ultimate reality.
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1A METAPHYSICS DEFINED:

"... that which transcends the physical. By pure metaphysics is meant a clear understanding of the realm of ideas and their legitimate expression" (RW/132).

Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that studies the ultimate reality beyond the physical realm, and is generally concerned with asking the questions, "What is the nature of being?" "What is the nature of the universe?" and "How do we know what we know?" When we study Unity metaphysics, we are studying one perspective within this branch of philosophy. Unity metaphysics is based on the recognition of divine ideas as the fundamental, eternal truth that underlies and transcends all physical manifestation. What we, in Unity, discern in the study of metaphysics are those realities that are true concerning the inner life of every human being, regardless of time, place, and circumstance.

1B WHAT IS TRUTH?:

"The absolute; that which accords with God as divine principle; that which is, has been, and ever will be; that which eternally is" (RW/200).

"God is Truth: the eternal verity of the universe and man" (JC/30).

"... All truth has its origin in Divine Mind" (TT/116).

Unity acknowledges that the term Truth represents the perfect ideas of good, which God has created. Truth is absolute, unlimited, unchanging and complete. We understand that Truth is universal and that every human being has the capacity to know the Truth by engaging in the activity of metaphysical thinking. We do this by looking beyond the physical realm to the realm of pure thought.

"Science of Divine Ideas"
"It is only from the plane of mind that one can know Truth in an absolute sense. That which we pronounce truth from the plane of appearances is relative only. The relative truth is constantly changing, but the absolute Truth endures; and what is true today always was and always will be true" (ASP/88).

Absolute Truth describes the pure, ideal good that encompasses Divine Mind. Relative truth is that aspect or dimension of good that we experience in the physical realm. The absolute is changeless. The relative is constantly changing. The human mind has the unique ability to identify with the absolute and at the same time to participate in the changing processes that are typical of the relative.

When we say that our mind is our world we do not mean to deny the existence of a material world or a material body in which we function, but only its independent existence" (KT/43).

It is most important for the Unity student to gain a clear understanding of the relationship between the absolute and relative. The relative world or world of the senses certainly exists, but it does not exist independently. It comes into manifestation solely through the formative power of thought. Therefore, that which is relative is not in the realm of cause but in the realm of effect. In other words, since the relative world is a product of thought, it is not ultimate or eternal in nature, even though it may seem so from our perspective. Since that which is relative is not permanent or unchangeable, we come to understand that any condition existing on the relative plane has the potential to be healed and transformed.
CHAPTER ONE

METAPHYSICS IS THE STUDY OF THE ULTIMATE REALITY THAT UNDERLIES AND TRANSCENDS THE PHYSICAL REALM. IN UNITY, WE REFER TO THIS REALITY AS DIVINE IDEAS.

ABSOLUTE TRUTH IS THE REALM OF DIVINE IDEAS IN GOD-MIND. THE ABSOLUTE IS UNCONDITIONED, UNLIMITED, AND UNCHANGEABLE.

THE TERM RELATIVE REFERS TO THE WORLD OF THE SENSES. TIME, SPACE, FORM, CHANGEABILITY, EXPERIENCE, AND PERSPECTIVE ARE COMPONENTS INHERENT IN THE CONCEPT OF RELATIVE TRUTH.

THE RELATIVE WORLD OR THE WORLD OF APPEARANCES DOES NOT HAVE INDEPENDENT EXISTENCE. IT EXISTS SOLELY THROUGH THE FORMATIVE POWER OF THOUGHT.

EVEN THOUGH RELATIVE EXPERIENCES ARE NOT CONSIDERED TO BE ETERNAL TRUTH, WE TEND TO EXPERIENCE THEM AS REAL, AND THEY FEEL VERY REAL. THIS IS WHY THERE IS SUCH A STRONG NEED TO CULTIVATE BALANCE IN OUR LIVES AS WE LEARN TO ACKNOWLEDGE OUR HUMANITY AND AFFIRM OUR DIVINITY.
TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Discuss your understanding of the absolute and relative.

2. Is it appropriate for Unity students to speak of the relative world as "unreal"?

3. What steps can we take to cultivate a balanced state of mind when conditions in the relative appear to be overwhelming?

4. Share a time in your life when you were able to know the absolute Truth despite appearances to the contrary. How did you relate your understanding to others? What was the outcome?
THOUGHTS FOR REFLECTION AND MEDITATION

"God's world is the real world.
In God's world life is eternal.
In God's world good is unending.
I live in God's world of eternal life,
And endless good"

(WAY/71).

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

Shanklin, Imelda, What Are You?, chapter 4, "The Real and the Fictitious."
Cady, H. Emilie, Lessons in Truth, chapter 1, "Bondage or Liberty, Which?"
Lynch, Richard, Know Thyself, chapter 1, "Knowledge of Truth."