

# MY SPINOZA

Heretic, Genius, Outcast, Visionary

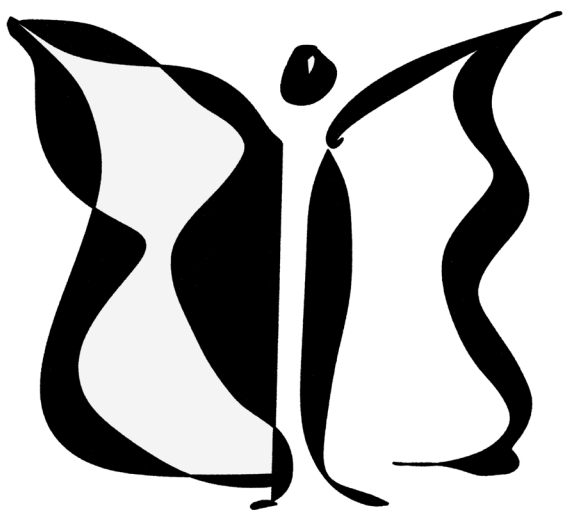


*Your Guide to the Joy of Sustained Enlightenment*

Charles J. Marcus

## Chapter 14

### *True Freedom*



## Being one with God

Over many centuries, much has been written about Spinoza's understanding of human freedom and free will. Entire books have been written on this topic—some just in the last few decades. Our focus is on the practical implications of his understanding of freedom and how we can experience true freedom in our lives today. The ultimate by-product of such an understanding is, as Spinoza puts it, “one that feeds the mind with joy alone, unmixed with any sadness” (Spinoza, 1992).

To understand Spinoza's approach, let's start with a central metaphysical concept we've previously explored, namely, his understanding that God is one substance and we, as human beings, possess finite and infinite attributes. For Spinoza, true human freedom is fundamentally rooted in our oneness with God. To experience freedom, we must realize—not just conceptually but experientially—that our mind is one with the mind of God. Our ability to transcend the frustrations, fears, and misperceptions that constrain our lives will occur only as we fully realize that our true nature is divine and grounded in God.

Spinoza's perspective on human freedom is largely unique among Western philosophers, although it is shared by Christian and Jewish mystics and some Eastern spiritual traditions. The contemporary Western spiritual teacher, Adyashanti, who trained in the Zen tradition and teaches extensively on the nature of freedom and enlightenment, writes:

In the experience of awakening, what's discovered is personal freedom. Personal freedom is freedom from

everything that ever happened. It is freedom from identity being confined to the body, mind, memory, and all the ideas that we hold about ourselves. In personal freedom, one has the sense of ‘I am free.’ The ‘I am’ has a perfume of the personal. Here, freedom refers to the ‘I am’; later one will go beyond the “I am” (Adyashanti, 2002).

Adyashanti’s understanding of human freedom is aligned with Spinoza in the following ways.

First, recall Spinoza’s concept of the three types of human knowledge. The first type, which is a fundamentally negative form of knowledge, is based on our unconscious acceptance of everything we’ve been taught to believe about ourselves. For Spinoza, these ideas constrain us and our freedom, they lock us into ways of acting and thinking that arise not from within us but from outside. We begin to free ourselves from the constraints of ideas imposed from outside when we employ a second type of knowledge—the ability, through reason and logic, to inquire into the truth of our beliefs. Spinoza places great value on using our rational mind to think things through for ourselves, to question everything, even our religious traditions and our holy scriptures. He wants to set us free from the constraints that were placed upon us by other people from the moment we entered this world.

Next we move to intuition, Spinoza’s third type of knowledge. This is when we open ourselves to direct awareness of the presence of God within. Through intuitive insight, we experience a whole new level of freedom. Through intuition, we experience a freedom that is only possible when we no longer see our identity as confined to the body, mind, and memory. We move toward the experience of

I AM, an intimate connection with the one substance in whom we have our being. We discover a freedom based on our realization that our nature is not constrained by time and space but is divine and connected to the Infinite.

Spinoza was a man intoxicated by God, and it is within this consuming love for God that he believed true freedom resides. He writes:

Understanding that we are partakers in the Divine nature shows us where our highest happiness and blessedness is, namely, solely in the knowledge of God, whereby we are led to act only as love and piety shall bid us (Spinoza, 1992).

Our freedom begins with our awareness that we partake of the divine nature and it culminates through living and acting from the foundation of the divine love within us. There is no better word than “intoxicating” to describe the experience of this love.

## **Freedom is experiencing our true nature**

Returning to Adyashanti, he nails the essence of Spinoza’s understanding that true freedom rests in our experience of oneness with God:

Once you’re finished being enamored with your freedom from all that is personal, there arises a love greater than anything that could be called personal. The dawning of this love within the human heart seeks something far greater than anything previously experienced. It’s a love that seeks liberation of the

whole. In that light, personal liberation starts to seem almost petty. The Love of which I'm speaking, arises directly out of a profound depth of realization. It has nothing to do with doing the right thing or being a good person. Such notions come from an egoic mind masquerading in spiritual clothing. I am speaking about a force of Love that originates from beyond the mind - from consciousness itself (Adyashanti, 2002).

I have no doubt that Spinoza was deeply connected to the “force of Love” that originates from consciousness itself.

When we are intoxicated by this divine Love, we no longer live in conflict with ourselves. We become completely aligned with God, which is our true nature. Another way to put it is that once we attain unity with God we become self-directed by the God within us rather than being directed by external causes. It is this truth that truly sets us free. Any burdens, constraints, or anxieties about the human condition are neutralized. This is the true freedom we must seek, cultivate, and attain at any cost.

As is always the case with Spinoza, it comes down to our understanding of and love for God:

But I tell you this, so long as we do not have such a clear idea of God that it so unites us to him as not to let us love anything outside of him, we cannot say that we are truly united with God, and so depend immediately on him (Spinoza, 1992).

Spinoza maintains that only when we have a complete understanding of our union with God does our mind and consciousness undergo the fantastic change he says is possible. Through rational thought

and a thorough understanding of the mind and emotions, we open ourselves to the divine freedom described by Eastern and Western spiritual traditions. Spinoza moves further along this path when he writes:

True freedom is nothing but the first cause, which is not in any way constrained or necessitated by anything else, and only through its perfection of the cause of all perfection (Spinoza, 1992).

We arrive at the long-awaited goal of true freedom through right actions, right thinking, right understanding, and, ultimately, through our merging with God. This is when the unitive principle takes over and we discover that all is one, or as Indian mystics have written, “You are That.”

Before exploring the concept of free will, let’s do a brief review. First, Spinoza declared that every human being could experience a profound sense of freedom. Second, an important step on the path to freedom is the courage to question everything we’ve been taught about who we are and about the nature of reality, or how we’ve been conditioned. The goal is to free our minds, so to speak, from the external constraints placed upon us throughout our lives. We might call this achieving freedom from the ideas, habits, and patterns that have governed our lives. Third, we then enter into a new intuitive awareness of who we are, immersing ourselves in the knowledge of God and divine love that is at the core of our being. This is when we experience the true freedom that is possible only by embracing our true self and living in harmony with our true nature.

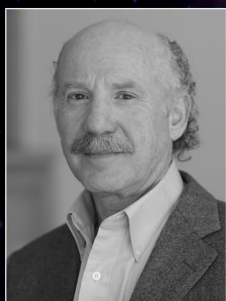
*My Spinoza* is the culmination of two decades of research by Charles J. Marcus into the life and philosophy of Baruch Spinoza. A renowned Western philosopher, Spinoza is revered by many from Carl Jung to Albert Einstein, who called him a “spiritual genius” and said, “I believe in Spinoza’s God who reveals himself in the harmony of all that exists.”

In *My Spinoza*, Marcus explores Spinoza’s revolutionary, non-dual understanding of reality, blending a mix of theology, psychology, Eastern philosophy and practical reasoning that reveals Spinoza to be a brilliant guide for all seeking to awaken to the highest state of Being.

Few philosophers have been so universally loved or reviled as Spinoza. While he has been honored as a “Father of Enlightenment,” some early critics branded his work to be utterly evil and “full of abominations.” Whatever beliefs one holds, Spinoza simply cannot be ignored.

Mystics respect Spinoza’s advocacy of human intuitive faculties and belief in a person’s innate ability to perceive God directly, without an intermediary. Atheists admire Spinoza’s logical dismantling of religious notions of God as a person, fatherly presence, and disseminator of reward and punishment.

A true universalist, Spinoza captures the spirit of Judaism (The Lord is One), Christianity (I and my Father are one), Buddhism (no separate self), and Hinduism (all selves are one Self). When Spinoza was honored in The Hague, it was proclaimed that he held the “truest vision ever” of God.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charles J. Marcus lives in Los Angeles and lectures on Eastern and Western philosophy, metaphysics and the experience of awakening.

