

## **Where have all the scriptures gone?**

By Tono Rondone

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*"It is because all our heads were filled with a million propositions.*

*We had endless debates and discussions, and we would argue and disagree.*

*Hatred ran rampant among us; fear and suspicion ruled our hearts.*

*Our very souls were smothered under the collective weight of our religious disciplines. Such a cacophony of dictums, the edicts of the thousand names of God, how they multiplied among us, until we knew not what to think. Nor could we hear the words of God, so busy were our minds with the words of men."*

--- Brother John the New

**I**t would be a difficult night. Her head would pound, her veins would collapse and burst, and she would shake and get cold sweats. Every bone in her body would ache. She'd cry; she wouldn't sleep. If she did, nightmares would come of needles and pills and alcohol and sex. And the terrible dread of self hate. But this was going to be different. This was going to be a change. She couldn't go back there again. She couldn't bring herself to even think about seeing him again, scoring for him again, with the belt around her arm as he shot her up.

No, it wouldn't be like that anymore. Lydia was turning herself in, going to the clinic. But it's Sunday. Not open, not taking new patients until tomorrow morning, and here it was Sunday! How could she stay clean tonight? Where would she go?

Lydia's antique Nash Metropolitan convertible pulled up to a Rancho Cucamonga gas station. It was six thirty, and the sun was just beginning to lose its glow, plunging darkly and without restraint below the level of the Pacific Ocean. Inside the station, she saw an advertisement for a local motel, bathed in sharp shadow razor chops between black and white.

***IF YOU STAYED HERE, YOU'D BE HOME BY NOW!***

***CASA LOLITA***

***Winter Haven***

***Marina Del Rey***

It took an hour to get across L.A. to the sea. She pulled up to the motel driveway and swung her car into the last free parking space. *Just one more night, and then I'll be able to throw off this monkey.*

A few minutes of peace, then the reality of here you are and you get no help, no peace, you're alone and checked yourself into a motel in Marina Del Rey, just one more night, and it's eight thirty.

The joke is that every hotel room has got one. Like an asshole. Slide up to the drawer where Gideon placed his notebook. There it is. The Gideon Bible. Just perfect, the metaphor, the simile; here's an artificial synthetic substance and it should be organically imbibed, consumed and assimilated.

But it's not there. All the pages are blank.

"This can't be right! What's this . . . nothing but blank pages," Lydia mumbled to herself. "I paid good money for this hotel room, and I expect to get a Gideon Bible with words printed in it," she said, as she grabbed her key and left the room to go down to the front desk.

It was about ten o'clock at night. Down in the lobby, it was a quiet, cold and damp night. The desk clerk was sitting in a chair watching a talk show on TV. Lydia walked up to him with the Gideon Bible in her hand.

"Excuse me, but there seems to be a problem with the Bible in my room."

Looking up at her from the chair, the young man with short cropped hair and a goatee said, "Oh, yeah? What seems to be the trouble?"

"There's no words printed in it. Nothing but blank pages."

"Nothing but blank pages? That's weird. Let me see." Lydia handed the Bible over to the clerk. He examined the book, turning a few pages abruptly.

"Damn, you weren't kidding," the man exclaimed. "Wow. I guess this one must have missed inspection or something. Hold on. I think we've got a box full of Bibles in the back. While the desk clerk went into the office, Lydia felt thankful for this little annoyance. Any distraction from her addiction was welcomed. She felt like she could make it now, make it one more day before checking herself into rehab. To get clean.

The man returned with a couple of Bibles in his hands and a confused look on his face.

"Strange . . . all the Bibles we have are the same as the one you've got. The whole case of Bibles is blank. I guess the entire box missed inspection. Strange. I'll report it to the manager tomorrow morning. Sorry about that."

Lydia said, "It's a wonder that nobody's pointing this out to you before."

"Not really. I'd say most people who stay here never even look at those things."

"Yeah, well, sad but true," Lydia admitted as she turned towards the elevator and return to her room. Once inside, she started to get a little nervous. She wasn't going to call anyone or go out. She knew what that might lead to. She turned on the television and started flipping channels with the remote. The device exuded the usual cavalcade of mediocrity; nothing in particular caught her attention.

But when she came to CNN, the news channel, something she heard stopped her in her tracks. The announcer said: "This just in from our newsroom in Atlanta. It appears that reports are being received from across the country that Holy Bibles are being discovered with no printing in them. These reports are arriving from all parts of the nation. We have with us in the studio Reverend Morton Smith of the Southern Baptist Alliance. Mr. Smith, what light can you shed on this bizarre story?"

"Well Phil, it's one of the most unexplainable circumstances I've ever come across. I discovered the missing text when I did a sunrise mass today at my parish. I went to open my Bible to read a passage from John to the congregation, and the book was blank. Alarmed, I closed the book and began leading prayer. I didn't want to scare the

assembled. After mass I went back into the church office and sought out another Bible, but that one was blank as well."

The announcer continued, "And you're not the only one who had this experience. We've been getting reports from all over the country that Bibles are blank. Even in our own newsroom, we've got Bibles here with nothing written in them."

Lydia turned off the TV and went to the window to look down at the street below. It was about ten thirty on a Sunday night, and she didn't expect to see too much foot traffic, but it was L.A., so it would never be entirely empty, except maybe in the middle of the night, like it would be when she used to go out and score.

She threw open the window and instantly heard a man across the street below who had a bullhorn in his hand. He was yelling to anyone within the sound of the horn:

"Repent sinners, The End is at hand. God has destroyed your ancient texts of lies! Man has perverted the will of God for the last time. He has struck down your idols -- He has abolished your Bibles! Who but God could have accomplished this? The End is near! Repent!"

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Lydia slept a troubled sleep that night, with nightmares of sticking needles in her arm, cold sweats and chills, aches and pains. By the next morning, she awoke to a very different planet. The entire country had discovered that every Bible had been erased of words, that every bible was blank. The headlines in the papers invariably read: Mystery Vanishing of Words in Bibles! Every Bible in America Found Blank!

It took another twenty-four hours or so before the rest of the world began reporting similar circumstances. From India, reports began trickling in that the Bhavagad Gita, the Hindu Celestial Song, their bible, was erased as well. From Israel, it was discovered that the Talmud was no more. And the world of Islam found that their Korans were also blank.

The panic that ensued began slowly, because there were few physical ramifications to the unexplainable disappearance of the entire world's religious literature. The stock market hadn't crashed; a natural disaster like a flood, an earthquake or a hurricane hadn't occurred; and the price of oil hadn't spiked. But people around the country and the world were left to ponder the significance of the inexplicable act. What force or power was there that could instantaneously obliterate every word on every page of every Bible, Talmud, Koran and Bhavagad Gita worldwide? And if there was such a power, who yielded it, and more importantly, why?

Of course, the religious community was devastated. In universities, in seminaries, in convents, in monasteries, in The Vatican in Rome, in ashrams in India, in temples in Jerusalem, in mosques in Iran and Saudi Arabia, religious scholars and leaders began a mad attempt to rewrite from memory as much of the lost texts as possible. But fear and suspicion began to run rampant.

One camp viewed the event as a conspiracy by anti religious factions to cast doubts in the minds of believers as to the validity and authenticity of religious scriptures. But how could they have accomplished such a feat? It was technologically impossible.

Yet it had happened. Others surmised that God Himself had destroyed all the texts. Who else could have pulled off such a feat? Yet the question remained, if God had

erased all the religious scriptures, why would He have done so? Because they were all false?

Looking properly for kinks in the armor, it was found that all the prophets had written were not only erased on paper, on CDs, on hard drives, on chip and dip and pips, but even the memory of them was lost to the masses.

However, the final blow occurred when all the religious clerics, the bishops, the gurus, the lamas, the deacons and the rabbis sat down with pens in hand to recreate their sacred ancient texts. Because they couldn't remember them either.

It was like Genesis never happened. Moses hadn't come down from the mountain. Arjuna never talked to Krishna. The Tibetan Book of the Dead wouldn't save any more souls wandering in the darkness after death. And even the ancient pyramids in Egypt, grand structures though they be, became utter enigmas shrouded in impenetrable mystery, now that every religious hieroglyph was eradicated as well as the memory of them.

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Johnny found out that Santa Claus didn't exist one day when he scrunched his way to the back of his long, ponderous closet and found his Christmas presents there. He was pretty sure his mom and dad had put them there thinking that was the last place he'd ever look, but they were mistaken. Sometimes parents forget what it's like to be a child.

He really didn't mind that much; the realization left him feeling a bit empty – some of the magic and fantasy had left him then, but he'd survive. He still had a new bike in there!

Johnny was nine years old and should have stopped believing in old St. Nick long ago, but he was a winsome child, dreamy and that bad word of all bad words about a young boy, sensitive. With brown hair, dark olive colored skin and green eyes, Johnny had a smile that tilted up one side. He loved music; his father was a musician so he'd heard that jazz, those blues, that rock and soul since he was born, and his mother worked as a waitress in a casino in Las Vegas.

Johnny had changed, though, since he'd gotten lost in Red Rock Canyon. He'd gone out there with his school on a field trip, he'd hung back when he saw a coyote up on the bluff; the rest of the class had descended the cliff and headed back to the bus. It was only after they'd left the canyon and were heading back to Vegas that Johnny's absence was realized.

It was a long hot afternoon and Johnny knew to keep in the shade. He sat beneath crags of rocks jutting out above him, and, at his altitude, he could gaze out over miles of rolling desert, liling with hawks gliding effortlessly and braying with cute dumb donkeys running wild in nature.

As the sun dipped below the mountain peaks, and shadows enveloped Johnny, it grew colder, as it will in the desert. He began to shiver, pulling his coat up over his head, and as it got dark and the stars began showing themselves a trillion miles above his head, the little man began to cry.

*“DON'T WORRY, JOHN, I'M HERE WITH YOU AND I'LL PROTECT YOU, IF YOU BELIEVE IN ME.”*

Johnny didn't really hear these words. At least, he didn't hear anyone *say* them, yet he knew they'd been heard and he listened. This was the son of Julia. It was 2006, and both Julia and her son John had reincarnated. Further significance, though, was that they had reincarnated together and a generation apart, and they had found each other again.

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Johnny Morgan heard the voice all right, and he received the news. It was the good news of the Lord, but he didn't know it at the time. All he knew was that someone had spoken to him whom he did not see, and they had told him he'd be rescued from his predicament in the desert and that surely is what happened.

Back at home, the newspaper reporters arrived to interview the young boy about his ordeal of being lost in Red Rock Canyon.

"How did you feel, Johnny, when the sun went down, about being alone and lost in the desert?" the journalist asked the youth.

"I was scared at first, but then I heard a voice, and the voice said, 'Don't worry, John, I'm here with you and I'll protect you, if you believe in me.'"

Johnny's father had been a Methodist minister, and like most of the other clerics, his world was shattered by the loss of the scriptures or any memory of them. So when he heard the revelation that his son claimed he'd received, he was amazed and intrigued.

It was now night, and Johnny'd been tucked in and hugged and kissed by his mom Julia, after she'd read him a bedtime story, a portion of *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint Exupéry.

Julia read this section of the book to Johnny just before he dozed off for the night:

"So I lived my life alone, without anyone that I could really talk to, until I had an accident with my plane in the Desert of Sahara, six years ago. Something was broken in my engine. And as I had with me neither a mechanic nor any passengers, I set myself to attempt the difficult repairs all alone. It was a question of life or death for me: I had scarcely enough drinking water to last a week.

"The first night, then, I went to sleep on the sand, a thousand miles from any human habitation. I was more isolated than a shipwrecked sailor on a raft in the middle of the ocean. Thus you can imagine my amazement, at sunrise, when I was awakened by an odd little voice. It said:

'If you please--draw me a sheep!'

'What!'

'Draw me a sheep!'

"I jumped to my feet, completely thunderstruck. I blinked my eyes hard. I looked carefully all around me. And I saw a most extraordinary small person, who stood there examining me with great seriousness. Here you may see the best portrait that, later, I was able to make of him. But my drawing is certainly very much less charming than its model."

As Johnny slept silently and deeply, he was once again visited by this strange vision, a vision he had had just prior to hearing that voice in the desert night: of a single point of light expanding into a bubble, which grew larger and larger until it was the size of a man. Inside the bubble, Johnny could see a blue being, smiling, benevolent and serene. Then the bubble burst into a million scintillating sparkling pinpoints of luminescence, and Johnny marveled continuously at its splendor.

Now the person in the bubble walked up to Johnny sleeping in his bed and asked him, "*JOHN – WILL YOU DO TO OTHERS ONLY THINGS WHICH YOU WOULD WANT THEM TO DO TO YOU?*"

In his dream, Johnny watched the play of the shimmering pinpoints of lightning blue energy all over the landscape, the mountains and the valleys and the plains and the deserts, the entire earth becoming nothing more than a conglomeration of such minute entities, such magnificently subtle manifestations of light.

Now he didn't feel fear or fright, and that night, Johnny vowed without saying a word that he would follow the rules of his now visible deliverer, though he'd never be able to describe his appearance to anyone. And he had no idea what his name was, and barely what he wanted of this young boy.

The next day at dinner, his dad was in a terrible mood.

"I just don't know what to do with myself, Julia," Joseph told his wife. "Ever since this awful occurrence, I've lost my flock, I have no direction, and I can't minister a truth I know nothing about."

Julia said, "Well, I don't see what all the fuss is about anyway. I mean, we all know there's a God – who else could have obliterated all the scriptures, everywhere, at the same time?"

"Sure there's a God, or a Devil – he might have done this deed – but even if there is a God, what does God want of us? How shall we act? What is the message God wishes us to receive? How shall we serve him? And there are so many other questions, unanswered questions. Is there a heaven? What happens to us after we die? How are we supposed to live, to behave?"

"Common sense should tell us that," said Julia, whose wild streak had dissipated years ago.

"Common sense, indeed!" Shouted Johnny's father.

Johnny slowly spoke up: "Dad . . ."

"Yes? What is it Johnny?"

"Dad, we should treat others as we would have them treat us."

"What did you say?"

"I said that we should treat others as we would have them treat us."

"Where did you hear that from?"

"From the blue being in the bubble."

"What?"

"The blue being inside the bubble that talks to me told me that. He also said we should love our neighbors as ourselves and have no other god before him."

Johnny's father was astounded. What Johnny was saying should have sounded familiar to the minister, but his memory had been wiped as clean as everybody else's. And his library of religious books was as blank as his memory.

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For his birthday, Johnny's tenth year of life, his mother and dad bought him an acoustic guitar. Johnny was ecstatic over the gift, and plunged into learning how to play the instrument with the help of some beginner's music books that he'd gotten along with the guitar.

From all corners of the globe, reports were beginning to circulate that the voices of prophets had begun to resound with information about God and what God wanted of his people. From China, a young girl from Shanghai had put forth a proposition that we

are all born again after we die. This was called reincarnation, and the consequences of your actions was called karma.

From India, a group of young religious aspirants began a practice which included sitting quietly in various positions and chanting phrases. This they termed meditation and mantra repetition.

From the jungles of Brazil, Amazonian children began experimenting with herbal concoctions said to produce dream visions of God.

From Egypt, children there were said to be relating information about alien beings from distant star systems that had visited the earth eons ago.

In the Middle East, young children began talking about building a temple to God and refraining from impure conduct.

And in San Francisco, where Johnny lived, a young guitar player took his instrument to Golden Gate Park to play a new song that he'd just written.

Its title was: *LOVE IS THE ANSWER*.

End