



RONNY VANCE

FORMER PRESIDENT OF GEFLEN MUSIC, PRESENT-DAY SEEKER

Ronny Vance, former president of Geffen Music and Interscope Music, has over 40 years of experience in the music industry. The writers he has signed have had cumulative sales of over 200 million records. Built on his uncanny knack for spotting songwriting talent and superstar artists in all music genres, each of his endeavors has enjoyed unprecedented success.

Over the course of his career, Vance has been responsible for the signings of songwriters Tupac, New Edition, Stephen Sondheim, Brenda Russell, Bruce Hornsby, and Gwen Stefani of No Doubt, and for the placement of such notable songs as "Maniac," "New Attitude," and Eric Clapton's two-time 1998 Grammy winning song, "Change The World."

Vance is the President of the high tech music search innovator MyPart, located in Tel Aviv. Its current customers include MPL, Paul McCartney's music publishing company, and Hipgnosis Songs. Vance is currently working on a music project that embodies original material and classics that, as he says, gives glory to The One Above. Vance would like to thank his friend, Moshe Schlass, who gave him the idea for the title of his essay.

Intimate with the Infinite¹

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Forty years ago, we would go to a Brooklyn apartment where a rabbi² had a small gathering. In his classes, he used every trick in his arsenal to describe the idea of a soul and an inner world, without using the word "God." He used energy, vibrations, spiritual force – anything but God – because as he said, *"that word has often been a major turn off to a number of the new people coming around."* People whom many today might refer to as *"the woke crowd."*

One day he told a story about someone who was not only secular but maybe even a bit anti-religion. This guy heard that the Lubavitcher Rebbe was a holy man and that every Sunday he would give a crisp dollar bill to anyone who waited to see him. The line was so long that the Rebbe had only seconds to talk to each person. When it was this guy's turn, the Rebbe said to him, *"it would be good if you would put on tefillin."*³ The guy responded, *"I only came here because I heard you were a holy man, but I am not one of your followers and I don't believe in God."* The Rebbe looked at him in a way that only he could and said, *"the God you don't believe in I also don't believe in."*

Hearing that story was a game changer for me. What exactly was he saying? At the time, it seemed like a riddle, but that one statement planted a seed and began what became a multi-decade journey of intense study and self-reflection as I tried to understand what he meant.

Here is what has become blatantly clear: That my opinions about anything to do with God were bereft of any real background or knowledge. That everything I believed at that time was based upon a *"giant nothing-burger."*

As a veteran of the pop music business in America, I have an opinion about movies, music, theater, books, tv, and sports, as I've put a lifetime of energy into these arenas. But what did I know about God beyond my short stint at religious school or momentary pauses to listen to Televangelists while channel-surfing? I didn't know what I didn't know. Only now, after more than twenty years in a religiously observant community, am I beginning to understand just how much I still don't know. Not coming from an academic background, I didn't realize what hard work it is to acquire all this ancient knowledge. Although the wisdom is in fact endless, I somehow find myself in a perfect environment and I am piecing more and more together each day.

There is an old expression that *"when someone graduates from college, that is when the learning really begins."* In my personal journey, the graduation speech came with a simple statement. If that opportunity comes for you, make sure you're listening.

Footnotes:

1. Courtesy of Moshe Schlass
2. Rabbi Simon Jacobson
3. Phylacteries (a pair of black leather boxes containing specific Hebrew parchment scrolls) that men wear. The Torah commands Jewish men to bind tefillin onto their head and upper arm every weekday morning. (Deuteronomy 6:8)