

KUNDALINI AND THE MORNING STAR

Suffering, Miracles and Enlightenment

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DEDICATION

**To my little sister,
in loving memory**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my wife, thank you from the bottom of my heart for your love, compassion, friendship and understanding. You stood by me when nobody would have blamed you if you had run away. Without your strength and faith in me, I may not have survived. I am also very grateful for your helpful comments and suggestions as I was writing this story.

To our four children, thank you for teaching me. It has been a great joy and privilege to be your dad. You have repeatedly reminded me that we are born pure and innocent. You helped convince me that this purity and innocence can never be truly lost, but rather only hidden. In even the hardest heart, the lost inner child can be recovered, and the flowers of the Spirit made to bloom again.

Thank you to my mother and father for caring for me and for doing your very best; to my sisters and brother, for assuring me that I am lovable; and to our close friends, who were there for my wife and me when we needed them.

Thank you to the well-meaning and helpful therapists, clergy and other professionals for your guidance and concern.

I know that my ordeals have been ordeals for all of us. We suffered together. And through it all, as my wife assured me many times, we have grown together.

I also thank the authors of the many, many books I have read. You have helped me understand myself and have brought me nearer to the Truth. In this way, you have all been my guru. In particular, I am indebted to Michael Washburn¹ for insightful comments, constructive criticism, and kind encouragement.

Finally, I am most grateful to Jesus, for showing me the way, and for making his presence known to me when I needed it the most.

Note: Biblical quotations in this story are from the *Holy Bible: New International Version* (copyright 1984, International Bible Society). Quotes of Jesus from the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas are from the translation by T. Lambdin found on the web at <http://gnosis.org/naghamm/gthlamb.html>.

1. Michael Washburn, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, Indiana University - South Bend.

PREFACE

Jesus said: “Whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.”

Gospel of Mark

Jesus said: “Do not tell lies, and do not do what you hate, because all things are plain in the site of heaven. For nothing hidden will not become manifest, and nothing covered will remain without being uncovered.”

Gospel of Thomas

“Perhaps all the dragons of our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us once, beautiful and brave. Perhaps everything terrible is in its deepest being something that needs our love.”

Rainer Maria Rilke

All of the events recounted in this book are true. In writing this, I have relied on my memory, the memories of close family members, and notes that I made during the past 35 years.

There is much I want to say. I feel that it is important that I convey what I have experienced and learned, in the hope that it will help speed the healing of others who are struggling with anxiety, depression or other mental illness. It will let them know that they are not alone, that their struggles have a reason, and that, dark as the way may seem at times, there is light at the end of the tunnel, there is a morning after. I know that I was aided tremendously by reading, for the accounts of others validated my own experiences and helped solidify their reality and importance, so that they could have their full healing effect.

In order to be happy, we need to love. We have all been born with an unlimited potential to express love, and our “true self”, our eternal Self that carries the image of the divine creative force (God, if you will), is yearning to love. But because our false self, our wounded ego, has thrown its veil over our spiritual vision, we have lost contact with the innocent child within, the natural child that is the expression of the Self. We have come to believe untruths about ourselves (mainly, that we are not lovable), about the world, and about God, and are bound as if in shackles. And the struggle to escape from those shackles, to rediscover the inner child and become reconnected with the wisdom of the Self, can be long and arduous. But the rewards of the struggle are so tremendous (Jesus' “pearl of great price” - the discovery of the kingdom of heaven within) that the answer to the question of whether the effort is worth it, is an emphatic yes!

The main things I want to tell about are matters of the Spirit. They are personal things that happened to me. They were learning experiences that helped me to remember what my inner child once knew but I had forgotten - that I am loved and safe in the Universe. Three spiritual experiences in particular had a powerful healing effect and preserved or restored my sanity, and likely saved my life. For many people, these may seem strange and difficult to believe, as indeed they would seem to me had I not lived through them. To other people who have had similar experiences, it is my hope that my account will provide reassurance as to their validity, reality and meaning.

Although I have been repeatedly blessed with gifts of the Spirit, I make no claim that what happened to me is special. Many children have been and are being raised in circumstances similar to those that caused me to lose contact with my true self. I received these gifts of grace because I needed them to find myself, and obviously the Universe knew that I was ready to receive them. I am loved no more, and no less, than anyone else. There are those who have received different gifts, and those who have received gifts similar to mine, but in a different order or different context. And others

will receive their gifts in the future. Although we are united in the Spirit, we are individuals traveling our own path to the truth.

Before proceeding, I wish to emphasize that when I refer to apparently harmful actions, or lack of actions, of other people or of myself, I am not being judgmental. In particular, I found it very difficult to be completely open about my birth family. I considered leaving some things out, but in the end I decided that, in order for the reader to comprehend as fully as possible how their own childhood circumstances could have resulted in mental illness, the whole story should be told, as I see it. As therapist John Bradshaw explains in *Family Secrets*, it is important to our healing that we find the courage to bring our dark secrets into the light. I am not suggesting that everyone publish a book (although I do urge you to write your own story), but I want my story to be of maximum benefit to others.

The abuse to which I was subjected as a child was not flagrantly brutal. I was not sexually molested, starved, or regularly beaten black and blue. My mistreatment took two main forms: physical punishment from my father who used alcohol to numb his own pain, and a lack of nurturing from my anxious, needy and emotionally manipulative mother (harsh words, I know, but I had to understand and grieve the pain of these truths in order to heal). Neither of my parents validated my feelings, and so I was forced to disown them. Also, the relationship between my parents was highly strained during my childhood. I expect that some readers might have difficulty understanding how this situation could cause the types of illnesses I suffered. But the destructive effects of our dysfunctional family were such that my younger sister ultimately took her own life, and I nearly met the same fate. As will be elucidated in this book, mistreatment during childhood, which is always undeserved and often unrecognized as abuse, can result in anxiety, severe depression and other mental illnesses. And even the majority who are fortunate to have been raised by “good enough” parents, so that they don’t become overtly mentally ill, carry buried wounds from childhood that cause them to reject valuable parts of themselves.

Although I went through a prolonged period during which I was very confused about my feelings for my mother, I am now able to feel compassion for her. I love both of my parents, now deceased, and don’t blame them. They, too, were raised in dysfunctional families and suffered deep spiritual wounds that negatively influenced their treatment of my siblings and me. We all do the best that we can at each period in our lives. I am fully convinced that all of us are intrinsically “good”. Whenever we harm our children or anyone else, it is not the work of some supernatural malevolent force. Rather, it is due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of who we and they truly are, for the root cause of “evil” is ignorance.

INTRODUCTION

Jesus said: “No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.”

Gospel of John

Jesus said: “Blessed is the man who has suffered and found life.”

Gospel of Thomas

“One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.”

C. G. Jung

I was 29 years old, with a family of my own, when the panic struck with a vengeance. The attacks were relentless. I feared fear, which brought on more fear. I struggled to control it, but my efforts were largely for naught, and I began to lose hope. For the first time in my life, I thought of suicide. At first I was terrified of the thought itself, and I became even more depressed at the idea of leaving a widow and two fatherless children. But, as the pain and panic continued, the appeal of suicide increased.

Finally, one blizzardy winter evening I felt that I had reached the absolute end of my rope. In complete and utter desperation, I went outside and wandered aimlessly in the cold and blowing snow, and began to pray in earnest to the only force that I felt could possibly help me - not the vengeful and judgmental sky god of my fundamentalist upbringing, but simply the “creative force” that was responsible for my being on earth. I had no idea whether this force was anything personal, or whether it was intelligent and could hear my plea, but this was my last hope. I knew that I had fallen victim to my own screwed-up thought processes, and I prayed that my thoughts could somehow be made right.

When I returned home, I really didn't have any expectations whatsoever of receiving the kind of help I needed. I went immediately to our bedroom, lay down on the bed, and essentially gave up. I let go - I momentarily stopped thinking about anything.

At the same time, my young daughter, not yet two, entered the bedroom, climbed up on the bed, and called out “daddy”. What happened next is difficult to describe, but I was instantly transformed. An enormous weight was dramatically lifted as if from my shoulders. I felt free and light and so very, very right. My anxiety was totally and completely gone. I was completely well and unconcerned about myself; in fact, I felt better and more relaxed and at ease than I could remember ever feeling before. I also knew that this was reality. I was at peace because peace was a natural state of mind - the way we were meant to be. My prayer had been answered in a manner far more profound than I could ever have dreamed possible. As if by a miracle, I had returned to a state of grace.

I picked up a bedside copy of *The Prophet* (a recent gift from my wife) by the Lebanese-American mystic and poet Kahlil Gibran², and began to read it for the first time. I read, “Your children are not your children - they are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself”, and I was amazed at the truth and beauty of these words. When my wife came

2. Kahlil Gibran was born into a Lebanese Christian (Maronite Catholic) family. Although he was influenced by mystical Sufi Islam, his Prophet's image of the Divine is very similar to that of Jesus, but radically different from that of Islam's Prophet Muhammad, as depicted in the Koran (Quran) and other Islamic scripture.

to bed a short while later, I told her what had happened, and that I believed in God, who had answered my prayer. She was very happy (though naturally surprised).

I did not take any medication that night. I felt - no, I knew - that I had no need for it. I quickly fell into a deep and peaceful sleep, the first such sleep that I had had in many weeks, and proceeded to dream the most beautiful dream of my life. My brother had a garden hose, and he was spraying me with water. It was wonderful. I felt so utterly clean. I laughed and laughed. I laughed so heartily that I woke my wife, who was concerned that I was in some difficulty (bear in mind that sounds made while dreaming often sound very different - guttural - to an awake observer).

The following morning, I still felt terrific. My breakfast cereal tasted wonderful. My feet seemed to float as I walked to the bus stop. While commuting into work, I observed the faces of strangers. They were strikingly lovely, each radiant and unique.

Up until the first panic attack, my job had been rather boring. During my struggle, I had found it excruciatingly difficult to work. I had dreaded being physically apart from my wife, and I constantly battled “free-floating anxiety” (the label applied by my psychiatrist). But now my whole state of mind had been radically altered. I began to work on a routine, previously boring report. My hand seemed to glide over the page, and I was amazed at how beautiful it felt to be writing a mundane report.

This profound state of peace remained with me for some fifteen hours. It ended almost as suddenly as it had begun. The question of why I was feeling so untroubled arose from the back of my mind while I was at work in my office, and at once I was re-submerged in fear. This was extremely depressing, and I felt terribly unclean.

Very reluctantly, I restarted the medication to gain some control over the fear. But, most importantly, I now knew that the “I” that was experiencing panic and depression was not who I really was.

The above incident occurred some 35 years ago, and marked the beginning of my active spiritual search for healing from “mental illness”. But just what is mental illness? The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines it as “a disorder of the mind”. This is a broad definition. It includes everything from relatively minor neuroses such as hypochondria and social phobia to debilitating and potentially life-threatening conditions such as clinical depression and schizophrenia. Yet there is such a stigma associated with the term that many sufferers of even minor mental illness and their families try to hide the fact or label it as something else, such as “nerves” or “the blues”. While these various mental disorders can certainly differ in symptomatology and the degree of suffering they

cause, I believe them to be more closely related than is generally recognized, at least by the medical establishment.

Modern depth psychology views mental illnesses as disorders of the “ego”. The ego is what we consciously believe ourselves to be - the “I” we think we are. It is the self with which we face the world. However, it is not fixed, but rather is constantly evolving in response to new information. When we don't understand what we really are, but falsely believe ourselves to be deficient or bad, we are viewing reality through the distorted lens of our false self, or “wounded ego”. We are “mentally ill”.

It is important to realize, however, that we can be ill without even being aware that we view ourselves as deficient or bad. Negative parts of our self-image may lie repressed in our unconscious, hidden from the ego's awareness. These hidden ideas can be particularly destructive precisely because we are not conscious of their influence. For example, I had repressed my own memories of the psychic pain of having been emotionally neglected and physically abused as a child. I had denied the damage caused to my self-image. Without realizing that I didn't even like myself, I developed a “survival personality” that presented a false front to the world, which fooled most people. During my adolescence and young adulthood, many actually considered me to be self-confident, and occasionally I was viewed as “stuck-up” or narcissistic. But this was my false self - all bluster and no substance. So I was very surprised and somewhat offended when, driven by panic attacks to seek help from a psychiatrist some 35 years ago, he bluntly pronounced that I considered myself to be “shit”. If this were true, how could I believe that God or anyone could possibly love me? I first had to absorb the truth of this wise man's statement (that unconsciously I had a very poor self-image) before I could begin to heal.

The ego always expresses our own current degree of enlightenment, and in this sense cannot itself be “false”. Like “sin”, the wounded ego does not consist of evil that necessitates punishment or destruction, but rather is formulated, at least in part, from perceptual errors (ignorance) that require correction. The process of healing mental illness involves the displacement of false, negative ideas in our ego by true, positive ideas, and the release of emotions that were repressed into our unconscious during or following our original woundings. This expansion of consciousness allows our true or higher Self (what I call the “healed ego”) to be expressed. There are no barriers between the fully healed (enlightened) ego and the Source, or God.

This is a book about my struggle with, and overcoming of, rather severe mental illness that prompted three brief periods of voluntary hospitalization. It is divided into three main parts. Part I (The Dis-Ease) and Part II (The Cure) were essentially completed about 15 years ago and were published online, to favorable reviews. In the present book, the only appreciable changes made to Parts I and II were to update timeframes and

include references to pertinent current events, as well as to refer to my now-deceased mother in the past tense, where appropriate. Part III is a completely new update, describing additional difficulties and hurdles that I subsequently encountered on my spiritual journey, and including more evidence (proof, to me) of the existence of a divine creative force (“God”). It also presents further evidence (again, my own proof) of the reality of Jesus and the truth of his message. Jesus was crucified, but his Spirit is very much alive.

I was afflicted with various mental conditions during my struggles. In addition to panic attacks, conditions that caused me major distress included chronic “free-floating” anxiety, clinical depression, and psychosis (associated with a fundamentalist religious upbringing). Intertwined with these debilitating conditions at various stages were co-dependency, hypochondria, obsessive-compulsive tendencies and social phobia. I am still not entirely comfortable in social situations, but I accept that there is a reason and purpose for this. I also came very close to addiction, and continue to appreciate the social lubricating effects of a glass of wine. Many of these afflictions are themselves symptoms of so-called “borderline personality disorder” (BPD), as described in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th Edition)*. BPD is one of the most controversial diagnoses in psychology today, and many researchers believe that the term should be scrapped.

In view of the considerable degree of possible overlap in symptoms among the various disorders, and the uniqueness of each of our stories, I am hesitant to impose any label that has the potential to place artificial boundaries on human suffering. I have come to recognize that all of my illnesses were rooted in childhood trauma. Therefore, if I were to select any one label over any other, it could justifiably be “post-traumatic stress disorder” (PTSD). Indeed, in their book *Delayed Posttraumatic Stress Disorders from Infancy*, Drs. Clancy McKenzie and Lance Wright show how traumatic events in the first two years of life correlate with later development of schizophrenia, whereas the identical events in the next year of life correlate with the development of clinical depression.

Experienced and knowledgeable therapists recognize childhood trauma as a principal cause of the mental distress exhibited by their patients. However, there is still much denial and misunderstanding within the medical/psychiatric community. The view currently being popularized by many medical professionals is that mental illnesses are caused by genetically-linked biochemical imbalances. This premise puts a great deal of money in the pockets of the pharmaceutical industry, but it is largely wrong. The authors of *Delayed Posttraumatic Stress Disorders from Infancy*, while not disagreeing with biological or genetic findings, clearly demonstrate that the biological/biochemical changes associated with mental illnesses are a result, not a cause. Genetic factors may result in predisposition, but these same factors can bring benefits including increased intelligence and creativity. The afflictions themselves will not develop in the absence of

trauma. Mental illnesses are essentially spiritual as opposed to biochemical in nature. At bottom, they reflect a lack of self-love and trust, largely rooted in childhood trauma.

It has been said that we should be grateful for our neuroses, for they offer protection from psychosis. However, neurosis of any sort is a cover-up, and indicates that we are not being true to ourselves. We must courageously feel what our neuroses are hiding. I believe that when we have successfully uncovered our repressed feelings and emotions, and have come to understand and actually “feel” the truth of who we really are, we will find that our avoidance behaviors, our attempts to control, our perfectionism, our fears of being judged, our all-or-nothing (black and white) thinking, and our obsessions and compulsions will fall by the wayside. We must face our fears and the truth of the hurts we suffered, in order to feel and release our grief, and get well. But what I mainly want to share with you is what I learned during my own struggle - the good news that we don't have to do all this alone, that there is an unconditionally loving power at work within us and throughout the universe that empathizes with our suffering and will guide us on our journey to wholeness. I also believe that this was the real message of Jesus, and that it is through accepting this message that we are “saved”. Later in this story I will provide my personal proof of this.

All of us were born with a direct connection to our Source, the unconditionally loving “ground of being” that most people call God. This divine force is both inside us and outside us. We are a part of the Divine, and we always will be. But we lost contact with our divine origins when, through a lack of empathy from our primary caregivers, we were not validated as the unique and precious beings we are. This lack of empathy manifests in various forms of child abuse, of which emotional abandonment is perhaps the most insidious and difficult to recognize. Our emotions, whether of fear and sadness, or joy and delight, were not attended to and mirrored back to us, causing us to reject important parts of our very selves. The result may be serious mental illness in later life.

Unfortunately, people exhibiting symptoms of acute mental distress are often stigmatized and treated with powerful anti-psychotic drugs when in reality they are experiencing a “spiritual emergency”. As described by John Perry in his book *Trials of the Visionary Mind*, this psychosis is actually a natural effort of the psyche to mend its imbalances. The afflicted individual needs to know that his/her suffering has a profound and holy purpose, and is anything but shameful. This knowledge imparts strength to work through the pain.

This, then, is the story of why I got sick, and how I got well. Indeed, it is the story of how I got much better than I was before I began experiencing panic attacks some 35 years ago. My main purpose in writing this book is to provide hope and guidance to those who are struggling with mental illness. I want to empower the mentally ill as I have been

empowered. This empowerment occurs when we are able to acknowledge and experience the truth of the following:

- our own life has a divine purpose;
- we were born innocent and did not deserve to get sick;
- our illness resulted largely from family-of-origin influences over which we had no conscious control;
- our illness has given others the opportunity to extend love and compassion to us, thereby helping them express their own divinity;
- we are deserving of self-compassion, and are allowed to feel and release our own entrapped grief;
- in confronting the real causes of our pain, we are being courageous;
- in pursuing our healing, we can bestow upon our children a great blessing, for we will not pass our sickness on to them.

In addition to the mentally ill and their families, I am hopeful that therapists and clergy will find this book interesting and useful. Furthermore, I hope that even those who are not currently actively involved in the battle with mental illness will find encouragement from this story, because it testifies to the reality of a divine love that unites us all.

Having been raised in a church-going family in western society whose principal religion is Christianity, I naturally include many references to the Bible and my fundamentalist Christian upbringing. Religious abuse (as defined later in this story) played a large part in the development of my illness. My gaining a new understanding of Jesus and his message was crucial to my healing. Religions arise from the institutionalization of spiritual experience. There are many paths to God. Perhaps my story will help bridge the gap between traditional Christianity and other religious and spiritual paths (including “new age” and Goddess worship) - we can all learn from one another.

My religious beliefs changed considerably over the course of my illness. Any reader looking for a defense of fundamentalist Christianity will be disappointed - indeed, I believe that religious fundamentalism of any form can be both contributory to and symptomatic of mental illness. Many fundamentalists are, I believe, addicted to religion out of fear and in order to avoid facing their own childhood pain. Although I respect the Bible, in particular the New Testament, I do not consider it to be the sole and unerring Word of God. The Old Testament contains many references to a cruel, judgmental and jealous Jehovah - and, for healing to occur, any God of this sort must be exposed as a fraud and expelled from the psyche. Indeed, it seems clear to me that this was a large part of Jesus' purpose. Unfortunately, as is bound to happen when individual spiritual experience is formed into a religious framework, the meaning of the original experience becomes distorted.

We should recognize that many other beautiful and truthful spiritual writings have been composed by inspired men and women throughout history. These exist both outside of and within various religious frameworks. For example, there are other Christian writings - the “lost gospels” - that the early Church Fathers decided, for their own reasons, not to include in the canonical Bible. I have found many of these, in particular, the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas (often referred to as the “Fifth Gospel”) and the Gnostic Gospel of Truth, helpful and inspiring, and I have included several quotations in this book. *Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary* defines “Gnostic” as “relating to divinely inspired knowledge”, or “gnosis”. As explained by Elaine Pagels in *The Gnostic Gospels*, the Gnostics were early Christians who believed that salvation came through personal revelation. For the Gnostics, and for me, Jesus did not save by offering himself to a judgmental God as a sacrifice for our sins, but by leading us within to find the knowledge of our true identity. However, as Michael Washburn (author of *The Ego and the Dynamic Ground*) pointed out to me, many Gnostics also espoused a strong mind-body, celestial-earthly dualism that judged the body and this world harshly and glorified disembodied spirit and celestial other-worldliness. I am not an adherent of these particular Gnostic teachings, and neither, I submit, was Jesus.

Fundamentalist Christianity, Islam and Orthodox Judaism (all of which take literally the Genesis myths) do not subscribe to the concept of reincarnation. Millions of devotees of Buddhist, Hindu, Sufi, Cabalistic and “new age” philosophies (which all have Gnostic associations) do, however, believe that the spirit passes through many lifetimes during its journey back to the Source. Many who consider themselves followers of Jesus also believe this. It is a fact that the Bible once contained obvious references to reincarnation (less obvious references still remain), but that in 325 AD, the Roman emperor Constantine deleted references to reincarnation from the New Testament. In 553 AD, the Second Council of Constantinople confirmed this action and declared the concept of reincarnation a heresy.

I do not maintain that it is necessary to believe in reincarnation. Although I do think that the concept is probably true, I myself have never experienced memories of past lives. But during my own struggle, I became absolutely convinced of spiritual immortality - we need not fear death. And there are numerous documented cases in which “past life therapy” has helped persons bothered by stubborn phobias or anxiety. However, whether these cases represent recall of actual past life memories, or ancestral “cellular” memories contained in our genetic coding, or creative expressions of our current life psyches, is unknowable.

There are many seekers today who claim to be in contact with enlightened “masters” - evolved spiritual beings who have learned much and are available to guide us. This is very similar to the Christian concept of guardian angels. Some new-age authors claim to directly “channel” knowledge and advice received from angelic beings, and produce

entire volumes of these messages for humankind. Whether these are actual communications from the “beyond” or originate from the channeler’s own subconscious mind (or conscious mind, if the “channeler” is a charlatan) cannot be proven. I myself have never received any such direct verbal communication from the beyond, although I certainly have received non-verbal messages that were crucial to my healing. In any case, belief in channeling is not a prerequisite to happiness.

To my mind, four main characteristics of God (or, if you prefer, the Source or Spiritual Ground) are love, intelligence, creativity and service. However, the one single belief that most succinctly summarizes my spiritual outlook is that God, and our true nature, is unconditional love. Later in this book, we will contemplate what this means.

Childhood

The greatest poem ever known
Is one all poets have outgrown:
The poetry, innate, untold
Of being only four years old.

Still young enough to be a part
Of Nature's great impulsive heart,
Born comrade of bird, beast and tree
And unselfconscious as the bee -

And yet with lovely reason skilled
Each day new paradise to build
Elate explorer of each sense,
Without dismay, without pretense!

In your unstained transparent eyes
There is no conscience, no surprise:
Life's queer conundrums you accept,
Your strange Divinity still kept....

And Life, that sets all things in rhyme,
May make you poet, too, in time –
But there were days, O tender elf,
When you were poetry itself!

Christopher Morley

PART I: THE DIS-EASE

Jesus said: “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say ‘Here it is’, or ‘There it is’, because the kingdom of God is within you.”

Gospel of Luke

Jesus said: “If those who lead you say, ‘See, the kingdom is in the sky’, then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, ‘It is in the sea’, then the fish will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are the sons of the living Father. But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty and it is you who are that poverty.”

Gospel of Thomas

Jesus said: “If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.”

Gospel of Thomas

Chapter 1 – The Seeds of Anxiety

At the age of thirty I was forced to admit to myself, under circumstances I will shortly describe, that I had been raised in a highly dysfunctional family. Until that time, I was under the illusion that my upbringing had not been at all harmful to my psyche.

I was the second youngest of five children. My mother's first pregnancy occurred out of wedlock, which was taboo and must have incited considerable shame. Only recently have I considered the likelihood that she would not otherwise have married my father. Apparently, she didn't then love my father, and one of the reasons for this may have been his ethnicity. Although my parents are of the same ethnic background, my mother, I have come to understand, was in some ways ashamed of her heritage.

From my older sisters, I have learned that the relationship between my parents became especially strained at about the time of my birth. My mother herself has told me that she did not want any more children, but my father did not believe in birth control. The arrival of my younger sister, when I was barely two years old, was apparently the result of my father having forced himself upon my mother.

Although my older sisters and brother were all breast-fed (my brother albeit for only a brief period), neither my younger sister nor I were. I mention this because I regard breast-feeding as a crucial element of the "bonding process" that must occur between the new-born and the mother if the infant is to properly develop psychologically. Granted, there are circumstances that may preclude breast-feeding, and proper bonding can still occur if the mother attends to the infant in a tender and loving manner. However, when a mother chooses, for no apparent sound reason, not to breast-feed, it is a signal that something is amiss.

My mother had been supply teaching (i.e., filling in on an occasional basis for full-time teachers) since my birth. However, shortly after my younger sister was born, my father required a back operation. This meant that he could not work for some time, and my mother accepted a full-time teaching position in order to make ends meet. I was then two years old and my brother was four. Our two older sisters were eight and ten. Our grandmother looked after us much of the time. This, combined with my mother's own psychospiritual limitations, meant that she simply was not able to provide her children, in particular we three youngest, with the emotional support so crucial during the formative years.

An extremely anxious woman, my mother would consult a doctor for even relatively minor ailments in her children. She herself was anemic during my early childhood, and

was prone to dizziness and chest pains. She was very concerned about what other people thought. Prudish and religious, she never sang or danced. In short, she was not a joyful person by any stretch of the imagination. I have a faint memory from very early childhood of being naked with her in the steam bath (Finnish “sauna”) at our cottage on one occasion. However, from the time I was about four years old, she kept herself fully clothed in our presence, and never wore a swimming suit or even shorts. When tired, she would paraphrase Isaiah by exclaiming, “No rest for the wicked”. She had very high expectations of us children, and would flee to her room in tears whenever we quarreled.

My mother, it seems, believed that worrying was a virtue, as if by being constantly on-guard and protective (to the extreme) of her children, she was demonstrating her love. As a child I didn’t question this attitude, but I now have difficulty understanding it – it is so contrary to Jesus’ teachings about how we are to trust in the boundless love and care of God. Rather than being a sign of her love, could it have been a reflection of the fact that our mother needed us to serve her emotional needs, unmet in her own childhood? Although fearful for our safety, she was perhaps more afraid of the pain that she would feel if we were to suffer misfortune.

Regardless, this worrisome outlook on life naturally rubbed off on me - in fact, it became even more exaggerated. I began to worry about everything, including the possibility that I would become mentally ill. Having learned to see my private parts as shameful, I began to worry about even thinking of my penis. Of course, it is impossible to force oneself not to think about something, so the more I tried, the more it backfired. Once when I was six or seven years old, a friend and I were play-wrestling and he bit me on my scrotum through my pants. It produced a small cut, which concerned me and hurt for a while, but I was much too ashamed to acquiesce to my mother’s request to let her see the injury. My mother began to refer to me as a “worry wart”, but I sensed that she found it amusing that I worried so.

My grandmother did much of the cooking, and at this she excelled. My mother did not cook very often, and when she did she often burned things - the sausages were regularly hard and black. She never sat at the table and ate with us - rather, she would eat standing up or sitting alone in a corner of the kitchen.

It certainly didn't help my parents’ relationship that my mother was fanatically against even the occasional social use of alcohol. Although my mother would not allow any alcohol in the house, my father would drink regularly and to excess away from home. As a result, he was involved in several automobile accidents. He would often drink alone at the cottage. My siblings and I were ashamed of him when he got “stupid” under the influence, especially when he would speak very disparagingly of my mother behind her back. He was an alcoholic, although no one dared openly acknowledge this fact.

My father was also quite strongly religious, at least outwardly, and very judgmental. He was the primary enforcer (although generally at my mother's request), and he had a violent temper. The most frequent means of punishment was hair pulling, during which I was literally lifted off the ground. Sometimes, I was forced to cut my own switch from a bush in the back yard, with which I would be beaten. My father's wide and heavy belt, which he would ritually peel off from around his waist, was also a favorite tool for discipline. During these beatings, I would beg for mercy, and promise to be good, in the hope that this would lessen the punishment.

I can recall the precise circumstances surrounding one of these incidents of punishment. When I was about six years old, I had gone to a friend's house directly after school, without asking permission from my parents. Upon my return home, after an absence of an hour or two, my father expressed his feelings by taking his belt to my bare buttocks.

My mother herself would also physically discipline me on occasion. She would repeatedly whack my bottom with her hand, while exclaiming, "This hurts me more than it hurts you".

This punishment was inflicted although I now know that I was by no means difficult or troublesome. On the contrary, one of my sisters has told me that she remembers me being a sweet and gentle child.

My "negative" childhood emotions were not validated by my parents. Whenever I was fearful, angry or sad, I would be told that there was no reason for me to feel this way. I remember feeling so frustrated, to the point of tears, that my mother didn't seem to understand me. "Talk-back" was not tolerated. If I asked my mother to explain why I could not follow my own wishes, she would exclaim only, "Because I said so". I now understand that this absence of empathy was poisonous to my self-image.

We attended a fundamentalist church regularly, where the Old Testament notion of God as an angry and vengeful judge was often preached at the expense of God as revealed through Jesus - a completely loving and forgiving father. If we occasionally missed church for other than a "good" reason, it was the work of the devil, and it would be sinful if we were to do anything enjoyable that day.

During my entire childhood, my parents had separate bedrooms. There was virtually no exchange of affection of any sort between them. My siblings and I were also deprived in this regard - we were starved for genuine affection. When I sought assurances from my mother that she loved me, she would respond that she loved all of her children equally.

After my parents' emotional estrangement, we children represented my mother's reason to exist. Susan Jeffers, in *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*, has pointed out the inevitable side effects – a need to dominate, overprotectiveness, self-righteousness, and the creation of massive amounts of guilt in children. Considering our ages (4, 2 and newborn) at the time of this estrangement, my older brother, little sister and I were especially sensitive to the negative repercussions of this dysfunctional situation.

Although I don't remember my father ever telling me that he loved me, I have no recollection of seeking such assurances from him. Once while alone at the cottage with my father, when it was apparent that he had been drinking again (which he generally sneaked away to do), I told him that I wished that he wouldn't drink so much. When he asked why, I said it was because I loved him. His painful response was, "I don't care".

However, I recall many happy times with my father. My brother and I often accompanied him during holiday trips to neighboring towns or into the wilderness to camp, fish or pick berries. My mother and sisters never joined us on these excursions.

There were many occasions during my childhood and adolescence when I dearly wished that I were bigger, stronger and more virile than my brother. Frustrated and hurt by what I considered to be unfair tactics, unnecessary roughness and frequent teasing about everything from my athletic ability to the size of my penis, I would long for the day when I could "kick sand in his face". However, I now understand that my brother was himself dealing as best he could with our dysfunctional environment.

One incident involving physical injury is regularly brought to my mind. I was playing on a backyard swing, and my brother began to push me higher and higher although I was pleading with him to stop. Suddenly, I lost my grip and went flying off the swing, landing flush on my tailbone. There was immediate excruciating pain, which lasted for several hours, and was followed by stiffness and a dull ache over a period of several days. Strangely, this is one occasion when my mother did not seek medical attention for me. For many years following, I experienced severe pain in my tailbone area whenever I had a bowel movement while the least bit constipated.

However, I know that I have always loved my brother. My feelings were made very clear to me when he went missing while on a snowmobile expedition. He left alone from a wilderness cabin inhabited by my sister and brother-in-law, and a blizzard sprang up. When he hadn't returned by nightfall, I began to worry. My brother-in-law and I borrowed a snowmobile (with a broken headlight) from a neighbor and searched for him by flashlight. We finally located my brother's snowmobile in the middle of a frozen lake, stuck in "slush" (water-soaked snow, every snowmobiler's nightmare), but my brother was nowhere to be seen. My brother-in-law and I managed to free the snowmobile, and

proceeded slowly down the lake, stopping intermittently and calling. To my great joy, we finally discerned his faint response. Following his shouts, we located him at a private lakeside cabin, which he had managed to reach and break into in spite of being half-frozen. We left a brief note of explanation and thanks, and a few dollars to pay for a new lock, and returned to the warmth and security of my sister's home without further incident.

Chapter 2 – Neuroses

As a child, I was very afraid of the dark, and experienced frequent nightmares. In them, I would be menaced by evil alien space creatures, ferocious dinosaurs, wild beasts (especially bears) or atomic bombs, and would awaken terrified and ask permission to climb into my mother's bed for comfort and security. Although my mother always acquiesced to this request, she never held me close.

I now understand that when a young child is allowed to suffer essentially alone in his/her fears, the child internalizes the rationale for the fear and begins to believe that s/he somehow deserves to experience the fear - in other words, that s/he is bad.

There was very little display of affection in our family, but I enjoyed having my hair occasionally stroked by either of my parents. Strange as it seems to me now, as a child I had thought that I was basically happy, and I was not aware that I was emotionally very insecure. For no reason that was apparent to me, though, I felt extremely uneasy from time to time. However, having a drink of water would make the strange feeling go away. I didn't realize that I was putting on a false "mask" in order to try to be lovable, and that in doing so, I was denying my own Self, and was forcing my natural child farther and farther into hiding.

As I will later elucidate, I am fully convinced that we are all born into a state of grace. This state is characterized by a communion with the Source, with the Ground of Being – with God. The infant basks in unconditional love, in a state of perfect innocence. This is the natural condition of the child. Joseph Pearce called the natural child the *Magical Child* but there is no magic here, but rather only reality which looks like magic when viewed by the "rational" adult ego. In the eyes of the natural child, there is no self-condemnation. No energy is wasted on defending a fragile self-image. The natural child is free to be at one with the universe. The natural child knows that s/he belongs here, and is comfortable here. The natural child plays, and is not concerned what opinion others might have of the play.

A characteristic of this state of grace is that the natural child observes the universe in wonder and awe. There is an amazing sense of discovery. One of my fondest childhood memories, which I recalled several years ago, is of just staring at a small part of one corner of the floor in a room in our house, and thinking that I was probably the first person ever to focus on and really "see" that particular small part of the floor. This simple thing filled me with awe! How, and why, did I lose it?

We all begin to lose touch with our Source as we build a self-identity, an ego, which tells us that we are separate from God and from others. This is not of itself a bad thing – the ego is necessary to survive in and relate to the world. But the seeds of later psychopathology are sown when we start to believe (and we really have no choice) what we are taught - that we are not unique and valuable just as we are and must somehow earn the right to be loved. We are taught that we are not intrinsically valuable in many ways: by not having our earliest needs for cuddling and caressing met, by being left alone to cry ourselves to sleep, by being made to feel that our bodies and bodily functions are dirty and shameful, by being yelled at and told we are stupid and lazy, by being physically disciplined for making “mistakes” or being “bad”, by being told that our very thoughts are bad and are therefore to be feared, by being taught that we ourselves are so bad that God had to sacrifice his only son on our behalf in order to make us somehow acceptable in his sight (in effect making us responsible for the crucifixion).

Later, we discover to our dismay that our attempts to earn recognition and love always seem to fall short of the mark. Out of desperation, we may then either try to be perfect (an absolutely hopeless task), or we may give up trying to earn love and simply accept our miserable state, or we may rebel by exhibiting objectionable behavior (I am not sure that any of these is preferred). I chose the first response (and indeed this was a “choice” on my part, as I later came to fully understand), and gradually became more and more of a perfectionist.

When I was in kindergarten, my natural child was still in evidence, for I volunteered to sing a solo (the National Anthem) in front of my entire class. However, by the time I had reached the third grade, and having learned that I was being judged (loved) according to how well I performed in relation to others, I had become very shy. In fact, when my third-grade music teacher required all students to sing a brief solo in front of the class, on which we were to be graded, I refused. Given the opportunity to sing before the teacher in private, I still refused. My mother was concerned by this (or rather she was concerned about what my teacher thought of it), and so she took me to see the family physician, who of course found no physical ailment.

In addition to shyness, my anxiety manifested in various other neurotic and obsessive-compulsive behaviors while I was in grade school. These included vigorously chewing my pencils and fingernails, developing a nervous squint (which caused my teacher to send me to the school nurse) and experiencing the nightmares I have previously described.

Concerned that my efforts would not satisfy my mother, I asked her how well she expected me to do. She replied, “Always do the very best that you can”. By the end of the third grade, I had managed to rise to the top of my class, where I was entrenched

throughout the remainder of my formal schooling. Through my good grades (or rather through my performing better than others), I felt that I was earning affection and approval, both from others and from myself. However, I now realize that, in trying to elevate myself above others, I was putting others down.

A comment on my report card from my sixth grade teacher says a lot: “Robert should go far; he tries so hard to please”. My mother herself often commented, both directly to me and to others in my presence, that I was a perfectionist. It was obvious to me that she regarded perfectionism as a desirable quality, and so I felt a sense of pride in being thus labeled.

Physically, I was quite capable of standing up for myself among those my own age. On one occasion, I responded to a challenge from a bigger boy, who had threatened to beat me up. I quickly got the upper hand, and he was soon on the ground with me on top. Urged on by onlookers, I was considering striking him in the face to make him surrender. But I couldn't do it, and broke into tears and ran home.

The child who is loved conditionally feels that s/he is guilty when s/he is unable to meet these conditions. His/her “faults” are interpreted as moral faults. The only way to be acceptable is to be perfect. Unfortunately, the perfectionist pays dearly for his/her attempted perfection by setting impossible standards, and living with a constant fear of failure. Rather than seeking admiration, the perfectionist is deeply afraid of being rejected. S/he will do everything possible to avoid this.

My mother seemed to be very proud of me. However, I now believe that she was trying to live part of her life through me and my accomplishments - as if I were just a projection of her. Sensing this, I must have been under a great deal of unconscious pressure and feared disappointing her. This made it impossible for me to live for myself.

I did not consciously question the existence of God until I was eleven years old. After watching a film about the universe during a school science class, I went out to the playground for recess and, out-of-the-blue, was stricken with a doubt concerning God's existence. Could I really be sure that there was a God who had made this vastness? I was absolutely devastated by this doubt. I was terrified that if I did not believe in God, my mother would no longer love me and I would be abandoned.

It would be difficult to overstate the effect this had on me. I was sick to the depths of my spirit, and became terribly depressed. When I was finally able to confide to my mother the nature of my remorse, I received scant comfort. She recited, “Poems are made by fools like me, but only God can make a tree”, and she bought me a toy birch-bark canoe to try to take my mind off my doubts. She told me that I thought too much and too

deeply. And, of course, she took me to our family physician, who simply said that I was suffering a crisis of faith at an abnormally young age. But what I needed most - to be hugged and kissed by my mother and told that I was loved no matter what - I did not get.

Much later I learned from my mother that, during the period in which I was openly suffering as a consequence of this sudden doubt, my maternal grandmother had commented that someday I would be very strong in God.

Fortunately, my eldest sister embraced me and tried to comfort me as best she could. I struggled to bury my doubts, and by a very great effort of will, I was able to put them out of my mind, and actually managed to return to my state of unquestioning childlike faith for a time.

Two years later, however, the doubts returned with a vengeance, and I gave up the struggle for an unquestioning belief. This seems to have been the point at which my fall from grace accelerated, and I began to bury my inner child in earnest. Although I was not aware of it until it was pointed out to me by a therapist many years ago, I had felt very guilty about doubting God's existence.

As a family we continued to attend church regularly, and I was "confirmed". However, I felt hypocritical, and leaned more toward agnosticism than faith. When I recited my nightly prayers, it was out of habit and fear. My hope was hollow. I lacked the courage to honestly examine the evidence for the existence of a loving God for fear that I would conclude that God did not exist, that life was a fluke, and that we were living in a meaningless universe.

Gradually, I became more and more materialistic, egotistical and disdainful of philosophical matters. Life was to be lived, with as much fun as possible. Religion was something not to be thought seriously about, for serious religion brought pain. I began to fear growing old, I began to fear death and I became a hypochondriac. As a result, I became afraid of life.

On occasion, I exhibited some disrespect for the life of other creatures and a lack of compassion for their suffering. Once when I was a young teenager, visiting at my friend's cottage, we deliberately killed toads by burning them and blowing them up with fireworks. I also shot a songbird with a pellet rifle. A few years later, I obtained my hunting license and enjoyed blasting away at ruffed grouse (which we at least ate). I also killed a squirrel, and a weasel that was trying to abscond with a grouse I had just shot.

While in grade school, I developed a very strong affection for a certain girl, but, largely because of my inner insecurities, the relationship died in early high school, and another psychological scar formed (but with an astonishing sequel, as described in Part III of this book). I became convinced that I was physically unattractive. One of my sisters once commented that I would make a “cute girl”, something an insecure teenage boy with acne does not want to hear. An insensitive “friend” also poked fun at my appearance.

The strong sexual urgings that accompanied puberty were difficult for me to deal with. I was, I think, fourteen when I experienced my first orgasm. It occurred while I was alone in our sauna. I was quite enthralled and pleased to discover that I was capable of this feat. But masturbation eventually created much guilt and shame. I was totally entranced and captivated by the female breast, to the point where I would even fantasize about how I would enjoy myself if I were a woman with ample breasts. Once while amusing myself with a mildly pornographic magazine in my bedroom, my mother suddenly and unexpectedly entered the room. Feeling terribly humiliated, I tried to conceal things as best I could, but I was certain that she knew what was going on. But she said nothing at all, and simply turned and left the room.

Later, I was shocked and shamed to my core when my younger sister suddenly proclaimed in front of our parents that she had seen me masturbating in my bedroom (she must have been spying on me through the keyhole). Of course I vehemently denied this, and nothing more was said.

In high school, I worked hard to make myself attractive to the opposite sex, with some success, although I directed most of my attention to girls who were somewhat younger than I. In order to gain false courage, I would sometimes abuse alcohol, and on one occasion I became very intimate with a girlfriend. I did not treat her with respect and tenderness, for which I later felt shame. In general, I was much more concerned with being loved than with loving. Because I feared that I would not be loved if I revealed what I was really like, I ultimately caused pain to some who became attracted to me.

Although I was a very good wrestler (I won my weight class at school), I felt a need to act tougher than I was. Alcohol would make this easier, and I occasionally bluffed bigger and stronger boys into believing that I was capable of beating them up. But one time this backfired, and I ended up backing down, which was very humiliating.

In spite of my doubts concerning the existence of God, I remained active in the Church. I served on the Church Council, and assisted with services. On one occasion, after I delivered the sermon, I was complimented by a fellow parishioner, who suggested that I should enter the Ministry. I smiled, but this was actually the farthest thing from my mind.

My terrifying nightmares finally subsided, but I frequently had other bad dreams, including: being shot at, being shocked to discover that I had arrived at school wearing only underwear (reflecting a fear of humiliation from exposing my real self), struggling to write an exam only to have the time expire without my having answered a single question, and having great difficulty fleeing from bears or even simply walking because my legs felt excruciatingly heavy and stiff.

My second eldest sister and her husband departed on a backpacking adventure around the world. They were gone for a year and a half, during which time they travelled through Europe and the Middle East (this was before the rise of fundamentalist Islamic militancy), and on to India, Nepal and Bali. Upon their return, I greeted my sister at the doorway of my parents' home. My manner of greeting was very reserved, reflecting my low self-esteem. My sister commented, "I don't know you".

During summer employment as a tree planter, an incident occurred that was my first apparent experience with the supernatural. My roommate showed me a trick wherein he correctly identified a randomly chosen playing card solely by feeling it with his fingertips. I decided to try it, and found that I also was able to quickly and easily identify the card in this manner. My roommate was initially surprised at my success, but then he told me that I must have cheated just like he had. I assured him that I hadn't. He then laughed and said that it was impossible to identify a playing card with one's fingertips. He proceeded to explain how he had performed the trick. As he brought the card up in front of him, he had briefly bent an edge back just enough to identify it, without my noticing this. I told him the truth, which was that I really had felt the outline of the card. He challenged me to repeat it, but when I tried, I could no longer feel anything. I have no rational explanation for my initial success, other than that it was telepathy, clairvoyance, or hypersensitive touch (which is indeed how I experienced it), which disappeared when I lost faith.

I graduated at the top of my Grade 12 class, and decided to skip the final year of high school, enrolling in the Faculty of Science at the local university. In my first year of university, I suddenly discovered what I believed to be an enlarged lymph node on my neck, and became convinced that I had cancer. I monitored my body temperature, and the fluctuations I observed seemed to confirm my diagnosis. Even after our family physician had examined me and pronounced everything normal, I requested a biopsy. His scornful yet welcome response was, "You do not have Hodgkin's Disease!"

Because outer appearance of good performance at school was so important to me, I generally selected optional courses on the basis of their ease as opposed to their learning value. On one social occasion, after having a few drinks, I bragged about the high degree of "success" this approach to my studies had brought me. Not surprisingly, this upset

one professor from another department. When he voiced his opinion, an argument developed that nearly came to blows. Later, I felt very remorseful, but I never apologized.

Shortly afterward, I graduated with a degree in biology, first class standing.

At about this time, an incident occurred at our summer cottage that I remember vividly. Someone had brought a bottle of wine, and after a glass or two, my younger sister, a visiting friend of my elder sister, and I, all decided to have a sauna and go “skinny dipping”. After swimming for a time, my younger sister went back into the cottage, but my elder sister's friend and I returned to the sauna to warm up. The situation soon got out of hand. But while we were lying on the floor of the change room, my younger sister returned and began to pound on the door. I was much too excited to interrupt what I was attempting. Suddenly, my younger sister threw a log through the door window, which was a sufficient shock to stop the action before the act had been accomplished.

I was too embarrassed and ashamed to be angry with my sister. Feeling responsible, I later replaced the broken window. But I wondered about the reasons for my sister's actions. Had she acted out of “brotherly love”, worried that I would do something I would later regret, or could her rage have been the result of jealousy? I myself very occasionally experienced incestuous feelings, although they would be accompanied by guilt, and I never attempted to pursue them.

Family expectations were high, and I enrolled in medical school. However, I was extremely uptight and insecure. My hypochondria surfaced again when I noticed that the left side of my abdomen stuck out slightly in relation to the right side. This meant that I probably had abdominal cancer, I concluded. My fears were only quelled by a physical examination, during which the physician commented that no one's abdomen was perfectly symmetric.

In medical school, my palms sweated and my hands trembled (so-called “intention tremor”, a common characteristic of social anxiety disorder) whenever I had to perform manual tasks in front of people. I dreaded the thought that people would find out what I was really like. How could I possibly treat patients? I left medical school without completing my first year, and returned home to enroll in graduate school at the local university.

During my first year of graduate studies, I made the decision to have cosmetic surgery. This was carried out (with the knowledge of my mother, brother and younger sister only) during the summer at a hospital in a major city some distance away, and I paid for

it out of scholarship money. I justified the decision by telling myself that it was required in part to correct a deviated septum, but this was really a very secondary concern.

During a pre-operative interview, a social worker told me that in her opinion, there was absolutely nothing objectionable about my appearance, and she questioned my rationale for the operation. Nonetheless, I was convinced that the operation would make me feel better and more self-confident, and in fact it did (although it was not totally successful from a clinical standpoint). The difference in my appearance was actually quite minor, and no one else, including friends and even my father and older sisters, apparently knew or suspected anything.

But appearances, as they say, are only skin deep. In spite of my feeling more confident about my appearance, years later I came to realize that the operation had made no significant difference in how I really felt about myself.

I completed my Master of Science degree “with commendation”. Although I was afraid, I was somehow able to muster the courage to accept a postgraduate scholarship at a foreign university, in the country of my father's birth. While saying our goodbyes at the airport, I was not surprised when my mother began to cry, because she had cried for days when my older sisters went away to university. When she suddenly kissed me forcefully on the lips, however, I was shocked.

Although I was dreadfully homesick for the first month or so, gradually I began to feel more comfortable living away from the security of family. However, my shyness developed into a full-fledged phobia. I became terribly afraid of embarrassing myself by having shaky hands. Meals with colleagues and authority figures were particularly stressful. Unless I had had an alcoholic beverage (and even consuming the first of these in social situations was problematic), I would eat quickly and try to avoid spillable things like soup and salad altogether. On one occasion, I was offered a bowl of ice-cream at the home of distant relatives. In anticipation of being embarrassed, my hand shook noticeably whenever I tried to bring the spoon to my mouth. I forced myself to finish the bowl, but it was an experience of ever-increasing agony. Others could not help but notice, but they were too polite to say anything. On future occasions, I went so far as to feign illness in order to avoid having to dine with others.

Even while alone in my room, with no immediate stress triggers, I would catch myself expressing my underlying anxiety by compulsively chewing my moustache or plucking at my eyebrows.

My room-mate in the foreign students' residence was a young Frenchman studying architecture, and I was introduced to his “girlfriend”, a very pretty and independent

mademoiselle who was learning the local language while working as an “au-pair”. When I finally discovered that they were not romantically attached, my interest perked.

As we spent more and more time together, and got to know each other better, I became very enamored. This was a special human being, I knew, someone from whom I did not want to part. But I was still frightened that I would not be loved if all of my secrets were known. For example, although by this time the worst of my acne was over, I still used cleansing and cover creams regularly. Very reluctantly, I told my girlfriend about this condition, and she laughed that I was so concerned about what she would think of it. However, when she commented on the presence of a surgical scar, I told her that the surgery had been to correct a deviated septum, for I was too ashamed to tell her that it was mainly for cosmetic purposes.

Following a three-month courtship, I hesitatingly proposed (I was terribly afraid of being rejected). When, after an initial hesitation, the young woman said yes, I was ecstatic.

At one point, during a brief discussion of morality and ethics, I described my mother as a “saint”. My wife later told me how surprised and somewhat perturbed she was by that comment.

We decided to be married the following summer in the small town in the north-central part of the country that was the home of a very good and long-time friend of my fiancée, and where we had spent some time together during our courtship.

The wedding was truly a fairy tale affair. Friends from several different countries attended, in addition to our immediate families. For my father, it meant the first return to his homeland since he had emigrated as a young lad of thirteen some fifty years earlier.

Following a brief honeymoon voyage to Leningrad (now St. Petersburg, Russia), my bride and I travelled to her home town, where we spent six glorious weeks relaxing with her family.

In September, I returned with my wife to my native land. We took up residence in the upper floor of my parents' home. I obtained employment as a research assistant at the local university, although my intention tremor interfered somewhat with my job. My wife studied to complete her degree. Preliminary contacts were made with a number of universities regarding my enrolment in graduate studies to complete my Ph.D.

However, our plans changed when we received the joyous news that my wife was expecting. There was a sense of pride and accomplishment for me in this. In order to

support a family, I needed to find more secure and better paying work. Fortunately, I was soon able to obtain a good government job. The only drawback for me was that the position was located in a major centre a considerable distance from my hometown.

We made the move, and events progressed relatively smoothly in our lives. Our beautiful daughter was born, and we were as happy as could be expected. Although we had our daughter baptized, it was mainly out of respect for my parents, for neither of us gave religion serious thought. It seemed to me that the knowledge of my wife's love was all the security I needed and wanted.

Chapter 3 – Panic Attacks

It was while working in the basement of our home one evening that I experienced the unease. Difficult to describe, it was a sort of mental queasiness, similar to what I remember having felt occasionally as a young child. Although I found it alarming, I was able to push it back into my unconscious. But I think I recognized then that it was a symptom of a more serious problem.

Soon afterward, we travelled overseas to visit with my wife's family. During the whole vacation, I felt very insecure, and was not able to enjoy myself. It was a relief to return home.

At this time, I began to have brief recollections of my early childhood, happy and carefree memories, in which I truly enjoyed life, and was not at all concerned about embarrassing myself in public.

My wife soon became pregnant again, and our handsome, healthy son was born when our daughter was not quite two years old. It is this event that seems to have triggered the crisis. Shortly before my son's birth, I had a very disturbing dream that our child was born hideously deformed. I began to experience increasing anxiety, without being able to put a finger on the reason. As described my Michael Washburn in *The Ego and the Dynamic Ground*, I was losing faith in my ego's "identity project". Success at work and in my family life was not enough to guarantee my happiness.

At one point soon after my son's birth, I confided in my wife that I wished that I could have my childlike faith in God back. I realized that if I truly believed in a God who loved me unconditionally, I could relax and not be concerned about being perfect. I could let my guard down, and enjoy life.

However, at the same time, I believed that this unquestioning faith was no longer possible. Nor did I really want this kind of faith, because I now associated it, ultimately, with spiritual pain. For me, belief alone would not, could not, be enough. I would have to **know**, and I didn't think it was possible that such knowledge was attainable on this earth.

The following night, I awoke in a cold sweat. I began to feel panicky, for no apparent reason. The more I tried to control the fear, the more it escalated, until I developed a full-blown "panic attack". I had experienced something similar when experimenting with a mildly hallucinogenic drug with friends many years before. However, the previous panic was associated with a sudden and apparently groundless fear that I could

somehow become a homosexual (although I was homophobic, I now believe that it stemmed from a fear of loving myself, as I will later elucidate). It had also been far less intense, and I appeared to be none the worse for wear when the effects of the drug wore off.

Those who have not experienced a severe panic attack cannot possibly have an appreciation of the terror involved. My heart was beating so violently I thought that it would explode. In my utter terror, I cried out to God, but I didn't really believe that there was a God there to hear me.

Although I couldn't put a finger on it at the time, I now believe that the horrible fear I felt was the terror of "non-being", the fear of ceasing to exist. It was a fear that I had been suppressing for many, many years, but my defenses finally broke down.

At last, the panic attack subsided, although I lay anxiously awake for the rest of the night.

In the ensuing days, I suffered many similar attacks. They seemed to me to have no cause, other than a "fear of fear". It was literally a fear of experiencing uncontrollable anxiety that brought about the uncontrollable anxiety, a sort of vicious circle. However, I found that I was able to obtain a small measure of temporary relief by praying, although there was strong internal resistance to this course of action. Aside from my painful early memories of religion, I also resisted letting God back into my life because I thought that this would interfere with my close relationship with my wife, whom I adored. But when I told my mother that I was afraid that God would somehow come between my wife and me, she insisted that the opposite was true - that God would bring us closer together. I was not then aware that my relationship with my wife was really a pathological dependency.

My teachers had commented on several occasions throughout my schooling that I had an "analytical mind". Desperately, I tried to analyze myself back to normal. Why was I suffering this panic? Was it simply a consequence of my having tried a hallucinogen on one occasion, or did it go deeper? Was the cause purely psychological (as I hoped), or was it spiritual? (I didn't then comprehend the direct relationship between mental illness and spirituality). I dug up and analyzed all the traumatic events and circumstances in my life that I thought could have contributed, and wrote these down. Still, there was no relief.

I had never before visited a psychiatrist, and was reluctant to do so now, feeling that it was an admission of weakness. However, out of desperation I made an appointment through the Yellow Pages of the phone book. After all, I also had a responsibility to my

family to overcome this problem as quickly as possible. All I wanted was to return to my previous state of mind.

During my initial visit with the psychiatrist, I began to talk a mile a minute, raising the various possible contributors to my condition that I had previously written down. The doctor was not impressed. He literally told me to “shut up” and let him begin treatment. Then he said that I had a very low opinion of myself - in fact, his exact words were, “You think you're shit”. Initially, I was offended. It had never even occurred to me that I had low self-esteem. But as I began to think about it, I realized he was right. It even made me feel better, somehow, to repeat to myself that I thought I was shit.

My psychiatrist immediately prescribed two drugs, a tranquilizer and an anti-depressant. I questioned the need for an anti-depressant because I didn't realize that I was depressed.

Feeling extremely frightened and alone, I later asked my therapist whether he had ever treated anyone with a similar condition. He told me that panic disorders were not that uncommon, but that he personally had never encountered anyone as deeply agitated as I was. The effect of this statement was to increase my concern.

My psychiatrist also told me that I was engaging in “mental masturbation”. It was only much later that I realized that this was an inaccurate description. The purpose of masturbation is to bring pleasure, whereas I was trying to relieve pain. Rather taken aback by my psychiatrist's statement, I began to chastise myself for spending so much time and effort thinking about myself. However, when one is in pain, it is perfectly natural to seek the cause of that pain in order to obtain relief. Intense self-scrutiny was absolutely essential to my ultimate recovery.

Reluctantly, I asked my psychiatrist whether religion could help me. He told me that he couldn't say for sure - that it could possibly help me, or it could be the worst thing for me.

I had a very strong urge to run home to my mother. My therapist told me that this would be a grave mistake, and thankfully I had enough sense to appreciate that he was probably right, and was determined to heed his warning.

At this time, still soon after that first panic attack (and while I anxiously waited for the anti-depressant to begin working), I began to have some very strange dreams. I suppose they could have been due at least partly to the medication, but, in hindsight, they make perfect sense. One night, I dreamed that I was diving deep under the sea, wearing a very bulky suit and helmet, and I was having difficulty breathing. When I recounted this

dream to my psychiatrist, he told me to pull off all my heavy gear and come up fighting. But when I mentally tried to do this, I felt as if I were stifling all my feelings and emotions, and that what was left was a cold and uncaring person living a joyless and meaningless life. I couldn't accept this as an option.

Another night, I dreamed that I was trapped in a deep, dark dungeon. I was carrying a heavy backpack of some sort. The only way out was to grasp a rope and climb up a slippery rope. However, I would get part way up the rope and then slide back into the dungeon. One particularly disturbing dream I had was of being at my parents' home, and overhearing my father refer to me as "the beast". Later, I dreamed that I was floating in dense fog, totally lost. In the distance, I saw a faint light. In desperation, I began to "swim" in the direction of the light. Beside me was someone I could not see clearly and did not recognize, who was trying to guide me to the light.

Although the tranquilizers helped me function at work, I knew they were not a solution. However, whenever I tried to cope without the medication, I failed miserably. I dreaded getting on the bus to commute to work. I dreaded being separated from my wife for even a brief period (such "separation anxiety" is characteristic of those afflicted by panic attacks). It was dawning on me that I was spiritually dependent on my wife for what little self-esteem I had - that I was clinging to her because I didn't have a clue what it meant to love myself.

This may have been at least part of the reason why my son's birth seems to have triggered the panic attacks. I was afraid that my son would somehow divert my wife's affection from me. It didn't help that I knew that this was a very selfish attitude. I wanted very much to be able to be a good husband and father, to be able to truly love my family in an unselfish, giving way. I knew that I was supposed to love them this way, but I was too insecure to truly give of myself. Besides, was my love really worth anything? These thoughts fuelled my guilt feelings and my depression deepened.

Portions of my moustache turned white. I used a hair dye to darken it, but I was bothered by the realization that I was entirely too concerned about my appearance.

I cried a great deal. At this point, I would have been willing to trade my mental illness for virtually any physical illness or incapacity. But this option was obviously not open to me, and I began to lose hope.

Surely, I was going insane. Was there no way to still the chaos in my mind? Was a lobotomy my last resort, after which I would be a vegetable, or should I try taking a hammer to my head?

The amazing (and I believe miraculous) manner in which I received a peaceful respite from the excruciating pain of the panic attacks has already been described in the Introduction and will not be repeated here.

When I recounted the peaceful episode to my psychiatrist, he discounted it as some kind of hocus-pocus. He did, however, suggest that I begin to say the Lord's Prayer at bedtime. I was hesitant to do so, because the painful memories of my childhood experience with religion remained strong.

I decided to consult a specialist in behavioral and biofeedback therapy. He did not discount the episode, and attempted to induce the peaceful state of mind through relaxation techniques. These were not successful, perhaps because I was so anxious that I could not relax anywhere near enough.

Aware that I was emotionally dependent on my wife, I asked this therapist whether it could help my condition if I began to "fool around" with other women. His response was that it could possibly be of benefit, but that he didn't believe that I was capable of this activity. At the time, I didn't know whether to regard this as a positive or negative comment.

While at work one day, as I was fighting to control my anxiety, I had a sudden recollection of my state of mind from early childhood. In this state, there was no fear, for I was comfortable with God and with myself. The memory was very brief, but with it came a conviction that God would return me to this state, and that this was, in some sense, the purpose for my fear. "Bring me back, God", I prayed, "please bring me back".

We spent the next weekend visiting with my eldest sister and her family in a neighboring city. My sister has a very strong religious faith, and was the only one of my parents' five children who had remained an adherent of the church of her youth. As a young girl, she had experienced a vision of heaven during a church service. She had overcome cancer, but several attempts to have a child had ended in grief. However, she and her husband had adopted a healthy, handsome baby boy.

I told my sister that I had difficulty believing in a God who loved me. But, I reasoned, if God did not love me, would he have blessed my wife and me with two beautiful, healthy children? In retrospect, it is clear that I did not understand the nature of God.

When I recounted the anxiety attacks, the dreams, and the state of peace that I had experienced, my sister told me that she believed that God was searching for my soul.

Chapter 4 – Kundalini Awakens

The Christmas holidays arrived. We flew to my hometown to be with my parents and other family members. Upon our arrival, I became very distressed to discover that I had somehow forgotten to bring along my medication (to this day, I don't understand how this happened). I didn't think that I would be able to function for very long without it. However, I would soon come to realize that this was a part of the divine plan for my life.

My second eldest sister (a now-retired social worker), her husband, my wife and I sat around the kitchen table that evening and talked. My sister has traveled extensively throughout Asia, and was familiar with both western and eastern religious tradition and mysticism. When I recounted my struggles, which to me were very painful and not at all welcome, she surprised me by stating that I was lucky! She seemed to believe that God was actually favoring me in some way. Later that evening, I sat alone at the table after the others had retired, trying to understand what was happening to me. I began to read a booklet entitled *Love*, which is itself a chapter in a book called *All That You Are*, by the anonymous author Mary. My sister had earlier given this booklet to our younger sister, who had her own problems associated with very low self-esteem. As I read Mary's words, a revelation suddenly occurred to me. The revelation was that, indeed, God was searching me out. God existed, and God loved me and wanted me!

The moment that this realization came to my mind, a very startling event occurred. The best way I can describe it is that "electricity" began shooting from the base of my spine, up my back, and seemingly out of the top of my head. It was an incredible sensation - an intense spiritual arousal - that built and built until I was in a state of complete and utter ecstasy. There was absolutely no physical arousal associated with it. The feelings were definitely akin to a sexual orgasm, but were much more intense and prolonged, and had a different (inner) focus. I felt an indescribably deep love for God, but it was a response to the love that I now knew that God had for me. This sudden conviction that God loved me carried with it, inseparable from it, an awareness that I loved myself - that I was, indisputably, lovable.

As successive electric jolts shot up my spine, the feelings of love intensified. I felt that God had reclaimed my soul, which had gone astray when I had doubted God's existence in the sixth grade. I felt that God was very close, closer than I had ever known, and I began to expect to see God himself. Although I was in ecstasy, the thought of seeing God was somehow frightening, and I certainly didn't know what form God would take (a bearded old man?). As I experienced this trepidation, the electric sensations gradually subsided and finally ceased.

I was somewhat disappointed to feel the experience come to an end, but mostly I was so very, very happy that I now knew that God existed and loved me, and I resolved to write a testimonial. What I had been seeking was the freedom to love my family as I longed to love them, and I had received this and the knowledge that there was no death. I felt that I had been spiritually reborn. I was very aware of having returned to the state of grace that I was in as a young child (although during my childhood I had not known that I lived in this state - like so many gifts, it can only truly be appreciated after it has been lost, and when lost gradually, can only be recognized as such after it has been suddenly regained).

Is this what Jesus meant when he said, “unless you become like little children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven”?

I was so happy that I immediately woke my mother, and told her that I knew that God loved me. I further knew that we were all “saved” - that immortality was a gift to all of us - that God was so completely and so enormously loving that all people would eventually be brought together in this love. My mother got on her knees beside her bed and prayed a prayer of thanks. I then retired to my bed, and as I was drifting off to sleep, I was surprised by a very brief, very bright light, like a photographic flash going off in my head. This startled me, but I soon fell soundly asleep, and dreamed of still waters and of fishing.

The next morning (December 24, 1981), I excitedly told my second eldest sister what had happened. My sister was almost as excited as I was, and assured me that what I had experienced was the “serpent fire” of kundalini yoga (a part of ancient Hinduism). I had virtually no knowledge of eastern religions, and certainly had never even heard of kundalini. But I now know for certain that I had indeed spontaneously experienced the kundalini force. However, I was later to realize how this experience had been contaminated by its association within my own mind with a religion and a God that had so enmeshed my mother that she had very little left to give her children.

Unfortunately, the mere use of the word “serpent” will invoke fear and distrust in the minds of many westerners, because of the association with the Biblical temptation of Eve, and the references in Revelation to “the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil and Satan”. However, as described by Joan Borysenko in *Guilt is the Teacher, Love is the Lesson*, in most ancient traditions, the snake is actually the symbol of regenerated life, of throwing off the old and becoming new, just as the snake does in shedding its skin. It represents eternal energy and immortal consciousness, and is revered as a wisdom symbol. Jesus, even, instructed his disciples to be as “wise as serpents”. Further, the experience of kundalini is a universal phenomenon – it has been called the Life Force, and corresponds with the Chi of Buddhism, and the Holy Spirit of Christianity.

The twin serpents of the caduceus, the ancient medical symbol, represent this healing force. Caitlin Matthews, in her book *Sophia, Goddess of Wisdom*, further shows how the Wisdom Goddess (whose voice is the serpent) is synonymous with the Holy Spirit. This is the context in which the serpent fire of kundalini should be interpreted.

All the next day, and gradually diminishing over the following few days, it was as though I could see love in the visages of others, whether they were family members or strangers.

It was immediately obvious to me how tremendously important this experience of divine love was for me, and I was very, very grateful. But it seemed to me that, in my case at least, a prerequisite of this experience was intense psychological pain. I knew that my brother and I were naturally quite similar in our makeup, and for some time I was concerned that my brother would eventually have to go through the same kind of pain.

Another consequence of this revelation of divine love was that, for several months afterward, I frequently longed to leave this world to be with God, to experience his presence and to exult in his unconditional love. I can relate to the reported reluctance with which many who have undergone near-death experiences have returned to their bodies and this life.

Also, on subsequent occasions when making love with my wife, I found physical sexual orgasm, while still enjoyable, to be a let-down in comparison to the spiritual orgasm of kundalini.

In spite of this healing experience and my hopes for mental peace, my inner turmoil was by no means over. I was to later regret that my fear of seeing God apparently had caused the kundalini fire to be extinguished prematurely. I would often wish that the experience had been completed - in other words, I wished that I had undergone a true spiritual union with God, because I believed that this would have cemented my love for God and ended my suffering. But I was not ready for this, because I lacked understanding. Suffering is necessary to force us to probe more deeply in an attempt to find the "truth that will make us free". As I will describe, I would continue to suffer and to search until I came to understand that God is invisible spirit, and the very Ground of our being, whose loving power and intelligence can be felt and experienced, but cannot be seen. God can only be seen in various physical manifestations, the most complete expression of which is humankind, created in God's image. Our true identity is the divinity of God.

As a Christmas gift, my sister gave me three books by C.S. Lewis, the famous Christian apologist, whose writings I was totally unfamiliar with at the time. The books were: *Surprised by Joy*, *Mere Christianity* and *Miracles*. I was actually reluctant to begin reading these books, because I had just undergone the most incredible emotional

experience of my life, I was trying to assimilate this experience and establish a degree of mental stability, and I was afraid that exposing myself to new ideas would upset the fragile equilibrium and cause me additional mental pain. However, I found the works of C.S. Lewis to be on the whole tremendously helpful at that stage of my spiritual journey. Mr. Lewis was very learned and very compassionate, and his writings are infused with the love of God. The following line from *Surprised by Joy* made an especially large impression on me: “The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compulsion is our liberation”.

Feeling compelled to discover my own truth, I soon began an investigation of other religious beliefs. Naturally, I was now interested in Hinduism, particularly with regard to kundalini yoga, and I read what I could find concerning the subject in the local university library (there was no internet then). Buddhism also intrigued me, and I was pleased to learn how similar Buddhist teachings were to those of Jesus. Although I was disturbed by some Buddhist writings that seemed to deny the existence of God, I later came to realize that I had misunderstood these particular teachings in the context of my incomplete concept of the Divine.

Once experienced, kundalini cannot be put to rest and forgotten. It was to be many difficult years before I was to come to an understanding of what kundalini was - that it represented the awakening of the healing power of unconditional love - the nature of God and the very energy of creation that is entrusted to the natural child in us all.

Many times during my ongoing spiritual struggle, I found comfort and assurance from the words of a Buddhist monk, who, when asked how one obtains liberation from the wounded ego or false self, responded simply, “The Spirit knows the way”.

Chapter 5 – Respite

Although I was hopeful that the worst was now behind me, I had difficulty assimilating the two mystical experiences. In retrospect, I think that I was looking for some magical state (in the sense that I had not yet completed the necessary ego work) - a state of total self-acceptance and peace. In this regard, my spiritual experiences seemed to be largely mutually exclusive. This bothered me a great deal. Which experience was the truly significant one? Which experience represented “ultimate reality”?

Because I could not answer this question at the time, and yet I knew that both experiences were intensely real to me, in my terrible confusion I began to question reality itself. Was it possible that I had somehow invented these experiences in my own mind? But if I had invented them, then I must have invented my own existence. Perhaps the universe was also a creation of my mind! This idea, the excruciatingly lonely philosophy of solipsism (which C.S. Lewis also tackled during the period of his conversion), frightened me. Very hesitatingly, I suggested this to my therapist, and he laughed. Sick as I was, I found his response very reassuring, because I desperately did not want to be alone.

During my reading, I came across an address for the “Kundalini Research Foundation” in New York, and wrote to them, but I received no reply. However, the mere knowledge of the existence of this organization gave me some degree of added comfort.

Eventually, I came to an understanding, with the help of *A Course in Miracles* (which I will discuss later) that both religious experiences were indeed equally real and valid. The first experience, I have concluded, was entirely God's gift to me, in which my own thought processes played no active part (other than to end it). It was an experience of the immanence of God. It was seeing others and myself through the eyes of the true Self, the eyes of the natural child, created in the image of God. It was complete acceptance of and openness to the Source, with no ego barriers to distort the Truth. It was knowing that I was a part of the All, and the All was love. It was knowing that my pain, my personal hell, was illusory, and that within me lay the reality of the kingdom of heaven.

The second religious experience, on the other hand, was a direct result of my own thought processes, of my rediscovering that I was indeed a child of God, and loved by God, when I had considered myself unlovable. It was a long-suppressed outpouring of love, a powerful expression of spiritual desire, from my inner child to God, in response to the love of the transcendent God, the creative force. It was the awakening of understanding and of the power of unconditional love.

Although I believe that the universe is unfolding as it should, that there is a reason for all things, and that I needed to experience kundalini when I did, what happened to me could be considered premature. I experienced very nearly a full-blown opening to the Source, with the kundalini current passing rapidly through all seven spiritual centers (the chakras of traditional eastern religion) and exiting through the top of my head. When this happened, I was overwhelmed by the power of divine love. But my spiritual understanding was very limited. My image of God was largely judgmental and masculine, and entirely outside of myself. In addition, I carried within a lot of unresolved family of origin issues that made it very difficult to accept that I was lovable. As a consequence, I had a long, hard struggle ahead of me. In *The Stormy Search for the Self*, Christina and Stanislav Grof describe how “spiritual emergencies” can result from such overwhelmingly powerful altered states of consciousness.

The validity and importance of traditional Christianity was a question with which I continued to wrestle. In this, my wife (who was raised a Catholic, but who had rejected her faith as a young teenager) struggled with me. What was the significance of the Trinity? My wife had a beautiful dream in which she saw three suns rising simultaneously. She regarded this as a sign of the validity of the Christian notion of God - the Father is the God without, the creator of all things; the Son is the God alongside, the teacher and guide; and the Holy Spirit is the God within, the image of the Father in the Self.

Most important to us, however, my panic attacks were no more, and I was now able to function without any medication whatsoever. My social phobia had also improved, thanks in part to some relaxation skills I was learning (such as deep “belly breathing” which elicits an autonomic relaxation response). My therapist had suggested that, whenever I began to feel anxious to the point where my hands shook noticeably, I should laughingly point this condition out to others. This helped me realize that I was greatly overemphasizing the importance of avoiding embarrassment - that it was a problem in my mind, not in others. Just the idea that this was an option relieved my anxiety considerably.

Soon after our return home, my wife and I contacted the pastor of a local Christian church to inquire about joining the congregation and having our son baptized. During the pastor's visit to our home, I asked pointedly whether Christianity should have any special status in relation to the other world religions. The pastor agreed that there were possibly many ways to salvation, but that Christianity was his way. On hearing me describe my spiritual experiences, he commented, “God is in His heaven”.

One evening I was lying on our bed, alone, thinking about God. By this time, I had read a good deal about the lives of the Saints and of their writings. To my conscious mind, my

self-esteem seemed to have improved, but I didn't know where my future lay. Suddenly, a powerful yearning came over me - I yearned to be a saint. No sooner had I felt this desire, however, than I saw in my mind's eye the classical image of a horned devil's head. This disturbed me, and I didn't understand its significance, but in light of subsequent developments, it seems to have been a premonition.

The next few years were a period of relative mental tranquility. However, I continued to experience disturbing dreams. Recurring scenarios included: being in an airplane that takes off smoothly but soon flips over and begins to fall to the earth, being on the top of a skyscraper that begins to sway precariously, and being in an elevator that begins to plummet out of control. Perhaps most frightening to me were dreams of being in a building and feeling very threatened by the presence outside of a menacing beast of some sort, of which I had to be very wary lest it gain entry. I now understand that such dreams are a response to the encroaching power of the Ground (which fuels the higher Self), viewed by the wounded ego as a threat to its existence. This condition, in which one finds oneself "a prey to troubled dreams", is described in the Gnostic Gospel of Truth as the state of the "ignorant".

We took part in the life of the Church. I was elected to the Church Council and assumed responsibility for Christian Education, served as a lay reader, and undertook a training course in evangelism.

Nonetheless, a main subject of concern for me continued to be Christian dogma and the significance of Jesus. I was also concerned about the relevance of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. I kept a Bible in my desk at work, but very seldom made use of it. One day while in my office, however, some months after my Christmas kundalini experience, I responded to an urge to open the Bible at random and read the first passage that my eyes fell upon. It was the words of Jesus in the gospel of Mark (the earliest of the synoptic gospels): "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it." In light of my own suffering, I immediately recognized this as a passage of great significance.

I decided to try a similar test with the Old Testament. I opened it at random, and the very first verse to meet my eyes was, "Cast your bread upon the waters" (Ecclesiastes 11:1). Again, I thought, a very significant passage, and I understood that my "bread" referred to spiritual knowledge. I don't know what the odds would be to find words of such apparent personal significance in a completely random manner, as I had done, through chance alone, but they must be long odds, indeed. In my view, this was evidence from God of the validity of Jesus' message as expounded in the Bible.

My search for truth entailed a great deal of reading. In addition to the canonical New Testament, I read a considerable amount of New Testament Apocrypha (both Gnostic and otherwise) and a large number of religious/spiritual and self-help books. Not all were beneficial, and some of what I read initially added to my confusion. Many of those books that I found to be particularly helpful are referenced in this story.

I spotted an advertisement in the local newspaper for a “Spiritual Healing Seminar”, sponsored by the Kundalini Research Foundation, to be held at the “University of Light”. The illustration accompanying the ad was of a hand, with rays of some sort emanating from the index finger. The caption read, “For those who want to use this power”. Although as a recipient, I knew that kundalini could impart spiritual healing, I felt in no condition to be able to effect healing in anyone else, and so I did not call the telephone number given to make a reservation. However, the ad did offer some additional assurance as to the validity and significance of my own experience.

With financial assistance from my parents, we purchased our first home in a neighboring community. Although we had been quite active in our previous church, we made no effort to join another congregation. Actually, I used the excuse that my church involvement had been somewhat stressful, and that the teachings of our previous church were too dogmatic.

My wife became pregnant again, although this was an unplanned event. When she miscarried early on, we realized that we definitely wanted another child. Our second son was born in 1985, and this time we approached the pastor of a local, relatively liberal Christian church regarding baptism and church membership. Our son's baptism was an occasion of real joy, the first truly joyful and meaningful event that I had experienced within the Church in my memory.

During a visit from my parents, I had occasion to remind my father of the simple truth that God loved him. I was surprised when his eyes filled with tears, and he told me that I should become a minister of the Gospel.

Chapter 6 – Tragedy Strikes

1986 was a very painful year. Three deaths came in rather rapid succession. The first was that of my uncle, my mother's younger brother. He had been a slave to the bottle, and his mental and physical condition had been steadily deteriorating in the years since the break-up of his marriage. He died alone in his apartment, of undetermined causes, surrounded by empty liquor bottles, and had been dead for some time before my younger sister discovered his cold, hard corpse. I flew up to attend the funeral, which was arranged in conjunction with the Canadian Legion, in honor of the fact that my uncle had been a war veteran.

Then one evening, less than a month after my uncle's death, my mother telephoned me and, as gently as possible, broke the news that my younger sister had shot herself in the head and was on life-support. Although I knew my sister had previously attempted suicide with prescription drugs, this news nonetheless came as a horrible shock, and I screamed uncontrollably. I flew home the next day. However, when I visited my sister in the local hospital, I derived a certain sense of comfort from her appearance, for her face had a look of peace such as I had not witnessed since she was a young child.

But the overall experience was one of almost unbearable agony. My older sisters and my brother and I wept openly in one another's arms. We feared especially for my father's state of mind, for he and my younger sister had been hostile for many years. For example, while he was in a fit of rage (not entirely unprovoked), I had witnessed him threaten to kill her.

Naturally, my sister and I had been very close during our childhood. There was just two years' age difference between us. We quarreled like all siblings, but mostly we shared good and gentle times. In particular, I remember how as little children we used to take turns comforting each other with affectionate back rubs. Unfortunately, my sister was less able to handle the pressures of schoolwork than were her older brothers and sisters, and yet a great deal was expected of her. She must have been under tremendous pressure to excel. I tried to help her with her high school assignments, but I didn't have enough patience and as a result both she and I often ended up frustrated.

Nonetheless, she graduated from high school with very respectable grades and went on to earn a degree in psychology from the local university. However, she was subsequently unable to complete a program of studies in nursing.

In some way, I believe that my sister became emotionally dependent on me. She looked up to me, perhaps as a sort of "father figure". I think it bothered her when I got married,

and my wife noticed some resentment. Her own decision to marry may have been partly a response, but she was not ready. Her condition deteriorated rapidly after her marriage.

My sister lacked the ability to be independent of our mother, having never been allowed to take responsibility for her actions. She soon left her husband and returned to live with our parents. But she was unable to hold a job, and she felt herself falling deeper and deeper into the pit of alcoholism.

She became more and more depressed, isolated and withdrawn, developing agoraphobia (which often results from a fear of panic attacks) and symptoms of schizophrenia. Out of ignorance and fear, I began to distance myself from her. Partly for this reason, both my wife and I had welcomed the opportunity to move away.

During our Christmas 1981 visit with my family at my parents' home, I had initially resented my sister because I was then battling my own demons, and her long-standing problems were, I felt, diverting attention from mine. However, subsequent to my experiencing the revelation of God's love, I had been corresponding with my sister, trying to give her knowledge of her own worth, from a Christian perspective.

The first home purchased by my wife and me was selected partly because it contained a suite that we invited my sister to occupy. I felt that she needed to get away from her old surroundings and influences. Initially, my sister had expressed a desire to take us up on this offer, and had even gotten so far as to board the train. Unfortunately, however, by this time she was so lacking in self-confidence that she just could not bear to leave her childhood home. It seems that our offer was too little, too late.

My sister died on removal from life support. According to her wishes, her body was cremated. Some of her ashes were scattered during a private family ceremony at the summer cottage, where she had enjoyed periods of relative tranquility, and the remainder were buried alongside her maternal grandfather.

During the Pastor's visit to our home after the funeral service, I asked to speak with him in private. I told him that I felt guilty about my sister's death, and requested absolution. This he readily agreed to. When I recounted this to my mother, she expressed shock that I would feel the need for forgiveness.

My eldest sister and I accompanied each other on the flight back. Desiring to be totally open, I confessed that I had had cosmetic surgery several years earlier. I was relieved when my sister replied that she saw nothing wrong with efforts to improve one's self-esteem in this manner.

In the aftermath of this tragedy, my mother seemed to stand up remarkably well. The closest she came to expressing her feelings in my presence was to state that “your child is not supposed to die before you do”. But I knew that within she must have been harboring tremendous pain. Later, I learned that for a long time afterwards, she would break down in tears whenever she came across an item of my sister's lying around the house.

The fear that my siblings and I had for our father's emotional state was, fortunately, not validated. My mother has confided to me that my father had been a rock for her when she needed him during this very difficult time.

The third death was that of my maternal grandmother. She had been very frail, having suffered a severe heart attack several years previously. She was also becoming quite senile, and her mental alertness varied from day to day. We had not told her of the death of her son, although she had been at home when my sister had taken it upon herself to end her suffering.

My parents had been caring for my grandmother in their home for many years. Barely two months after my sister's suicide, she collapsed in the washroom and died shortly afterward in the hospital. I told my parents that I couldn't justify either the time off work or the cost of flying up to attend another funeral so soon after my uncle's and sister's. However, the real reason why I didn't attend my grandmother's funeral was that I was too emotionally drained.

Suicide cannot but have severe repercussions for the surviving family members. One questions whether one's own actions, or lack of actions, contributed in some way. Unresolved guilt associated with my sister's suicide was a major factor in another spiritual crisis that I was to face.

Chapter 7 – The Hell of Psychosis

We returned to our normal routines. I immersed myself in my job, and was promoted to a management position. But in my eagerness to elevate myself in order to compensate for my unconscious low self-esteem, I continued to put my co-workers down, at least in my own mind. Because I did not yet recognize my own divinity, I could not see the divinity of others.

We remained reasonably active in our church. My attempts to grow in spiritual understanding also continued. Unbeknownst to me, however, I still harbored within a tremendous guilt over my sister's death. I had not yet forgiven myself, for I didn't believe that I deserved to be forgiven. The wounded ego does not understand the concept of unconditional love.

My social phobia resurfaced with a vengeance. Whenever possible, I would avoid situations in which others might observe my hands shaking. Writing in front of others and even signing my name became stressful. But this “avoidance behavior” exacerbated those situations that I could not avoid. For example, during a workshop in which my employer had enrolled me, attendees were required to construct a tower of blocks. My hand began to shake so vigorously that my tower soon collapsed. I was surprised that no one said anything.

In early 1988, I came across another book in the local library written by Scott Peck, the author of the acclaimed *The Road Less Traveled*. The book was entitled, *People of the Lie*. It expounded the view, with case histories, that some people are innately bad, while others are possessed by evil spirits. The book greatly disturbed me, for I felt as if a finger of accusation were being pointed directly my way. My depression re-surfaced, I had difficulty sleeping, and I began to obsess over what I considered to be unwanted “bad thoughts”. In particular, I was tormented when the single word “kill” would repeatedly enter my mind, and it was to be some time before I came to understand the real reason for this.

I desperately wanted to be rid of this sense of guilt, and of the nagging fear that I was a bad person. Having not yet fully resolved the role of Jesus in my life, I now turned to him for relief. Alone in my room, I prayed, fervently and tearfully, for Jesus to enter my heart, and make me clean.

The next morning, while in the shower, a conviction suddenly came to me. I would become a Christian minister. Convinced that I was finally answering a call of God, and that my internal strife would end with this decision, I was filled with a great sense of

peace and joy. I also anticipated the happiness with which my sister and my parents, especially my mother, would receive this news.

Foolishly, I had not considered any of the complications of such a dramatic career move, or whether I would even be accepted for theological studies. When I told my wife of my unilateral decision, she expressed support. However, I later learned that she, very understandably, had reservations concerning my emotional stability.

But while commuting into work that very morning, another aspect of my personality arose as if from hiding to ambush me. Suddenly, I had a complete change of heart. I decided that rather than answer the call of God, I would rebel against God.

The immediate result was a tremendous psychological dilemma for me, a catch-22 situation. I believed in God - I believed that his was the ultimate authority, from which there was no real escape, and yet I now intended to rebuke that authority. I intended to reject what I believed was God's will in favour of my own will. Although I had earlier resolved to enter the Ministry, convinced that this was the culmination of my spiritual quest, to which I had been called, I now rejected the call.

My saying no to God (or rather my believing that that was what I was doing) may have been due to a combination of pride (the greatest sin according to C.S. Lewis, and concerning which I will have more to say later), self-hatred, and outright animosity to God, as I then still conceived him. But I am now certain that it never was divine will that I enter the Ministry at that time, but rather simply represented a premature attempt at self-acceptance.

Whatever the reason, the stage was set for a psychotic struggle, and I was overcome with a debilitating fear. Totally unable to concentrate on my job, and feeling as if my head were literally about to explode, I returned home. When I arrived, my wife, needless to say, was extremely distressed by my state of mind. I certainly could not understand myself. The trap had sprung, and there seemed to be no escape for me, not even suicide. For what I wanted was to escape from God, and this was clearly impossible, even in death.

My wife asked my closest friend to come and talk with me. Coldly and mechanically, I explained my predicament. My friend listened compassionately, and tears welled up in his eyes. But I had no compassion for anyone, least of all myself. I was convinced that, rather than give in to the divine will, I would pass the rest of my days locked away in an insane asylum, and that when my mortal existence ended, I would spend eternity in hell.

Later that evening, I lay on our bed and desperately tried to ease my excruciating pain. My mind seemed totally tied up in knots. My wife lay down beside me and gently placed her hand upon my chest. Miraculously, I was able to sense that she loved me, even though I could feel no love for myself. At the same time, I knew that I didn't want her to suffer, and I wanted to believe that I truly loved her.

It was absolutely imperative that I somehow get rid of the evil that was inside of me. I began to moan and to breathe heavily, and an unconscious belief (or desire to believe) that I was possessed, suddenly surfaced in my mind.

I had never heard of anyone attempting to perform a self-exorcism, but that is what next occurred. Writhing on the bed and flailing my arms, I could sense the anti-God feeling begin to leave me. Then I slid from the bed to the floor, and called upon the name of Jesus to cast out the evil spirit.

My wife telephoned our Pastor as well as two close family friends, and they arrived while I was on the floor. Unhesitatingly, I told the Pastor that I was undergoing an exorcism. The church to which we adhered does not traditionally preach possession by evil spirits, and I don't believe that our Pastor was prepared for the situation. He did warn me, however, that exorcisms were not always successful. But I was now hopeful, because it seemed as if the evil was indeed leaving me, and I began to feel love for Jesus, for God and for myself.

Suddenly, however, the self-loathing and animosity to God flooded back into my head. I was very, very depressed and distressed. Still lying on the floor, with my arms stretched out to my sides, it occurred to me that I felt as though I were being crucified. Our Pastor evidently had the same thought, because he commented, "You feel like Jesus on the cross, don't you".

Feeling completely hopeless, I resigned myself to the fact that the evil was in me to stay - that its grip on me was so strong that I would never be free. Slowly, I got up off of the floor, and told everyone that the exorcism had been a failure. In a daze, I went downstairs to the bathroom, and fumbled around for something - anything - to overdose on. Our Pastor stopped me. I told him that I didn't want to hurt anyone. My own voice sounded to me to be deep and sinister. Together, we went into the kitchen. I felt utterly wicked and totally depraved. It was as if I had rejected all morality. The light bothered me, because it represented what I had rejected. Bizarre thoughts of sexual exhibitionism entered my mind. I felt very, very isolated and alone, as if no one else existed. On a deeper level, I was profoundly afraid.

If one defines hell as complete separation from God (as did the philosopher, Pascal), then I was in hell.

The children, thankfully, slept through all of this, even though our sons' bedroom was directly across the hall from ours. Although it seemed to me at the time that I was causing all manner of noise and commotion, my wife told me later that I had actually been quite subdued.

Our Pastor suggested that we go together to the hospital, and fortunately I had sufficient sense not to object. He drove me to the emergency entrance of the local general hospital and spoke briefly with the attendant. Then I was given a physical examination. For some reason, I was extremely calm and relaxed for this brief period. I was committed to the psychiatric wing, and immediately began receiving anti-psychotic medication.

My stay in the psychiatric facility lasted some three weeks. It was, not surprisingly, an extremely unpleasant experience. Initially, I was kept in secure confinement and under constant supervision. My eating utensils were plastic and of special design so as to be of no possible threat. I was tormented by my hateful and destructive thoughts. There was a nearly constant ache in my chest, which was only relieved for the very brief periods during which feelings of love would surface. But even at my best, I felt shame at the fact that I was in the hospital.

Still tormented by the notion that I was possessed and by the word “kill”, it suddenly occurred to me that perhaps what was to be killed were the “evil spirits”. With as much inner force as possible, I silently uttered the magic words, “Kill the demons”. Immediately, I felt a tingling sensation within my head, and I was convinced that the evil spirits had been vanquished. Excitedly, I cornered one of the staff psychiatrists and proclaimed that I was now okay. Not surprisingly, he just looked at me like I was crazy. Alas, my relief was only very temporary - a product of my wishful thinking.

After several days of secure confinement, I was grateful to be moved to the unsecured ward, where it was possible to socialize with other patients, and where meals were served with real cutlery. We had freedom to roam about the hospital, and even to go on short walks outside, provided we signed in and out.

I continued to search desperately for relief, but the false perceptions of my ego were strong. It occurred to me that my main problem was that I had much too much pride, and I sometimes felt the urge to wash floors or perform other menial tasks. When my wife asked on my behalf that I be allowed to perform such tasks, she was told that my request was characteristic of my illness. I had not yet grasped that my suffering was

caused, not by pride, but rather by a desperately inadequate sense of self-worth, coupled with an inaccurate and incomplete understanding of the nature of God.

In an attempt to ease the pain, at one point I again determined to push God out of my life. I tried to convince myself that all of this mental confusion was silly, that no one could know whether or not God existed, and so I should just ignore the whole issue and get on with my life. I went so far as to tell this to a young student social worker who interviewed me. But this attitude lasted all of one afternoon. For it was impossible for me to regress in this manner, to simply ignore what I had learned during the previous eight years.

Although I spoke with a number of other well-intentioned persons during this time, I found that the psychiatrists had a very clinical and distant attitude, fearing, it seemed, to get truly involved in their patients' problems. In fairness to the doctors, however, they may not have been equipped to deal with the issue with which I was struggling.

Other than to watch television, there was little else to divert my attention away from my tormenting thoughts, although a group of us patients went bowling on one occasion. During the second half of the period of my hospitalization, I sometimes wished that I had access to some exercise equipment.

Yet at times I was able to appreciate that I was one of the more fortunate patients. My wife and closest friends visited regularly, and my distant family sent cards and letters. Although I was ashamed (falsely, I now realize) of being where I was, these cards and visits were spiritually soothing. They provided concrete evidence that I was loved, in spite of my condition. In particular, I was touched by a letter from my brother in which he expressed his love in a way he never had before, and by a visit from my eldest sister who drove several hundred kilometres to demonstrate her concern.

I was allowed to spend the two latter weekends of my period of hospitalization at home with my family. This was reassuring for the children, who had been simply told that I was sick and needed to rest. Naturally, it was very difficult to return to the hospital come Monday morning.

It can be argued that virtually all psychological illnesses are spiritual in nature. They are caused by an absence of self-love. The mentally ill person views reality through the distortions of the judgmental and unloving ego. There is a battle within between the wounded ego and the natural child, which is yearning for expression. The ego passes judgment, and the innocent child is repressed. The result is pain and depression.

Significant numbers of psychiatric patients are, I believe, suffering the effects of repression of the inner child caused by false religious guilt. I encountered one young man in the hospital who was horribly burdened by false guilt, who was convinced that he would be damned to hell. He lived in a state of terror, and had to be heavily sedated. Although I didn't then feel lovable myself, I told him that I was certain that God loved him and would never condemn him. However, his guilt and his image of a punitive God were very deep-seated, and it seemed that my words had little effect.

I took part in group therapy discussions with counselors and other patients. When I initially described my own predicament, many of my fellow patients expressed sympathy. A couple voiced the opinion that I seemed to be in an impossible situation.

It was a few revelatory words from a middle-aged, motherly woman, who wore no uniform and whom I assumed was a volunteer, which represented for me the greatest help that I received while in the hospital. A few days after my admittance, this complete stranger quietly entered my room, unannounced, and asked what was troubling me. I painfully explained to this person how I had rejected God. Without hesitation, she gently but emphatically stated that I had not rejected God - rather, she said, I had rejected my parents. She then told me that I had to find out who I am.

I never saw this person again. But I have often thought of her. For I have since come to realize how crucially significant her words to me were. The word "angel" comes from the Greek for "messenger". Angels bring messages from God. This woman was an angel.

During my period of hospitalization and for some time afterward, I underwent rapid and dramatic mood swings, from lows during which I experienced anti-God and anti-self feelings to highs during which I felt a love for God (and self), and could even see a purpose to my whole situation. My most intense (though short-lived) feelings of wellbeing arose when I again resolved to enter the Christian Ministry.

Chapter 8 – Dark Night of Depression

My discharge from the hospital was at my request and with my wife's consent. Obviously, I was still undergoing a terrific mental struggle, and my condition was monitored on an outpatient basis. I didn't know how to live with God, for my seemingly proud and distrustful ego wanted to be in control, and yet I knew I could not live without God, the creator and sustainer of all things.

The temptation to dull my pain with alcohol was strong, but in the main I was able to resist it by keeping in mind the ultimately destructive hold it had had on my sister and uncle.

At this stage in my understanding, I continued to view existence through my distorted ego much of the time. I was distrustful of God, and I blamed my proud self for not having a proper relationship with him. The word “kill” would still pop, unwanted, into my mind, and to me this was evidence of my wickedness. In tears, I confessed my bad thoughts to my therapist, and cried that I couldn't understand why I was such a rotten person. He assured me that I was nothing of the sort, and told me that I was much too hard on myself. But he was clearly concerned, and later telephoned me at home to ascertain that I was okay.

One way in which I repeatedly attempted to relieve the pain was to try to convince myself, or rather to fool myself into believing, that God did not exist. But with every such attempt, I felt that I was also denying the existence of all moral authority. This simply fed my fear.

During this period, I seriously considered requesting electroshock therapy. I am now thankful that my reluctance to physically damage my brain was strong enough to overcome the urge to dull my pain in this manner.

At my wife's insistence, I visited a naturopathic clinic that performed chemical analyses of hair samples and then prescribed the necessary diet to correct any imbalances that could cause or contribute to various disorders. The practitioner told me that he was frightened by my obvious state of agitation (which seemed to me to be a rather strange thing for him to say). In that I would have welcomed the news that I had some chemical imbalance that could possibly be contributing to my mental distress, I was disappointed though not surprised to receive the report that all of the test results were normal.

Previously, I stated that I did not believe that even suicide would end my pain, because in my heart of hearts I knew, for I had been shown, that God exists, and that the spirit is

eternal. Nevertheless, I did consider suicide several times during periods when the pain was most intense. In my sickness, I even asked myself whether it could somehow be God's will that I kill myself. Now I thank God that I had been given this previous assurance of immortality, because it is this knowledge that prevented me from taking my own life.

Suicide, indeed violence of any sort, whether directed against self or others, is never the answer to pain. It only brings more pain. The issues must be confronted, honestly and directly, sooner or later. This is the only path to spiritual wholeness and lasting peace.

Repeatedly during my struggle, I would seek solace in the Bible, only to find that the words I read seemed at best, foreign, and at worst, accusatory. But upon my return from a drive during which I had entertained, in tears, the notion of crashing into a concrete abutment, my thoughts again turned to the Bible and I was briefly overwhelmed with a deep sense of the beauty and meaning of this book. However, this disappeared as suddenly as it had come.

One morning in our kitchen, in the midst of mental self-flagellation, I had another recollection of my natural child. I remembered exactly how I once thought and felt - I remembered that there was a time, long ago, when I was entirely comfortable with myself and my relationship with God. The difference between my current state and this remembered state felt like night and day, and I couldn't understand how I had sunk so low. I prayed to God to return me permanently to my former state of grace.

As I watched my children at play, so loving, so trusting, I ached to be like them.

One day, near the end of a long walk, during which my thoughts had been going around in circles, the phrase "called and ordained servant of the Word" entered my mind from out-of-the-blue, and again I felt very peaceful and happy.

But, as before, these good feelings were very short-lived.

Nights were particularly difficult. Lying in bed, I would experience very uncomfortable hot flashes, and I had a strange numb/tingly feeling in my left thigh. I went through a prolonged period during which I was unable to fall asleep naturally, and had to rely on medication. But even with medication, sleep came very begrudgingly. When I finally did sleep, I had mostly bizarre and frightening dreams, involving such things as encounters with mutilated animals and birds, and losing my own children. Then I dreamed that I myself was a child lost in a strange dark house, and I was calling for my mom. I knew that she was somewhere around, but she ignored me, and I was terribly afraid.

Whenever I awoke, generally very early in the morning, I would immediately remember my condition, and feel extremely depressed.

I developed a chronic itchy “butterfly” type red rash on both sides of nose, beneath my eyes. Recently, I found this same type of rash described by Thomas Stone in his book, *Cure by Crying*. Mr. Stone believes that it is a result of repression of painful childhood memories. He equates it with a dried up riverbed that must be replenished by tears.

I often had to force myself to eat. Because so much of the time I perceived myself to be at war with God, who had made all things, including food for our sustenance, eating lost all pleasure.

Interacting with others in a meaningful way was very difficult. My psychic pain kept my attention constantly drawn inward, so I couldn’t follow someone else’s conversation. This was terribly frustrating for my wife.

I began to be haunted by the notion that I had chronic schizophrenia and would never be well.

Although at no time during my illness did I contemplate violence toward my family, I was aware that some persons who were deeply depressed over a long period of time had expressed violence toward others who were close to them. Therefore, I was concerned about the possibility that the future might hold a similar outcome for my family and me, and I revealed this concern to my therapist. He did not seem at all surprised, but simply assured me that he was absolutely certain that I did not have such behavior within my makeup.

Chapter 9 – Dawn of a New Day

Finally, I had a dream that gave me courage and hope. In it, I resolved to track down and do battle with an adversary that was causing me and my family pain and suffering. Just as I was fearfully but purposefully entering the dark dwelling of this enemy, I was awakened by my wife, who was concerned by my evident state of agitation. Disappointed that I had not had the opportunity to directly confront my perceived foe, I asked my wife to subsequently refrain from wakening me, even if I seemed very distressed, for I now comprehended the importance of courage in the healing process.

I sometimes wonder what would have happened had I confronted my “enemy” in this dream. At the time, I was not familiar with the Jungian concept of the unconscious “shadow” (which will be discussed later). If I had indeed attempted to destroy my shadow, rather than understand and integrate it, could I have caused myself more harm and increased my suffering? Perhaps, my wife’s awakening me at this point in my understanding was a synchronistic act of grace.

Regardless, this unfinished dream seems to have represented a turning point. It firmly impressed upon me the fact that my desire to get well was stronger than my fear. It also suggested to me that the enemy was within my own mind - that I was battling myself. When I truly comprehended that I was, in a sense, the cause of my own problem, the absurdity of the situation struck me. Why was I fighting with myself? The familiar adage, “Physician, heal thyself” came to mind. I became determined to confront my “foe”, unmask it, disarm it, and get well.

With my doctor's consent, I stopped taking medication and returned to work (I had been on sick leave for some eight weeks). But although I managed to function, my predominant frame of mind remained a mixture of anxiety and antagonism. I persisted in asking questions for which there seemed to be no answers, for I was still highly mistrustful of God and unforgiving of myself.

Whenever the pain became particularly intense, however, I was always granted a respite, a glimpse of the reality of love. But the recognition of love would soon disappear behind the black shroud of my wounded ego. As this was happening, I would momentarily acknowledge, disappointedly, that God's work in me was not yet finished. Although it felt very good to experience feelings of love, I was at war with myself, and my vengeful and mistrustful ego would not allow me the pleasure of these good feelings for any appreciable length of time.

At this time, my social-worker sister recommended that I obtain *A Course in Miracles*, published by the Foundation for Inner Peace, which she herself had been studying to work through and overcome feelings of guilt over our sister's death. This sister had tried very hard to help our younger sister, and she had been so deeply affected by her suicide that she had seriously questioned whether she should continue in her chosen field. Thankfully, she decided to remain in social work, for it was her calling.

I was able to relate to many of the situations described in *A Course in Miracles*, which helped to validate my own experiences. The workbook helped me to realize that I was not innately bad. On the contrary, I was a holy and precious child of God, and my feelings of guilt and self-condemnation were simply the result of my listening to my own wounded ego, repeating lie upon lie, as it had been conditioned to do. The discovery that I was actually not a bad person was highly emotional.

The workbook also reinforced my growing conviction that there are no such things as supernatural evil forces capable of possessing the human spirit. Wrong or evil actions are the result of fear and hatred that develop in the misunderstanding ego when love is blocked. Evil is not a self-existent force - it is simply the absence of the expression of love. The misunderstandings of the ego breed fear, but in reality there is nothing to be feared, for there is only the love that is God.

Not only did *A Course in Miracles* help me to understand myself, it also taught me that at the deepest level of the human spirit, at the level of ultimate reality, God and the human spirit were in perfect concordance of purpose - that indeed, God's will was my will. I did not have to make an effort for this to be so, but this was just the way things were. This knowledge brought me precious moments of peace, joy and wonder. Still, the conditioning of the wounded ego is a difficult thing to undo, and my old thought patterns would regularly attempt to reassert themselves.

I read many other helpful books during this period and more recently. I purchased several copies of John Bradshaw's book, *Healing the Shame that Binds You* as gifts for my siblings. In it, Mr. Bradshaw exposes murderous "toxic shame" that, unfortunately, had run rampant in our family.

Distressed because my love for God was so seldom evident to me, I decided to heed the advice of C.S. Lewis, who had written that if one acts as if one loves God, the love would become apparent. Therefore, I began to help others in need. I joined the Pastoral Care Committee of our church, the Bridge ministry (which assists in re-integrating ex-convicts into society) and the Telecare telephone crisis line ministry. However, I recognized that my purposes were mainly selfish, in that I was hoping that by attending to the needs of others, my own pain would be eased.

Yet even with this selfish motive, my pain was eased. Bit by bit, I came to a firmer understanding of who I am and the reasons for my struggles. Gradually, my shame at my condition, and in particular at having been hospitalized, was replaced by self-acceptance.

More and more, as I thought about life and existence, and looked around at the world, I came to appreciate and love the true nature of God (which I later discuss more fully). During one outing with my family, I was suddenly filled with a tremendous hope, bordering on a conviction, that someday God would remake me in his image.

I finally mustered up the courage to leave the security of my government job and move with my wife and three children back to my hometown, where I was fortunate to immediately obtain a solid position with a consulting firm. We bought a modest home on a couple of acres of land on the outskirts of town, where we lived for several years, sharing our home with a large friendly dog, and two lazy cats. We were able to see much more of my parents, and my brother and sister and their families. We had fun together.

However, the struggle for spiritual fulfillment, for the discovery and adoption of my true calling, continued. There were still times when I got down on myself. But whenever I found that I was getting painfully wrapped up in myself, I purposefully turned my attention outward in love. Even a simple act of kindness toward someone helped a great deal. I also learned another important lesson - sticks and stones may break my bones but thoughts can never hurt me, unless I let them.

Formerly, I was frightened by my dreams. But I learned that even frightening dreams may have a good purpose in that they may be trying to teach us something about ourselves - something that we have to recognize and acknowledge in order to grow. On the whole, however, my dreams became distinctly less frightening. I still occasionally dreamed of unfinished assignments or of missed airline flights, but my planes and elevators were no longer falling out of control, and I no longer had legs of lead.

One night, I dreamed that I was working very hard at trying to decipher some sort of secret code. Suddenly, the solution flowed into my dreaming brain - it was a nine-digit number, and I was very excited about having discovered it. Immediately, I woke up and remembered the dream. Although I couldn't relate the number to anything concrete, I had a strong feeling that it was significant, and so I wrote it down. Since then, I often thought about the number, but if it is indeed other than gibberish, its meaning continues to elude me.

Another night I dreamed that I was recruited by strangers to help some young women, apparently runaways and prostitutes, find their true selves. I approached each girl,

gently touched her shoulder, knew instantly whether she needed to be liberated and asked her if she wanted to be free. If the answer was yes, I somehow took her self-hatred into my own being, tasted it, recognized it, spat it out, and she was free. It was a marvelously fulfilling feeling.

Shortly thereafter, my wife gave birth to our fourth child. Our littlest angel was not consciously planned, but she could not have been more welcome. Loving her was a joy beyond words. She reminded me every day that God comes anew into this world with each birth of a child.

I became a happier and more contented person than I had been since I was a young child. My wife was also much happier than she had been for many years, for she no longer had to carry the burden of a chronically-depressed spouse. I (and I suspect my wife also) was concerned for a time that my depression and anxiety could have adversely affected our elder daughter or son. Thankfully, this concern has not been borne out. I am so grateful that I married a woman who was able to give our children what all children need from their mother.

Some time ago, I recounted to our elder daughter how she had played such a pivotal role in the miracle that began my healing, and how that made her very special to me. Similarly, I told our elder son that I was spiritually sick when he was born, and didn't know how to love, but that his birth marked the beginning of my path to wholeness. That, I told him, made his arrival a special blessing, because if he had not come along, I might still be wallowing in my ignorance.

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This is the end of Part I.

As Mary proclaims in *All That You Are*, understanding is love. And love is the cure. Part II of this book presents the foundations of the understanding that eventually cured me (as further developed in Part III). I obtained this understanding from various sources including dreams, synchronicities, books, the internet, friends and family, and from searching the deepest recesses of my own mind. All of these were gifts of the Divine.

PART II: THE CURE

Jesus said: “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

Gospel of Mark

Jesus said: “The man old in days will not hesitate to ask a small child seven days old about the place of life, and he will live. For many who are first will become last, and they will become one and the same.”

Gospel of Thomas

“In the middle of a school he came and spoke the Word, as a teacher. Those who were wise in their own estimation came to put him to the test. But he discredited them as empty-headed people. They hated him because they really were not wise men. After all these came also the little children, those who possess the knowledge of the Father. These came to know and they were known. They were glorified and they gave glory.”

Gospel of Truth

Chapter 10 – The Nature of God

At long last, I came to understand that the nature of one's true Self, one's eternal spirit, is expressed through the inner child who has always existed in a pure state of grace, but who is forced deeper and deeper into hiding by the developing false perceptions of the ego, which promote guilt and shame.

As my true Self - my healed ego - was revealed, I also came to realize that much of what I believed, unconsciously and otherwise, concerning the nature of God, was untrue. In fact, the two discoveries had to come together, because it was the experience of God's all-encompassing and limitless love that gave my inner child the courage to come out of hiding.

God is not the angry and vengeful being - as portrayed in parts of the Old Testament - who watches over us like a hawk and counts our sins, in order to protect his own dignity. God did not require that Jesus be sacrificed as an appeasement for our sins, in order that our way into heaven could somehow be bought. This image of God is certainly of a less than all-loving being - it is more the image of an egocentric tyrant. Having had such a confused image of God, and yet wanting to believe the words, "God is Love", which my parents and church purported to teach, naturally also confused my understanding of love.

As I indicated earlier, I believe that we are born pure in spirit, and full of delight in creation - that we are made in God's image. The image of God is love. But what does this really mean? To those struggling to overcome mental illness, the phrase "God is Love" may have little meaning. But I am convinced that, for most if not all sufferers, a proper understanding of the nature of God is crucial to recovery from mental illness. What, therefore, can we conclude about the nature of God that tells us that God is indeed love?

For God to be anything, God must first exist. Although I myself questioned the very existence of God for many years, the fact of the existence of God has been made unquestionably clear to me, in the manner I have previously described. I have been given the precious gift of the sure and certain knowledge that God exists, that God is love, and that I am loved, unconditionally.

Robert Persig, in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, writes to the effect that reality can only be understood in the context of the "value system" upon which it is based. This is the conclusion reached by the central character in the story (which I understand to be autobiographical), after undergoing a terrific mental conflict for which he is hospitalized. This person was searching for an underlying basis for reality,

something that would give meaning to life. What he discovered was the Absolute, the Tao, the Ground of all being, the moral fiber of the universe. This is God in the most basic and spiritual sense, the common ground of all religion.

But for me, God is much more than this. God is also supra-personal, more than a person, as C. S. Lewis concluded. God wants a one-on-one relationship with each and every human being, in which there is mutual love. Our love for God is a natural response to God's love for us. Thus St. Augustine, in his *Confessions* is moved to say, "I write this for love of your love".

One of the ways we humans often show love for one another is to give the object of our affection a gift. If we honestly consider existence, we must admit that we have been given a tremendous gift - the gift of life, with the ability to laugh, to cry, to see beauty, to love, to wonder. Think of our senses, how miraculous it is to see colors, to hear music, to taste delicious foods, to feel the touch of a loved one, and to smell the forest after a rain. Oh, how we are loved! Can there really be any doubt? I am certain that God's greatest joy is to shower blessings upon us. I am certain that the universe is the best it can be - that it has been designed for our greatest possible benefit. God is entirely giving; nothing is withheld that could possibly increase our joy.

And does God want or expect anything in return? The only thing God wants is our perfect joy. And because God's nature is in us, the fullness of our joy is also found in agape love - in caring for our neighbor.

Does God need our love? God does not need our love in the same way we require God's love. God is completely self-sufficient and needs nothing from us. However, God does want our love, but only because in loving God, we find a true joy that springs from the depths of the soul. The knowledge of God and therefore the ability to love God is a very great blessing, and it is the nature of God to want to shower us with blessings. Loving God is a natural response to our appreciation of life and of the perfect goodness of God.

God certainly also wants us to love ourselves. True love of God and of others cannot be separated from love of self. A full and complete love entails all three, and in order for one's happiness to be complete, one must realize that one loves oneself. As the adage goes, "God don't make no junk". I would go further: God only makes perfection.

It is somewhat unfortunate that in the Judeo-Christian tradition, God is assigned the male, to the exclusion of the female, gender (as are also the other main spiritual personages including the devil and the archangels). The universe coming out of God, in effect being born from God, is analogous to a woman giving birth. Also, God is gentle, nurturing and loving, all typically more female than male characteristics. As I will later

elucidate, both the inner beauty and outer beauty of women are for me principal expressions of the beauty of God.

It can be argued that God is all, including both male and female, but it can also be argued that God, as Spirit, is neither male nor female. Therefore, to my mind the two choices of a pronoun for God are the impersonal “it” (as suggested by Alan Watts in *The Book*), or the rather clumsy but more personal “him/her” or “he/she” combination, more conveniently expressed as “s/he”. I prefer the latter, and will make use of the same in the remainder of this story.

If the word “God” itself doesn’t feel right, perhaps because it is too firmly associated with the vengeful and judgmental Jehovah of the Old Testament, as preached to many of us during our childhood, I would urge the reader to cease using this term, at least for a time. Shakti Gawain, in *Living in the Light*, does not use “God” for this very reason, preferring “universe”, “higher power”, “spirit” or “inner guidance”. For David Spangler, author of *Everyday Miracles*, God is his “Beloved”. For Dr. John Nelson, author of *Healing the Split*, God is the “Spiritual Ground”. Other suggestions include “creative force”, “Source”, “Christ consciousness” or “cosmic intelligence”.

Because I value very highly the Biblical statement that we are created in God’s image, I like the term “God/dess” since it clearly suggests that the Divine includes both male and female. Some new age writers prefer the term without the “/” (i.e., simply “Goddess”), feeling that the “divine feminine” is more important at this stage in our evolution. In *Healing the Split*, John Nelson explains that as humanity evolves into fourth chakra (universal love) consciousness, a predominantly feminine mythology is required, in place of the aggressively masculine values of the third chakra that we are leaving behind. For a more complete description of the possible relationships between mental illness, spiritual evolution and the chakras, the reader is referred to Dr. Nelson’s book.

Those Christians who may be offended by my decision to stop referring to God solely in the masculine likely would wish to point out that the Bible indicates that Jesus referred to God as his and our Father. However, Jesus’ language in this regard is not unexpected, considering that Jewish society at that time was patriarchal, and Jesus, as a Jewish teacher or rabbi, inherited the traditions and terminology of the Torah.

In 1945, an Egyptian peasant unearthed the Gnostic gospels, sacred books of the early Gnostic Christians that had been lost for over 1,600 years. Elaine Pagel’s *The Gnostic Gospels* describes how these books shed new light on the earliest days of Christianity. They show that the Gnostic Christians held beliefs that were radically different from those of orthodox and fundamentalist Christians. In many cases, for example the Adam and Eve story in Genesis, the differences are a matter of viewing the early Hebrew tales

as meaningful myth (as do liberal Christians today) rather than history. However, the Gnostic gospels also show that Gnostic Christians esteemed the divine feminine, and worshipped God as both Father and Mother.

The Gnostic gospels, some of which are believed to predate the canonical Gospels, contain numerous references by Jesus to the divine feminine. For example, a saying ascribed to Jesus in the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas (which I have included on the heading page for the Postscript) indicates that Jesus recognized that God was not only his Father, but was his “true Mother” as well. Naturally, this attitude affected the treatment of women. Although the Gnostic Christians were not unanimous in affirming women (nor were the orthodox unanimous in denigrating them), it is clear from the Gnostic gospels that women were generally viewed as equal to men, rather than subservient to them. In fact, in *The Myth of the Goddess*, Anne Baring and Jules Cashford state that women in the early Gnostic Christian community could hold virtually any church office, including bishop, a situation which infuriated many orthodox Christians.

Notwithstanding the greater acceptance of the feminine, however, the original Greek language of the Gnostic gospels is quite patriarchal, and some passages seem to reflect a bias against women. The “Scholars Translation” of the Gospel of Thomas (by Stephen Patterson and Marvin Meyer) attempts to reduce the original bias by replacing masculine references with inclusive language, but their translation has been criticized for taking unjustified liberties. I myself prefer earlier translations, and use Thomas Lambdin’s original translation.

This, then, is my justification for recommending consideration of the word “God/dess” in place of “God”. It is for me a healing word, and bears repeating in order to overwrite the male, patriarchal image of the Creator that so many of us have embedded in our psyches. However, for the purposes of this book, I will use “God/dess” in reference to the Divine for the remainder of this chapter only, and will return to the familiar (and more comfortable for most) “God” thereafter. I will, however, continue to use the dual pronouns “him/her” and “s/he” in reference to God.

When one truly understands the nature of God/dess, I believe that it is impossible not to love him/her. For this reason, I have great difficulty with the fundamentalist concept of the devil as a fallen angel (and I will elucidate on this topic later). For a creature such as the devil to exist, it must never have truly understood the nature of God/dess. If such a thing did actually exist, it would in some way be deserving of our compassion, for any creature that purposefully brings suffering to others is ignorant and deeply misguided, and must itself be terribly unhappy. Ultimately, even such a creature would submit to the law of love. Furthermore, if the devil exists, then God/dess has obviously created it

(originally) and is allowing it to exist. It may, in a manner that will someday be apparent, be actually serving God/dess' will (as alluded to in the story of Job), which is to have all of us come to an understanding of who we really are - a physical expression of the eternal love energy of God/dess.

We are not judged by God/dess, nor are we to judge as if on behalf of God/dess - any judging we do is of our own accord. God/dess knows we are all doing the best we can with our present knowledge. "Sin", or separation from God/dess, is due to ignorance, or lack of understanding of the truth. Sin is therefore an error to be corrected, not an evil to be punished. So much of our character is a result of our upbringing, over which we had no control. We cannot discount the possibility, however, that we ourselves chose our parents and our conditions in life, even when those conditions entail great suffering, for purposes which will someday become known to us. I will have more to say about our responsibility in creating our personal reality in Part III of this book.

In *The Wounded Child's Journey into Love's Embrace*, Paul Ferrini (himself once an atheist) points out that whenever we judge others, we condemn ourselves. This is because our judgment of others is reflected back as a perceived attack on ourselves. We are all mirrors for each other.

The notion that some of us have been specially chosen by God/dess, to the exclusion of others, is clearly inconsistent with God/dess' nature. Although Jesus himself sometimes spoke of the "elect", no doubt he was referring to those who had already come to know and love God/dess. Ultimately, all will be elected, for all have come from God/dess, and all will return to the Source.

God/dess loves us absolutely and completely. We are infinitely precious to God/dess. His/her will is our total well-being and happiness. God/dess does not require a single thing of us in order to love us. We are loved just as we are.

In creation, God/dess poured forth - is constantly pouring forth - his/her love, which is the energy of the universe. We are a part of that creative love energy. We dwell in it, and it is in us. This is the immanence of God/dess. To be infused with an intuitive knowledge of the true nature of existence, and of our place in the universe, is to be in a perfect state of harmony and joy. *A Course in Miracles* refers to this experience as a "miracle". It is a precious gift of creative bliss.

Meditating on the love of God/dess, and the beauty of creation (God/dess' immanence) leads to the dramatic discovery that God/dess, who is perfect goodness, loves the Self, and calls the Self to him/her, in total and unconditional acceptance. *A Course in Miracles* refers to this as "revelation". This is an encounter with the transcendent

God/dess, and is a tremendously powerful healing experience. It is difficult to find words to describe the ecstasy of love flowing from creature to Creator, in response to the certain knowledge that infinite love has always flowed and will always flow from Creator to creature.

In fact, this experience, while intensely spiritual, is also intensely sexual - the pleasure that accompanies the experience can only be compared to a very highly-magnified orgasm. It is a complete giving of Self to God/dess in a burst of creative spiritual energy.

What else can be deduced concerning the nature of God/dess? Because God/dess is the source of all, in relation to us and the rest of creation, God/dess is all-powerful. But the power of God/dess is purely a loving, creating power. It is not the destructive power associated with a tyrant who has ego needs to be satisfied. God/dess has no ego. God/dess does not say "Look at how wise and powerful I am", out of any ego need for appreciation. God/dess has no needs, other than a need to give of him/herself in love for his/her creation. And because God/dess loves so completely, it is inconceivable that creatures to whom has been given the awareness of the finiteness of their mortal existence would not also be given eternal life.

As Hans Kung proclaims in *On Being a Christian*, "The will of God(dess) is the well-being of man".

God/dess is good. The goodness of God/dess is difficult, impossible really, to describe in words. God/dess is love. God/dess gives, fully, completely, totally. God/dess gives life. Life is an incredible gift.

Because God/dess' nature is in us, in order for us to become fully alive, we must discover this nature, and live it. The nature of God/dess is unconditional love. This is the love that is concerned for the welfare of others, the love that wants others to be happy and fully alive. This is compassionate love.

True happiness is ours when we live God/dess' nature, which is our true nature. What a stupendous gift, the greatest gift of all. Think of it. We have been given the power to become the sons and daughters of God/dess.

It is a misunderstanding to believe that those who give of themselves, those who do not possess many material things, are somehow missing out on life. The opposite is more often true. Those who strive to live God/dess' nature discover their true selves, and in this discovery there is tremendous joy. It is indeed more blessed to give than to receive, but the blessings are not just to be enjoyed sometime later in heaven, they are immediate blessings. "He who loses his life for my sake will find it." Those who have

discovered this truth are blessed. This is the wondrous paradox of God/dess' nature. The more one gives, the more one is filled.

Again, I want to assure the reader that God/dess exists. I am so certain of this fact that I have difficulty understanding atheism. Many self-professed atheists, I feel, would not be able to maintain their position if they honestly considered existence. Perhaps many of them are really saying that they don't believe in Jehovah of the Old Testament. But we all must admit that we didn't make ourselves. Therefore, how did we get here? How did the universe come into being? It is not possible for something to come out of nothing. Even if it appears so, the nothing was really Something all along.

There are many who, for various reasons, have rejected the God of the religion to which they were exposed during their childhood, but who acknowledge the fact that the universe did not come out of nothing, who acknowledge that they did not make themselves. Such persons are often engaged in a long and at times painful search to come to a spiritually-fulfilling understanding of themselves, their place in the universe, and their relationship to the creative force.

My chief advice to those who are engaged in this search is simply this - think honestly about what the true nature of God/dess must be like. The root of your difficulty, as was the root of mine, may lie in not understanding, and hence not appreciating, the true character of God/dess, because false ideas were deeply imbedded from our childhood. Pray for an understanding of God/dess' true nature. Resist ascribing characteristics of the abused ego to God/dess. In trying to protect itself, the wounded ego thinks it needs to be top dog, but the ego doesn't know what is best for itself. Because the wounded ego dictated our thinking for so long, we forgot what love really is. We forgot what God/dess is really like. So we should think about what we have been given - about the miracle of the universe, and the beauty and the wonder all around us. We should impress upon our minds that the magnificent power of eternal love that made all things also made us, and that this magnificence is at the core of our eternal being.

Although I had rejected the God of my youth, I couldn't deny the existence of a creative force. When I was at my wit's end, I prayed to this force, which theologian Paul Tillich (*The Courage to Be*) refers to as the "God above God" and the "ground of being", and I was saved! We mustn't allow our wounded ego to rule our life. This ego is not our true Self. We must look to that of which we are a part, the force that made us, the God/dess of Wisdom and Love. When we look to the source of all, we find truth, beauty and love. When we look to the Source, we find ourselves, and we find immortality.

God/dess loves us intensely, and the universe is a love gift from God/dess. God/dess wants nothing but for us to experience joy, and the route to that joy is to express love. As C.S. Lewis wrote, "Joy is the serious business of heaven".

We should be gentle, compassionate and honest with ourselves and others. There are no secrets in heaven. We should share our experiences and our gifts. When we love first and foremost, everything else falls into place. Martin Luther wrote, "Love, and then do whatever you want". We are to love to the best of our ability, knowing that the power of our love is infinite - the effects of our individual acts of compassion and caring are multiplied indefinitely. Remember that we are equal beings who are all doing the best that we can, and we need one another.

God/dess is good - in us there is goodness. God/dess is holy - in us there is holiness. God/dess is love - in us there is love. Ultimately, God/dess is the freedom to be true to ourselves, accepted unconditionally. When we look to these truths, the truth will make us free.

Chapter 11 – Christianity and Other Religions

Who was Jesus?

When I first drafted this chapter many years ago, I wrote about my beliefs concerning Jesus' absolute purity and holiness, in the sense of his not having committed any spiritual errors or “sins”, as if God just decided to incarnate in a pre-packaged perfect condition. But I no longer believe it works that way. Jesus, I am convinced, had to find out things the hard way, just like the rest of us. He, too, was abused and became estranged from his inner child. In order for him to rediscover his true nature, he also had to suffer. Most of his suffering would have been psychological, as his spirit battled to overcome the negative side of his ego (the “devil”), so that he could perform the task he had accepted. The fruit of his psychological battle and the integration of his own “shadow” (see Chapter 12) was his gaining access to the healing powers of unconditional love, which he demonstrated during his later life.

The notion that if one is to become good, one must first become bad (at least in one's own eyes) - that one must be a devil before one can be an angel - is certainly not new. It was by this logic that the spiritual reformer Martin Luther made one of his more astonishing remarks: “All the prophets saw that Christ would be the greatest brigand of all, the greatest adulterer, thief, profaner of temples, blasphemer and so on; and that there would never be a greater in all the world”. Four hundred years later, the Gnostic poet William Blake expressed similar thoughts in *The Everlasting Gospel*. He questioned whether Jesus was always gentle, humble and chaste, and answered resoundingly in the negative.

So what does Jesus mean to me? My new understanding makes me feel much closer to him. His story has similarities to our own – it is the universal story of the “hero's journey”, the great myth that has been retold in modern form in *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Wizard of Oz* and *Star Wars*, except that in Jesus, the myth was fully actualized. The unconditional love Jesus so clearly expressed is a powerful attractant, a direct reflection of God's nature. In him, God is defined as the one who suffers for others, whose suffering love is the instrument of the creation's redemption. For the power by which God brings the kingdom is the power of suffering love revealed in Jesus on the cross. I want to follow this man, to emulate his love and his compassion to the best of my ability.

Consider for a moment Jesus' death and the Bible's proclamation of his resurrection. Are they historical events? Surely, there can be no doubt that Jesus was crucified, and I believe that the evidence for his resurrection (in a spiritual but still very real body) is

overwhelming. Nothing short of an encounter with the risen Jesus could have changed Saul, the foremost persecutor of the early Church, into Paul, the tireless crusader³. Nothing short of a miracle of this magnitude could have imparted the early apostles with the strength and conviction required to establish the fledgling Christian church. The resurrection of Jesus means that the “Christ spirit” lives in us all.

Jesus, I believe, did indeed die for us, but not as a way of appeasing a God who demanded some sort of payment for our sins. Jesus willingly went to the cross out of love, trusting that his destiny was a very important part of God’s plan for mankind. Jesus gave of himself as the suffering lamb, for our sakes, to demonstrate God’s love and power to overcome darkness and raise us to new life. And he left us with the keys to the kingdom: “He who loses his life for my sake will find it”.

And what are we to make of the world's other religions? Those religions that accept that the Ground of existence (the Tao) is goodness, in that it represents a value system that encompasses universal love and compassion, as do most of the world’s major religions, are certainly worthy of the greatest respect. Most new age and Goddess religions, including Wicca, also proclaim the goodness of creation. They are all valid ways to connect with the Source.

Jesus was a Jewish rabbi who taught in the temple. But he had a clearer knowledge of the nature of God than had previous Jewish prophets. Jesus came to proclaim the “good news” of the rule of love, as opposed to the rule of the law. Jesus lived the rule of love, died for it, and was raised by God to demonstrate that indeed he had shown the way. However, I believe that adherence to the central teachings of most religious traditions can also be a valid path to God. We should be tolerant and respectful of one another's choice of paths, except when it infringes on the welfare of others.

C.S. Lewis stated that, had he not come to accept the position of Jesus in God’s plan, he would likely have adopted the Hindu religion. The Hindu tradition is ancient and rich, and the core of Hindu teaching as expounded in the *Bhagavad Gita* (the Hindu “path of love”) is very similar to the Sermon on the Mount: love your enemy, have compassion

3. However, the apostle Paul chose to preach a different message from that of Jesus. Jesus taught that salvation is found in loving one’s neighbor as oneself, requiring “metanoia” (translated as “repentance” in the Bible but actually meaning “transformation of the mind”). Paul taught that in order to be “saved” (i.e., go to heaven), one needed to accept Jesus’ death on the cross as a sacrifice for one’s sins (see further: *Why Paul Should Not Have Changed the Message of Jesus* at <http://pathseeker101.wordpress.com/>).

for the suffering, passively resist those who would oppress you - as witnessed by the life of Gandhi. Hindu mysticism has given birth to various yogic practices that offer vehicles for self-transformation. Through intimate contact with their spiritual centre, developed through intense meditation, yoga adepts have gained amazing degrees of self-control and mastery over the body.

Buddhism, which sprung from the enlightenment experience of the Indian prince Gautama (563-483 BC), is an offshoot of Hinduism without the multiplicity of gods and goddesses. In general, Buddhists do not espouse the existence of a separate and external God or gods, and for this reason, Buddhism has been described as a “godless” religion (an oversimplification). For Buddhists, true enlightenment comes when one understands one’s identity and realizes that one is a part of “It”. Hindu mystics throughout the ages have made the same pronouncement – “Thou art That”. Jesus himself, in the Gospel of John, says: “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are gods?’” To my mind, this realization is also the core of Gnosticism. Indeed, Buddhist writings such as *The Dhammapada* (the Path of Perfection) are very similar to Jesus’ teachings, particularly those found in the Gnostic Gospels.

It is very unfortunate that so much fighting and killing has occurred, and continues to occur, in the name of religion: Muslims against Jews in Israel/Palestine; Muslims against Hindus in India/Pakistan; Christians and other minority groups persecuted in several Islamic countries; and Muslim extremist groups including ISIS and Boko Haram exhibiting utter brutality, even against other Muslims, in the Middle East and Africa. The west itself is not immune, as witnessed by the mass murders perpetrated by religious fanatics in the U.S., France and Belgium. Evidently, religious conviction can breed hatred, violence and misery. This is an unfortunate consequence of unquestioned adherence to certain religious texts that do not reflect Divine will.

Some Christians feel threatened by eastern religions. They do not want their children exposed to other religious beliefs, fearing that they may be led astray. However, in *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh clearly shows how similar are the core teachings of Jesus and the Buddha. Blind adherence to dogma fosters intolerance and misunderstanding, and can stifle spiritual growth. Even some Christian scholars and ministers make much of philosophical differences between Christianity and eastern religions. They claim that pantheism (the philosophy of God in all things) and reincarnation are anti-Christian, as if belief in these ideas leads to eternal damnation. How can this be? What a warped idea of God they have to preach that the maker of all, who is Love, would cast his/her beloved into hell. We ourselves may make our own hell here on this earth, but God certainly doesn't put us there.

In any case, it is my belief that neither pantheism nor reincarnation is contrary to the essential teachings of Jesus.

Pantheism does not necessarily preclude the existence of a “personal God”. In the same way that God is both immanent and transcendent, so God is both present throughout creation and loves us on a very individual, one-on-one basis. We should not allow our understanding of the goodness and power of God to be limited in any way.

But the bottom line is that this is all simply philosophical argument. It is not really important whether one is a pantheist, or whether one believes in reincarnation, or whether one believes that Jesus is the only way to God. The important truth to accept is that one is loved, unconditionally, by God. Acceptance of this truth brings a tremendous spiritual freedom, a release from the bondage of the judgmental ego. With the knowledge of this truth comes the assurance that God, in his/her love, will reveal his/her image within us.

We are all children of God. We all contain the pure light that will, sooner or later, guide our way home.

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Through study and personal experience, I have come to accept that at least two aspects generally associated with traditional eastern religious mysticism can be universally important to mankind's spiritual quest. Firstly, I have earlier discussed the serpent force of kundalini that is described in Hindu philosophy, and I personally know or have read of many others, of various religious persuasions, who have experienced it. Perhaps the best known case is that of Gopi Krishna, whose autobiography, *Living with Kundalini*, is an in-depth description of the tribulations and joys he experienced. The incidence of spiritual awakening initiated and fostered by the kundalini experience seems to be increasing worldwide.

Secondly, the value of meditation involving recitation of a “mantra” (a simple word or phrase with personal spiritual significance), is becoming more and more accepted in the west as a way of achieving contact with the core of one's being, the image of God in all of us.

In this regard, I wish to describe another personal experience. One evening, during a period of intense and difficult searching, I fell asleep after reading and meditating on

some Christian hymns. The next morning, my wife assured me that during the night, I had clearly and repeatedly chanted the word “om”, although I had absolutely no recollection of this. I was aware that “om” was a traditional Hindu chant, but I couldn't recall whether it had any particular meaning. Upon subsequent investigation, I learned that according to the *Upanishads* (the Hindu “path of light”), “om” is a sacred word which includes all names for God. *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines “om” as, “a word of affirmation or assent intoned as part of a mantra or as a symbolic mystical utterance during meditation”.

The specific reason for my reciting this mantra in my sleep is unknown to me. Could it have been an unconscious form of communication? I believe there are very wise and holy persons in this world, who are far advanced along the path of spiritual awakening. Possibly, there are those who are “tuned-in” to the “cosmic consciousness” - the mind of God - and my unconscious was sending some sort of message out into the cosmos. Far-fetched? Perhaps.

That evening, shortly after I had arrived home from work, my son answered the telephone, and called me to the phone, saying the caller had asked for me. When I picked up the receiver and said “hello”, there was no response, only silence. I continued to hear only silence in response to subsequent “hellos”, and finally hung up. Obviously, it is not particularly uncommon to receive crank calls, but this is the only such call in which someone specifically asked for me that I have ever received. Coincidence? It has been suggested that coincidence is God's way of performing a miracle anonymously. My interpretation of this incident is that someone was telling me that I had been heard, and that I was not alone in my spiritual struggle. This brought me much-needed comfort and reassurance.

Chapter 12 – The Devil Unmasked

An episode of “Mystères” (Mysteries) on French television presented the amazing story of Madame “R”. Madame “R” was an old woman who apparently managed to live for many years with absolutely no physical nourishment other than Communion wafers.

As a young girl, Madame “R” was physically abused by her stepmother. She turned to God for love, and had several religious experiences of the presence of Jesus and of his passion. A physical condition that threatened her life was apparently miraculously cured at Lourdes. She subsequently married, and had three children.

After her children had grown and left home, she began to pray in earnest to be allowed to sacrifice herself for God, as a love offering. She then suffered a tremendous internal upset, presumably involving a supernatural alteration of her metabolism, and during which stigmata reportedly appeared on her palms. She subsequently stopped all intake of physical nourishment, intending to live directly off of God’s love.

And this, it is claimed, she did for at least twelve years. Her virtual lack of physical nourishment was apparently medically corroborated under rigorously-controlled conditions.

Madame “R” claimed to be regularly tempted by the devil to eat. She was convinced that it was the devil that tempted her because the temptations had a spiritual nature - that it, it was not normal physical hunger that she experienced. She underwent the ritual of exorcism regularly. Apparently, however, her overall mental state was one of happiness and contentment, and she was in amazingly good physical condition during her self-imposed starvation diet.

Although I remain skeptical, I do not deny the possibility that Madame “R” lived solely off of the love of God, which is, after all, the same power that made and sustains all things. If so, she indeed made a sacrifice, for who can deny that eating when one is hungry and drinking when one is thirsty are not pleasurable, as they are clearly meant to be.

The life of Madame “R” is an example of sacrificial love. However, suffering for love is not really suffering at all. Her reward for her self-sacrifice, while spiritual, was intensely real. This she readily admitted.

There is an aspect of Madame “R”’s story that I feel obliged to challenge. This is her concept of the devil, a concept that is also held by Orthodox and fundamentalist

Christians, and by Muslims. There is no doubt in my own mind that there is no self-existent spiritual force of evil. As is clear from what I have earlier described, I had thought that I was possessed by some supernatural evil force. But it was only when I finally came to realize and accept that I was battling my own “dark side”, something that had life only through my own ignorance and repression of childhood pain, that I was able to effectively deal with my condition and be healed. Belief in the devil can, therefore, be an impediment to personal spiritual healing.

Belief in an external malevolent force can also have other grave consequences. Occasional news reports surface of mentally ill “caregivers” murdering children because they believed they were possessed. Less commonly, news stories appear that describe ritual acts of “devil worship”. Some years ago, Greece was shocked by the disclosure of a group of Satanists who had confessed to black magic rituals that culminated in human sacrifice. Four alleged ringleaders, including three soldiers and a young woman, were arrested after one of four girls being readied for planned Christmas Day sacrifice broke down and reported the rituals to police.

It is in the psychological context of “group dynamics”, operational in any gathering of persons and indeed within entire nations, races and religions, that the evil borne of child abuse and self-rejection can obtain power that is greater than that of any individual. It has been clearly demonstrated that people acting in a group feed off of one another’s various biases and negative tendencies, so that the resultant damage is greater than the sum of what the individuals would be capable of. This represents the “collective shadow” of the unconscious at work. It is exemplified by the manner in which whole nations can support their leaders’ plans for conquest, and by the way that fundamentalists can be so blinded to the projections of their own dark side that they label entire peoples as evil. Only in this sense can a super-personal power of evil be said to exist. But the fact remains that the force of evil owes its existence to the ignorance of the individual human mind, without which it would cease to be.

Those misplaced souls who partake in the sad practice of ritual abuse, with its attendant acts of destruction and violence, would be less inclined to do so were they aware that they were worshipping nothing that has any real substance. Their destructive acts would lose their meaning. The only power in devil worship comes from fear, and the truth is that there is nothing to fear.

The New Testament has several accounts of Jesus casting out “devils” (from the Greek for “accuser” or “slanderer”) from those who were mentally deranged. It also speaks of Jesus being tempted by Satan (the word is from the Hebrew for “adversary”), but in the Old Testament, Satan was the name of the angel charged by God to tempt Job. Similarly,

the New Testament speaks of Beelzebub as the “prince of the devils”, but Beelzebub was actually the name of a Philistine god (the “Lord of the Flies”).

I do not believe that Jesus recognized the independent existence of a creature that somehow thrived on evil and preyed on human souls. Jesus knew that when people committed evil deeds, it was an expression of their own unacknowledged pain, largely stemming from childhood abuse. They themselves did not understand this. When Jesus said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan”, in response to Peter's suggestion that he should not be crucified, Jesus was not implying that Peter was possessed. Rather, as his subsequent words to Peter suggest (“You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men”), Jesus knew that Peter was speaking from his own ignorance.

The power that Jesus used to cast out devils was the divine power of unconditional love, the only real power in existence. But he had to speak in terms that could be understood by those he was trying to reach, and his evident authority over Satan (really the self-hatred and false perceptions of the loveless and unloved ego) fortified his claim that he was, indeed, “the way, the truth and the life”.

Perhaps the most intriguing term that has been applied to the devil is “Lucifer”. The word is from the Latin for “light-bringing” or “morning star”, which in poetry refers to the planet Venus⁴. In Canaanite mythology, the god Athtar, the “day star” (Venus), had proposed to take the place of Baal, but did not succeed and had to come down to earth where he reigned as “god of it all”. In the book of Isaiah, Lucifer was the name mockingly given to the King of Babylon whose downfall is predicted. The idea that Lucifer's fall from heaven referred to the origin of evil as personified by Satan was introduced by the Church Fathers in the fifth century, based on an incorrect interpretation of the Isaiah reference to the Babylonian king. However, nowhere in the Bible is the name Lucifer applied to a supernatural evil spirit or demon.

Similarly, Satan as the personification of evil does not appear anywhere in the Old Testament. It was during the intertestamental period, under the influence of Iranian (Persian) dualistic religion and its evil god Ahriman, counterpart to the supreme god of light Ahura-mazda, that the figure of Satan emerged in Jewish tradition as the personification of evil and the transcendent opponent of God. Jewish monotheism prohibited Satan from becoming a second God, but he became the leader of all evil spirits, with his own kingdom of darkness opposing the kingdom of God. Thus, although

4. The full spiritual significance of the term “morning star” is discussed in Chapter 24.

the idea of Satan had not developed when Genesis was written, in the later retelling of the story in Jewish apocalyptic literature, the fall of humanity was provoked by the devil, now identified with the serpent.

Various versions of Satan (also called Satanail, Beliar [or Belial] and Mastema) as a fallen angel developed. Eventually, Satan became what he is when the New Testament begins: the one who tempts humanity to discord, violence and immorality, as popularized in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Because Satan was considered to be the cause of human sin and misery, the binding and destruction of Satan became a part of the hoped-for eschatological drama, as described by John in the book of Revelation. Early Christianity adopted this mythology as a way of expressing its conviction that evil, while not an eternal counterpart of God, was more than the accumulation of individual human sins. In the New Testament, the devil, Satan, Belial and Beelzebub are various names for this super-individual, systemic evil, which has much of humanity in its grasp.

Revelation's harshest language is directed at Babylon, which is described as "the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth". In Jewish tradition, "Babylon" came to mean "Rome" after Rome destroyed Jerusalem in 66-70 AD, just as Babylon had destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC. Revelation's picture of Satan as the evil Babylon is not speculative metaphysics offered to satisfy intellectual curiosity about the origin of evil. Rather, it is a part of the apocalyptic story meant to encourage Christians being persecuted by the Romans.

Thus, the not uncommon association of the picture of the dragon (Satan) being cast out of heaven in the book of Revelation with an explanation for the origin of evil is false. As in the similar vision reported in Luke (10:18), the time of the fall of Satan from heaven is now, the time of Jesus' victory won through his death on the cross. The dragon's fall from heaven is equated with the fall of Babylon, symbolizing the defeat of the evil power of Rome as a result of the sacrifice of Jesus. The story has nothing to do with the squelching of a rebellion of hyper-ambitious angels in some pre-creation mythological story.

Similarly, ascription of the number 666 (the "number of the beast" from the book of Revelation) to Satan is, according to knowledgeable scholars, another unfounded assumption. In Jewish tradition, a pseudo-mystical process known as "gematria" was used to assign a numerical equivalent to words. I have read that the number 666 has been shown to represent the letters in the Hebrew equivalent of "Nero", the Roman emperor who persecuted the early Christians. Therefore, in all likelihood, Nero was the beast referred to by the author of Revelation. However, in *Jesus Christ, Son of God*, David Fideler presents another gematrial equivalent of 666. He states that traditional cosmology, including that practiced by the Gnostic Christians and Hebrew Cabalists,

associated 666 with the “magic square of the sun”. The number 666 is equal to the “Spirit of the Sun”. It is also an important musical number, for .666 is the ratio of the perfect fifth, the most powerful harmonic interval. These meanings are a far cry from the diabolical associations preached by Christian fundamentalists.

My source for much of the above concerning the Satan language of the book of Revelation is *Revelation*, by M.E. Boring. In the final chapter of Part II, I write more about the possible significance of the book of Revelation for those overcoming mental illness.

In my own studies, I have come across what is to me an interesting coincidence concerning the number 666 in the Bible. The sixth verse of the sixth chapter of the sixth book of the New Testament (Romans 6:6) is: “For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.” It is this “old self”, the self-protective wounded ego, that has separated us from God, and it is the ego (i.e., the unlovable wretch, the beast even, that we mistakenly thought we were) that Jesus vanquished. My own journey from the depths of despair taught me that it is, indeed, the ego that is the accuser. If, therefore, the number 666 of Revelation should be ascribed to anything other than the Emperor Nero, it should be ascribed to the accusing ego.

However, I don’t feel that we should view our own ego as our enemy. It is really just what we think we are, and is strongly influenced by our repressed emotions. If we accuse ourselves, it is because we don’t know any better. We are always doing the best we can.

From a psychological perspective, I believe that the concept of the devil as the personification of evil has its origins in humankind’s natural propensity to externalize or “project” negative thoughts, impulses and actions. These “negativities” begin to develop in early childhood as a result of our being subjected to various experiences and messages that teach us that we are somehow bad and unlovable. We shove these into dark recesses of our unconscious mind and prefer not to deal with the pain invoked by their memory. Depth psychology refers to this collection of repressed negativities as our “shadow”. However, not all of the contents of our shadow would be considered negative by even unenlightened individuals. For example, we may have repressed valuable creativity. As described in *Meeting the Shadow* (Connie Zweig and Jeremiah Abrams, Eds.), these repressed parts of ourselves will haunt us for the rest of our lives, stifling our ability to love and forgive, unless we find the courage, or are driven by unbearable pain, to unmask and integrate them.

A quote from C. G. Jung that has appeared elsewhere in this book bears repeating: “One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness

conscious". By courageously owning our darkness, instead of denying its existence, we convert it to light – we become light-makers. As we gradually uncover repressed trauma and reclaim our shadows, our ego is enlightened. We become accepting of others and ourselves. And our new ego, born from transcending the old, becomes our friend, our lover even. We realize that we are our own Beloved. There is no greater joy.

This is the real purpose and meaning of the ancient practice of alchemy – discovering that what we regarded as the dross within us is actually, as Jung declared, "pure gold".

I have described my own process of unmasking my shadow. It has entailed depression and fear, but it has above all been a gift of God's grace. With each episode of pain and fear relived from my past, I have become more accepting, understanding and compassionate with myself and others.

C. S. Lewis is an author whom I came to admire and respect a great deal during the early part of my spiritual struggle (although he can be rightly criticized for having been a male chauvinist and would likely have objected to any suggestion to replace "God" with "God/dess"). A self-professed atheist for much of his life, he one day found himself, very reluctantly, facing the conclusion of his own rigorously honest intellectual search - the existence of God. For the remainder of his life, he used his intellectual prowess and tremendous literary skills as instruments of God's love as revealed in Jesus. I have read, I think, all of his religious writings. They were much help to me, and for that I am very grateful. He died, of natural causes, on the same day as President Kennedy and Aldous Huxley. When I read an account of Mr. Lewis' death, I felt a great sense of loss. My wife and I named our second son in honor of his memory.

The fact that such an intelligent and loving man professed to believe in the devil (which he parodied in *The Screwtape Letters* and *Screwtape Proposes a Toast*) made me think all the more carefully before reaching a different conclusion. C. S. Lewis claimed that belief in the devil was important lest we become complacent regarding evil, and that fear of the devil could for some people be what initially turns them to God. However, I am convinced that such a belief can provide a convenient scapegoat ("the devil made me do it") and is ultimately spiritually harmful. Therefore, for the reasons I have discussed above, I must disagree with Mr. Lewis.

Although C. S. Lewis believed in a supernatural evil force, with which Christians must constantly do battle, he was at the same time aware of the relative "smallness" of evil compared with the immensity of the kingdom of God. He wrote metaphorically that hell and all its contents could fit into a small crack in his floorboards.

Some years ago, I discovered an aspect of my being that, unbeknownst to me, had contributed to my low self-esteem, to the feeling that I was somehow bad to the core. I am left-handed, although I perform many two-handed tasks (such as swinging a baseball bat and puck-handling with a hockey stick) in the right-handed fashion. Not long after I had re-experienced the kundalini energy, the bizarre notion that God would make me right-handed entered my mind. For several hours, I actually had difficulty when I attempted to write or even eat with my left hand.

The idea that the left side is associated with evil has long been a part of western culture. Indeed, the Latin word for “left” is “sinister”, which of course has taken on a quite different meaning in the English language. The Bible contains numerous passages that suggest that the right hand side is the favored side of God.

I have no memories of any conscious attempts by anyone to get me to write with my right hand. However, I may have picked up on an unconscious concern on the part of my mother. For a period of a year or two prior to her death (when her short-term memory was failing), whenever she noticed me using my left hand, she would comment on it. She would ask whether any of my school teachers had encouraged me to use my right hand (which I understand was once common practice).

Studies have demonstrated that there are differences in the functioning of the brain between left-handed people and right-handed people. In left-handed people, the right hemisphere of the brain is dominant, while in right-handed people, it is the left hemisphere that is dominant. The right side of the brain is associated with intuition and creativity, whereas the left side is characterized by rationality and planning. Left-handed people can be highly artistic (I am an exception), as witnessed by the many renowned left-handed artists. They have a higher incidence of certain mental disorders, including schizophrenia. But the notion that left-handed people, who represent some ten percent of the population, are morally or spiritually inferior is clearly ludicrous and potentially harmful. In my case, intuition associated with being left-handed may have facilitated the manner in which God revealed him/herself to me.

My wife's aunt, who quite late in life was driven by depression to begin a spiritual search that has entailed world-wide travel and has taken her a considerable way along the path of understanding, believes that “left-handed people choose to complicate their lives”.

I do not know whether there are other “demons” still in hiding in my mind, but if so, I will welcome their undoing.

In summary, belief in a supernatural evil force that is at war with God and that has the power to possess and control a human being is inconsistent with my view of creation

and is potentially harmful. The devil is a fraudulent scapegoat. The only reality, the only self-existent force, is Love, which is God.

Chapter 13 – Evolution and “the Fall”

According to cosmologists, the “big bang” that marked the birth of our universe occurred some fifteen billion years ago. Since then, the universe has been constantly expanding. However, it will not continue to expand forever, for there is apparently enough gravitational force, from both visible and “dark” matter, to eventually halt its expansion. At some point in the distant future, many billions of years hence, it will begin to contract (and time will reverse). The universe will continue contracting until it implodes upon itself in a “singularity”, a sort of all-encompassing “black hole” of infinite mass. And then perhaps the story will begin again with another big bang.

The study of the origins and destiny of the universe entails dealing with masses, dimensions and time-periods that are on a truly awe-inspiring scale. It is a humbling feeling to be in awe of the universe.

Energy, as Isaac Newton stated, is neither created nor destroyed. It only changes form or expression. The internal and infinite energy of creation - the love energy of God - simply “is”. The notions of the eternal and the infinite are impossible for the human mind to grasp, because we think in terms of time and space. But time and space do not bind God.

Evolution is both physical and spiritual. The evolution of the universe and of life on earth - from primitive single-celled marine organisms that arose some four billion years ago through to *Homo sapiens* - is the evolution of the love energy - the “unfolding of the lotus blossom” on a cosmic scale. It is the self-expression of God. The spiritual evolution of humankind is the gradual realization that we are made in God’s image, and that we are an inseparable part of God. Through us, God loves and appreciates his/her creation and him/herself. Evolution is, in a real sense, God’s journey of self-discovery.

It is because we view existence through the eyes of our false selves, our wounded egos, that we see ourselves as separated from God and the universe. But as Kahlil Gibran wrote in *The Prophet*, we should understand that we dwell in the heart of God, which is all that there is.

As has previously been argued, evil is due to our ignorance (in a purely non-pejorative sense of the word) of our nature and God’s nature. So long as we believe that humankind is sinful (i.e., evil) by nature, we will go looking for evil in ourselves and others. So long as we do not understand that God is unconditional love and that we are made in God’s image, we will continue to teach our children that they are much less than they really are.

In *The Way of the Sacred*, Francis Huxley presents a view that “the fall” is related to humankind's need for procreation - that it was a “fall into generation”. God is self-sufficient and complete in him/herself, but men and women need each other. Adam was created in the image of God, but his fall was followed by his sexual knowledge of Eve. Because life must end in death in order to make room for itself perpetually, Adam became mortal after he had lain with Eve. However, this argument seems to equate sex with sin, as if the sex act itself were shameful. False sexual shame afflicts many persons, especially those raised in an environment of puritanical fundamentalism, and is at the core of many joy-robbing neuroses and inhibitions. The truth is that the pleasure of sex, experienced in a mutually caring and giving relationship, is one of God’s greatest gifts. We have been created in God’s image, and nothing can change that.

To me, the fall symbolizes the development of the wounded ego (the false self). This ego is the cause of (or perhaps more correctly simply is) the false perception that we are somehow separated from the rest of the universe - separated from God. But this sense of separation can be pathologically increased in those who have been raised in highly abusive situations. Guilt and shame foster psychological withdrawal - the child hides from him/herself. There is a sense of being unworthy and incomplete, and the child withdraws from reality. A false self develops, whose purpose is to protect the child from suffering more pain.

In *Healing the Split*, Dr. John Nelson also equates the fall with the development of the false self, or ego, which occurs as the child forms a psychic boundary of “I-ness” that separates him/her from the Spiritual Ground and from others. As the child fortifies his/her ego boundaries, which are necessary for psychic growth, s/he gradually forgets his/her relationship with the Ground. Michael Washburn, in *The Ego and the Dynamic Ground*, calls this original process of repression “primal repression”. Given that the Ground is our life-force, we can never get entirely cut off from it. However, abuse increases the sense of separation. But even in the most severely abused, it remains as an unconscious memory, and a source of both fascination and fear. The hero’s journey is the spiritual “conversion” of the wounded ego to the healed ego, the ego that dwells in the Garden of Eden in child-like communion with the Ground.

Michael Washburn has a theory of “original sin” related to primal repression. He posits that although primal repression must initially be considered an innocent act and is necessary for the development of a functioning ego, it usually remains in place much longer than necessary. Our higher destiny is to rejoin God. By maintaining primal repression, the wounded ego in a sense refuses God. This holding back, this maintaining an unnecessary separation from God, can be considered to be sin.

Indeed, this is certainly in accord with my first spiritual experience of salvation in which my panic and depression were dramatically lifted from me and I felt so exquisitely clean. Original repression was overcome for a while, and I dreamed that I was washed pure with water. I discovered that I was not the “I” that I thought I was. When the panic returned after about 16 hours of bliss, and I found myself back in my sick ego, I felt so dirty - sinful.

However, my belief is that the ego, which is what we think we are, really can't help behaving this way. The sin is unintentional and unavoidable. We carry around a lot of self-hatred and repressed grief that must be exposed. The ego must come to love itself – we must come to love ourselves – before we can be open to the purity and love of God. This is the key to overcoming primal repression.

Through our false selves, our wounded egos, we see ourselves as much less than we really are, and we are not able to love ourselves. We do not know that we are divine reflections of God, and that our joy is found in living our true natures, which is the giving and loving nature of God. Instead, we feel a need to put ourselves above others in order to feel good about ourselves. We equate power and domination with a sense of importance. We establish what has been called the “kingdom of self”.

This adult, primarily masculine need to dominate and to use others for personal gratification greatly affects attitudes toward sex. Men so often view women as sex objects whose primary purpose is to give them physical pleasure. However, sex is meant to be both a sacred act of creation and a highly pleasurable and joyful expression of love shared by two equal partners.

My own view is that the development of the masculine ego may have been an evolutionary necessity, both physically and spiritually. Physically, the ego may have been necessary to provide a self-defense and self-preservation mechanism to ensure our ancestors' survival in a world that was at times dangerous and hostile. Spiritually, it may be necessary for the individual soul to experience the anguish and tribulation caused by the ignorance of the wounded ego. It is through overcoming and integrating the shadow of our ego that we discover who we really are, compassionate and loving images of God. Now that we have subjugated our planet, however, it is primarily the masculine ego that represents the greatest threat to our survival and the greatest impediment to our happiness. The false sense of “separateness” due to the masculine ego breeds guilt, fear and the need for control and domination. We must learn to see ourselves and our magnificent world through the eyes of the natural child - the expression of the universal Spirit. In so doing, we will become nurturers and caretakers rather than warriors and plunderers.

The “new age movement” (viewed with mistrust and fear by narrow-minded persons, including many Christians) is the most recent expression of the developing change in the spiritual outlook of the collective unconscious. Of course, as is true of all philosophies that offer hope of relief from suffering, the new age movement is not without its share of charlatans whose interests are mainly selfish.

There are other positive signs of progress. The Berlin Wall fell and apartheid is no more. As Riane Eisler describes in *The Chalice and the Blade*, we are moving out of a 6,000 year period of patriarchal domination, with its emphasis on masculine competition, and entering a period in which the feminine values of cooperation and nurturing will again be cherished. Undeniably horrific regional conflicts and destructive acts committed by misguided religious fundamentalists notwithstanding, I believe that we are witnessing the dawning of a new age of peace and understanding - the “Age of Aquarius”.

Chapter 14 – A Spiritual Universe

As portrayed in the book, *Stephen Hawking, A Life in Science* by Michael White and John Gribbin, Dr. Stephen Hawking is a remarkable man. Although suffering from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's Disease), the theoretical physicist and author of the acclaimed and ironically titled, *A Brief History of Time* continues to achieve brilliant new insights into the nature of the universe.

He has been proclaimed as the greatest living scientist, the successor to Einstein. Einstein (who, contrary to popular belief, was not an atheist), once proclaimed that, “God does not play dice with the universe”. This was in reference to his reluctance to believe that the behavior of sub-atomic particles, the building blocks of the universe, was entirely random. Hawking, on the other hand, has stated, “God not only plays dice, he sometimes throws them where they can't be seen”.

Stephen Hawking is actively pursuing the development of a “Theory of Everything”, which will tie together all of the known forces, including gravity. However, those who think (worriedly or hopefully) that the attainment of this scientific breakthrough would somehow remove God from the picture are mistaken. God is Love, and love can't be explained away by any theory, no matter how brilliant or complex.

Shirley MacLaine (the actress and author of *Out on a Limb* and other metaphysical books) once asked Stephen Hawking whether he believed in a God who created and guides the universe. Hawking answered no. However, Hawking later made the following revelatory statement: “My work on the origin of the universe is on the border between science and religion, but I try to stay on the scientific side. We are on a minor planet of a very average star in the outer suburbs of one of a hundred thousand million galaxies. It is difficult to believe in a God that would care about us.” Hawking added, “But it is quite possible that God acts in ways that cannot be described by scientific laws”. Indeed, how can the Law of Love be described in scientific terms?

Hawking makes us even smaller when he postulates the existence of an infinite number of other universes.

This equating of value or worth with size or position may be a scientific (or at least human) tendency, but it is certainly not the way God loves his/her creation. It is also not the way a mother loves her children. If it were, the smallest and least capable (the new-born) would be less important and less loved than the older, more independent siblings. In fact, the reverse is more likely true, because weakness and helplessness solicit compassion and a desire to be protective.

In a similar way, every individual is of infinite value to God. God wants a personal relationship with each and every human being, because God knows that this is the only relationship that will bring each of us true and everlasting joy, and this is God's greatest desire.

Rather than using the vastness of the universe as an excuse not to believe that God loves us, we should consider that God has made this vast universe, and perhaps other universes, for our joy. We all appreciate the joy of discovery, and the more there is to discover, the greater the joy. I for one would rue the day that there were no more discoveries to be made, and I for one don't believe we humans shall ever see that day, for I have no doubt that God in his/her infinite love and creativity shall always stay ahead of us. God may well be creating additional worlds and universes as I write this. I trust that the thrill of discovery will always be available to the sincere seeker.

Some argue that the universe has always existed, but the generally-accepted (at least among cosmologists) Big Bang theory and an expanding universe suggest that it originated at some point in time (the point of creation). However, as Stephen Hawking theorizes in his "no boundary concept", there may be no absolute point at which the universe began, but rather space, time, matter and energy may be a self-contained package. Then one might ask, what is God's role?

The answer, I believe, is that God's role is essentially the same in both scenarios. God created time, in the same way S/he created space, matter and energy, but God is outside of or beyond both time and space. These are human concepts that allow us to describe the universe within which we dwell. To suggest that there was no time at which the universe did not exist is meaningless. The passage of time within the universe, as Einstein demonstrated, is relative. We are looking at the universe from inside the universe, using human minds that exist within space and time, but the ultimate answers are in the mind of God, which transcends space and time.

Further, if there were no observer to mark the passage of time, if there were nothing in existence to be influenced by time, would there be time as such? This is analogous to the familiar scenario wherein a tree falls in a forest, but there is no creature within earshot to hear the sound. Is there a sound? The answer is no, because sound only exists when there is an eardrum to vibrate under the influence of the energy of sound waves and a brain to interpret the messages from the ear.

Recent experiments in particle physics suggest that this need for an observer extends to the very existence of matter. Sub-atomic particles have been discovered that seem to exist only while being watched. Remove the observer, and the particle ceases to exist!

This is fascinating stuff, far beyond human comprehension, but certainly food for thought.

Alan Watts, in *The Book*, puts forth his belief that the universe itself is intelligent, in that it represents (as do we) a physical expression of ultimate intelligence, which is God. The anonymous author Mary (*All That You Are*) believes that all things, including apparently inanimate objects, are somehow alive.

Indeed, recent scientific discoveries point to the existence of a basic underlying and unifying intelligence in matter. Sub-atomic particles have been discovered that are aware of interactions made by other distant particles immediately as they occur (i.e., communication faster than the speed of light, which Einstein believed impossible). Called “supraluminal (i.e., faster than light) quantum connectedness”, the significance of this and other startling findings have been described in layman’s terms by Gary Zukav in *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*.

Moreover, the mind or spirit of man, which animates the body, has apparently been endowed with capabilities to directly influence external events. It is possible to affect the outcome of otherwise random physical events (e.g., the distribution of tokens as they randomly tumble under the influence of gravity through a series of channels) by the power of concentration. This has been proven well beyond the realm of chance alone. Also, there is indisputable proof that physical healing can be accelerated by directed human thought.

I believe that I have benefited personally from such physical healing. On one occasion while visiting with my in-laws in Europe, I burned my hand. My mother-in-law ran her own hand over the burn, and I experienced no subsequent pain and very rapid healing. Later, my wife cured me of chronic plantar warts on the soles of my feet using a similar thought-directed technique.

It appears that the mind at some level is independent of time and space. This is a characteristic we had previously ascribed to God. This is further evidence that the spirit of God dwells within each one of us.

In *The Holographic Universe*, Michael Talbot compellingly argues that both the universe and the human mind operate similar to (but are infinitely more complex than) light holograms. The unique and amazing characteristic of the hologram is that the whole is contained within every part. This has enormous implications for spirituality and mysticism. I am reminded of mystic Evelyn Underhill’s utterance, “Having nothing, yet possessing all things”. The hologram theory explains how instantaneous

communication (supraluminal quantum connectedness) is possible and also why memories can't be isolated to any particular part of the brain.

The title of the last chapter of Gary Zukav's book (*The Dancing Wu Li Masters*) is *The End of Science*. Mr. Zukav is not predicting that investigation into the physical world will end, but rather that this investigation will draw scientists ever deeper into an area that most were once careful to keep separate – the spiritual.

Clearly, science is coming to recognize the validity of the “perennial philosophy” described by novelist and philosopher Aldous Huxley as: “a metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality (in) the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being”.

We are indeed spiritual beings in a spiritual universe.

Chapter 15 – The Child Within

The new-born is completely helpless and totally dependent on others for survival. The new-born is not equipped to somehow earn the right to be cared for. Yet the unconditional love of a psychologically-healthy mother for her infant is nature's most powerful bond. This should remind us that this is the way God cares for each one of us. All that we have is given to us, out of love for us. We can do nothing, and need do nothing, to earn this caring. The nature of unconditional love, which is the very foundation of the universe, is one of the most difficult lessons for the wayward soul to learn.

The child is born into this world with an innate, unlimited capacity to love. However, if the child does not receive love during the crucial formative early years, the child feels unlovable and guilty. The capacity to love is still there, but the ability to express this capacity is not developed. Because of low self-esteem, the child feels that his or her love is of little or no value.

This is perhaps the greatest tragedy in the world today. Love of oneself and others is crucial to a happy and fulfilling life. There are untold numbers of children who are being robbed daily of their ability to love. These children become depressed and miserable, and this state will continue and possibly worsen into adulthood. Such people fill our mental institutions and jails.

No one is born into this world consciously intending to develop mental illness, or to become a thief, drug addict, prostitute or murderer. These people are victims, just as surely as their own victims are victims - they are suffering the consequences of the sins of the fathers, passed on from generation to generation (Exodus 34:7, paraphrased). Hiding inside each one of them is a frightened child desperately in need of love and compassion.

For such persons to become well and happy, they must first be taught and they must accept that they are valuable and lovable. They must be taught to listen to the still, small voice within, the voice of the Self, which speaks to them through the innocent natural child. They must be taught to see through the distortions and defenses of the wounded ego. This process does not readily occur. At the very least, it requires hard work and persistence on the part of the sufferer, coupled with divine grace, and generally also

requires the assistance of a wise therapist or other understanding person. These people must then become reacquainted with their inner child, and they must allow themselves to feel their repressed pain and grieve for the child.⁵ Additionally, these victims must come to understand that even those who abused and oppressed them were doing the best that they could. When this knowledge is absorbed, forgiveness follows naturally. Finally, wholeness comes. The journey to wholeness, to the state of grace in which we are all born, can be an arduous struggle, fraught with difficulties and hurdles. But compassion and understanding (both of which are facets of love) are its fruits.

On the other hand, those children who are born and raised with attention and love, who receive the strokes that they need, will in all probability develop and mature into healthy, energetic and contributing members of society⁶. These people did not have to deny their childhood - they were allowed to live it, and it remains a vibrant part of their psyche. Having received love and compassion from infancy, when they especially needed it, they have naturally matured into self-accepting, loving and compassionate adults.

It is crucially important that all children be treated with reverence and respect, so that they mature with an awareness of their divine nature. Children so raised will have the necessary self-esteem to unconditionally love their own children, not as possessions but rather as expressions of God. Only in this way can the vicious cycle of child-abuse and criminal activity be broken, and a stable, harmonious and joyful society be established.

The consequences of children losing touch with their own divinity can be terrible – the tragedy at Columbine High in Denver, Colorado, is a particularly notorious example of children murdering children. Although lax gun control laws contribute to a higher incidence of such events in the United States, the U.S. by no means has a monopoly on them. In England, two ten-year-old boys lured a two-year-old away from a shopping mall and brutally murdered him.

5. See *Healing Your Aloneness – Finding Love and Wholeness through Your Inner Child* (Chopich and Paul, 1990) for an in-depth discussion of the process of connecting with the inner child to help overcome anxiety and depression.

6. Apparent exceptions do occur, although I submit they are rare. A child can be raised in a seemingly loving environment and yet develop symptoms of mental illness in later life. Possible causes could include unrecognized or hidden abuse (combined with a particularly sensitive psyche), or even unresolved trauma from a previous life.

These incidents certainly focus attention on the issue of evil and the nature of man. But it is a grievous error to conclude, as did a columnist in the London Times, that the latter incident means that any child could be born with the “Satan bug” inside him, and that what is required to keep this evil tendency in check is more discipline. Subsequent to the Columbine High massacre, the Oklahoma State legislature passed a motion encouraging parents to “spank, switch or paddle” their children. Actions such as these are counter-productive – abuse of any sort directed against children breeds abusive and violent children. Such children may not become murderers of others, but they develop within a critical voice that tells them that they are bad and that robs them of the joy of life. These victims of abuse are more likely to become self-murderers.

It is not possible to think about the suffering of the two-year old English child, crying for his mom and not comprehending in any way what was happening, without feeling a profound grief. But no one who has been raised in a loving home, who is aware of his/her own worth, could ever murder another. What I have read and heard concerning the perpetrators' upbringings reaffirms my conviction that they, too, are victims. Reportedly, the one child was so full of self-loathing that he would intentionally injure himself, while the other was exposed to violent adult videos which his father enjoyed viewing. Similarly, I am sure that the Columbine High murderers were themselves victims of abuse, unintentional or otherwise, during their short lives. It is not possible to hate others without hating oneself. And indeed, their final act was self-murder.

However, one may then question why it is that other children who have been perhaps even more grossly abused do not become murderers. There are many factors involved in the answer to this question, including gender. There seems to be little doubt that abused males are more likely to turn their aggression outward, whereas females are more prone to turn it inward and become depressive or suicidal personalities.

Sex-differences aside, we do not know what combination of events any individual child may have experienced to produce severe anti-social behavior. It may have been due mainly to one especially disturbing incident that occurred during a particularly susceptible time of development, or it may have been the result of a succession of seemingly relatively minor abuses, culminating in the “straw that broke the camel's back”. It may also be that some children are born with more spiritual awareness than others. Perhaps they have suffered in a previous life and have already learned at least some measure of agape love.

In addition to the psychological consequences, there are physiological consequences of child abuse. Studies have shown that toddlers who are never spanked have increased cognitive development compared to those smacked two or three times a week. Therefore, sparing the rod during the toddler years when brain development and neural

growth is most explosive – and the very time most parents are tempted to spank – is especially important.

It is an appalling statistic that fully 94% of all U.S. parents spank, and that more than one-third of parents spank babies before the age of one! At this age, the infant can't possibly understand what's happening. This may go a long way to explaining why our culture is so violent.

Pope Francis has stated that it's OK for parents to spank children, so long as they do it with “dignity”. The comments came during a general audience in St. Peter's Square, when Francis was talking about the importance of a good father within a family. "I once heard at a wedding a father say, 'I sometimes have to hit my children a little but never in the face, so as to not demean them.' How nice, I thought, he has a sense of dignity," the Pope said. These comments both shocked and saddened me. Spanking a child can never be dignified and is always demeaning. It is violence. It is abuse, period. If I could, I would ask the Pope if he could actually visualize Jesus spanking a child, or condone spanking by others. If he were to say that he could, I would have to tell him that he doesn't know his Lord.

No one should ever strike a child. Effective discipline can be had without resorting to physical force. Experts suggest that discipline should start with verbal correction, proceed to reasoning, go on to a time-out warning, then a time-out, and finally to some sort of non-abusive back-up punishment appropriate to the circumstances (such as restriction of privileges).

All children, I believe, come into this world with an innate knowledge of God's love. But the embryonic self-worth of the child must be fostered and nurtured through the love and attention of the primary caregivers, or self-loathing will take its place.

Jesus was very aware of the importance of caring for and nurturing children. He told his disciples that a child-like heart was required to enter the kingdom of heaven. He chastised his disciples when they tried to keep the children from coming to him to be blessed, again saying, “for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these”. And towards those who would cause a child to sin (i.e., become separated from the Source), very stern words are directed, “It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck”. Clearly, Jesus did not subscribe to the Old Testament maxim of “Spare the rod and spoil the child”. But perhaps this maxim has been interpreted the wrong way. As followers of the Baha'i faith exhort, Christians should interpret this as a command – we are to “spoil” our children with love and tenderness.

I myself was not always aware of the harm that spanking can do. As I have described, I was spanked often as a child, and I spanked our first child not infrequently during our battles of wills. Thankfully, she has always had a very strong will, and it was never broken. I have since apologized to her, and she is now a very loving mother of my darling first grandchild. Though I found no occasion to spank our second child, sadly I did once ask him why he was not of a more “agreeable” temperament like his younger brother. I later deeply regretted inflicting this psychological abuse on my son, and I asked for his forgiveness. Our third child was spanked on only one occasion (the circumstances are forgotten). It was only a light paddling, but my dear son later told me that it made him question my love for him. I was very apologetic, but I was at the same time pleased that he was able to express these feelings to me. I never ever considered spanking our youngest child.

It seems obvious to me that Jesus realized that the heart of the child is pure. We are all born innocent. Jesus did not believe in “original sin” as it is preached by fundamentalist and orthodox Christians, and neither did the first Christians. St. Augustine introduced this doctrine into Christian dogma some 400 years after the crucifixion.

The natural child lives in the present moment, the “eternal now”. Without the ego distractions of adults, the child becomes absorbed in his/her surroundings, becomes, as it were, one with his/her surroundings. There is a deep spiritual joy that is associated with this absence of self-consciousness. With all of his/her psychic energy focused on interacting with the environment, there is a tremendous influx of sensory data. Interpreting and being moved by this sensory data is a highly enjoyable pastime. Certainly, there is no distracting sense of sin or unworthiness. The child does not question the fact that s/he belongs and is at home in the universe. The natural child is totally content and at peace with him/herself and his/her world.

I am convinced that one of the chief ways in which the natural child is denied is with regard to the body. The human body is beautiful and the joy and pleasure that accompany healthy sexual expression are gifts from God. Clearly, infants are not ashamed of their bodies, and it is normal instinctual behavior for young children to explore and experiment. The knowledgeable adult caregiver will not chastise the child for this activity. Yet, a great many children, by the time they are a few years old, have come to believe that their “privates” are dirty and shameful.

If the child is raised in a repressive, puritanical environment, he will feel ashamed of his normal and healthy exploratory desires. This stage of development will be truncated. Repression of the child's natural sexual expression (a form of denial of the Self) is a principal cause of neurosis in the adult. In many cases, repression of healthy sexuality results in its later expression in unhealthy ways, such as addiction to pornography or a

need for multiple partners. Severe repression or distortion of the child's normal behavior, a consequence of sexual abuse, can result in perverse sexual activity in the adult, involving degradation and pain. However, homosexuality itself is not a perversion, and some children are naturally transgender. Enlightened caregivers will fully accept and support the child's sexual orientation.

The natural sexual condition of the healthy adult, which is the way we were intended to function, is within the context of a monogamous relationship that is both spiritual and physical. For the adult who is in contact with the child within, sex is not a degrading activity in which one takes from or dominates (or is dominated by) as many people as possible; rather, sex is for giving, and sharing, and building-up in a one-on-one relationship with one's partner.

It is true that we are to be spiritual beings, but that does not at all mean that we should sacrifice our sexuality. On the contrary, I believe that when sexuality is properly understood, it is realized to be a profound expression of God. For it is largely through our sexuality that we are co-creators with God. It is incumbent upon the adult caregiver to foster in the child a shameless appreciation of the body as the temple of God and of the gift that is sexuality.

At the age of five, my younger son announced that he had chosen my wife and me to be his parents. Intrigued, my wife asked how he had done this. He stated, matter-of-factly, that while in heaven before he was born, he had been allowed to go through one door to pick his parents, and through another door to select his brothers and sisters. We have no knowledge of his having obtained this idea from any external source.

For several years prior to my wife's last pregnancy, we had talked about how we felt that we would be blessed with another daughter someday. Yet the pregnancy, when it occurred, was unplanned, because we did not believe that we were ready for another interruption in our lives.

When my wife was about four months pregnant with our last child, I accompanied her to the clinic for an ultrasound, which her doctor had ordered to keep tabs on the baby's growth (my wife had gestational diabetes, which put the fetus at increased risk). Seeing that exquisite little body floating around in her womb was a spiritual experience. We learned then that the baby was, as we had both felt she would be, a girl.

For several months after her birth, our baby girl often would stare off into a corner of space, seemingly transfixed, a smile on her face (she smiled from a very early age, and very readily). It was as if she were seeing something we could not. When this was

occurring, I had the distinct impression that she was in contact with heavenly beings, whether God or angels.

Sophie Burnham ends her book, *Angel Letters*, with the following true story: A young couple had one little girl and a new baby. The little girl begged and begged her parents to be left alone with the baby for a while. The parents were reluctant, because they knew that elder siblings could be understandably jealous and could hurt the new baby. Finally, they allowed their daughter to be alone with the baby in the baby's room, but they listened through the nursery monitor and were prepared to act quickly if they thought the baby was in any danger. What they heard, however, was simply the voice of their daughter as she whispered to the baby, "Tell me about God, I'm forgetting".

A while ago, I watched an episode of a BBC-produced television program, which dealt with the religions of the world. This particular episode concerned Zen Buddhism. The host visited a Zen monastery in Japan and asked the abbot what was the one chief piece of advice he could offer. His answer, "Know yourself".

Visiting a different Zen monastery, the program host asked the question, "What is Zen?" He was surprised when the abbot answered with a quote from Jesus: "Unless you become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven". Zen, this abbot went on to explain, was about becoming a child. Both abbots had really given the same answer. We are to re-discover our true self, our inner child, the innocent and glorious natural child that is the expression of God. Of such is the kingdom of heaven.

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Upon completing an earlier draft of my story, I shared it with two of my siblings and with a colleague, who loaned it to a friend who had attempted suicide. My colleague's friend was helped by what I had written and thanked me in person.

However, shortly thereafter I began to feel depressed again. I had trouble sleeping and concentrating at work, and I had very little appetite. But this time my reaction to being depressed was very different - this time, I understood that God had a purpose for my depression, and for this reason I was not nearly as afraid as I would otherwise have been; in some way, I actually welcomed it. Naturally, however, my wife was concerned. I did my best to reassure her that things would turn out all right.

About a week into this period of depression, I had a dream that upset me very much. I dreamed that my younger son, then seven years old, was going to die, and he had accepted his own death without so much as a word of objection. He was so brave, and so innocent - he did not deserve to die! I awoke sobbing violently. I didn't sleep for the rest of the night.

I was still very bothered the next day, and I began to experience painful childhood memories. While I was in my car driving to work, I pondered my own upbringing, and my childhood relationship with my parents, and tears started to flow. I thought about the physical abuse inflicted by my father, sanctioned and at times encouraged by my mother. It became very clear to me that, much as they may have wanted to, my parents had not loved me just for being me. The agony of this realization was intense, and an involuntary scream arose from my throat. I groaned and moaned for several minutes, and brushed away tears for fear oncoming drivers would notice. But in some way, it was a relief to experience this very painful truth that I realized I had long repressed.

The following day, I was scheduled to fly out of town on business. I was still depressed and quite anxious, and considered cancelling the trip. However, I decided to go, both because I had a feeling that it was God's will and because I didn't want to let my employer down.

Shortly after take-off, I settled back in my seat, and attempted to relax through deep and regular breathing from my abdomen. I began to go inside myself, in a conscious effort to contact the lost and frightened child that I knew I harbored within. Although I had experienced many memories of childhood during the previous several years, some pleasant and some unpleasant, my adult ego had never been in actual contact with my own inner child. But having read quite a bit on this topic, and having written about the relationship between the natural child and God, I knew that this could be a healing experience.

All at once, I saw in my mind's eye a bare-bottomed toddler, about two years old, jumping up and down, and exclaiming "yeah, yeah, yeah" and laughing unabashedly. This, I immediately knew, was my long lost inner child. As I write this, I vividly remember the wonderful, amazing, incredible feeling. This was the beautiful, innocent, fun-loving natural child that had been in hiding for so many, many years. Powerful emotions of love, mingled with compassion, arose within me. Tears of joy welled up in my eyes.

But I was surprised. I had expected, were I to be successful in this search, to encounter a child several years older.

I continued to observe the antics of my inner child in wonder, fascination and love. When he began to pull quite vigorously on his penis, however, I became somewhat upset. Although I did not consciously try to stop this behavior, my vision ended. It later occurred to me that this activity was probably a reflection of the repression of the child's natural sexual instincts that I had experienced during my upbringing.

Upon landing, I hurriedly picked up my rental car, and began driving to my hotel, still very excited and happy about having met my inner child. Suddenly and totally unexpectedly, I “saw” my dead sister, looking absolutely beautiful in a flowing white gown. She had a crown on her head, and a radiant smile, and she was telling me something very, very important. She was saying “I love you” over and over again.

What joy! I shouted and cried simultaneously. This time I didn't care whether other motorists noticed my tears. The fear that my sister harbored resentment or hostility toward me had long since left my conscious mind, but yet I strongly felt that she had been waiting patiently to meet me and to give me this message of love and forgiveness. The incredible feelings of relief and joy that I was experiencing made it totally apparent to me how badly I had needed to receive her message.

At the same time, I was very aware that God was with me. Although I was not familiar with the city, I drove to my hotel (some thirty kilometres from the airport) as if on autopilot. When I arrived, I discovered that I had forgotten to pick up my bag from the airport luggage carousel. Normally, doing something stupid like this (although I had never done precisely this before) would have upset me, but I was much too happy to be bothered by this triviality. I arranged for a cab to pick up my bag, and had a very enjoyable dinner.

That evening, I telephoned my wife and my sister (the social worker) and described the encounters with my inner child and dead sister. Both were very pleased. My sister, in particular, expressed relief at hearing of the message from our younger sister, because she, too, had been feeling guilty since her death.

The next day's business went well. It started with breakfast with my colleagues. It was a joy to be relaxed and not phobic about embarrassing myself. In fact, I actually enjoyed sharing the “forgotten bag” story and laughing about it. This laughter was not at all self-denigrating. It was just that I now understood that what I was, my true Self, wasn't at all determined or affected by harmless mistakes such as this. This knowledge brought real freedom.

Chapter 16 – In Praise of the Feminine

Love worships love.

I adore women, and I thank God that this is so. In the past, when I understood less, I was very wary of allowing myself to acknowledge feelings akin to love for any woman, for fear that it would be a painful, unrequited love. I was even afraid to tell a woman that she was beautiful. Now, however, that I am so much more comfortable with myself and who I am, my self-esteem is not dependent on how others may profess to feel about me. For what is truly important is how one feels about oneself.

That I have come to this understanding, I owe in very large part to the woman who has loved me more than I thought any human being ever could - my wife. She was able to see the light within me while I was in my darkest hour. I was able to feel her love for me although I could feel absolutely no love for myself. Her love is the nearest thing I have ever experienced to the way God loves me - unconditionally.

Women, I am convinced, are better able to love unconditionally than are men. This may be partly due to physiological differences. In women, the flow of information between the left and right brain hemispheres is apparently facilitated more so than in men. As a result, women tend to be less aggressive (left-brain characteristic associated with right-handedness) and more intuitive (right-brained characteristic associated with left-handedness). This may be a temporary evolutionary disparity that will gradually lessen, enabling men to take on more caring and less domineering roles in society. But it is women out of whose bodies new life arises, and it is women who, for the most part, sustain and nurture this new life, both physically and psychologically, until it is able to spread its wings and fly. To my mind, these abilities and qualities make women, on the whole and at least at this point in our evolution as a species, naturally more complete and “divine” than men.

In some eastern cultures, female children are not wanted. They are regarded as a burden rather than a gift. Abortions are sometimes performed simply because it is learned that the fetus is female. What a travesty! It is difficult to understand how entire cultures could be so spiritually blind.

In the New Testament there is ample evidence of Jesus’ love, respect and concern for women. He dismissed two Old Testament laws that persecuted women. One of these laws allowed a husband to divorce his wife on a virtual whim, but Jesus said, “What God has joined together, let not man put asunder”. The other law stated that an adulterous woman was to be stoned, but Jesus dispersed those who would condemn her with the

words, “Let he who is without sin cast the first stone”. He defended the woman who was criticized by his disciples for anointing his head with precious ointment, saying it was for his burial, and that she would always be remembered for this act. There are several other accounts of Jesus having compassion on and healing woman or their loved ones, and proclaiming that their sins are forgiven.

The more men are able to recognize the innate goodness and beauty of women, the more they will be expressing their own true nature. Recognition by men of the divinity of women is totally incompatible with treating women as second-class citizens or simply as sex objects to satisfy a physical desire. Jesus said that even looking at a woman with lust was committing adultery in the heart

Men will find that the pleasure that comes with loving their soul-mate is tremendously enhanced if they truly seek to give, rather than to take. This will impart a spiritual dimension that is sadly lacking in many relationships. Women are to be appreciated for what they are, rather than for what they can do. They are not meant primarily to satisfy a physical desire of men, but rather to fulfill a spiritual desire - the ultimate desire in all men - which is to behold the “beatific vision”, the indescribably beautiful image of God. Unfortunately, the plethora of so-called “adult” web sites that cater to men with perverse and degrading sexual attitudes is a sad testament to how far we have yet to progress.

Previously, I indicated that, like many men, I am fascinated with the female breast. This fascination certainly has sexual overtones, at least at my current stage of spiritual development, but I do not consider it to be sinful in the sense that I should feel guilty about it. In *Cure By Crying*, Thomas Stone argues that all of our fantasies stem from childhood trauma. Perhaps my breast fetish stems partly from my not having been breast-fed as an infant. There was no La Leche League around in those days to encourage mothers to suckle their babies, and the psychological benefits of this activity for both mother and child were not nearly as well recognized as they are today.

The book of the prophet Isaiah contains several references to breast feeding in the context of God’s love. “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast, and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!” (Isaiah 49:15). “You will drink the milk of nations, and be nursed at royal breasts. Then you will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob” (Isaiah 60:16). “For you will nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts; you will drink deeply and delight in her overflowing abundance. For this is what the Lord says: I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream; you will nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 66:11-13).

In truth, I have desired to suckle at the breast of God - to be loved and to love.

When I contemplate the great number of women in this world, each of whom is made in God's image, I am overwhelmed by the sheer amount of beauty that they represent.

With their innate compassion and their non-competitive nature, capable women should be encouraged to become leaders, rather than simply remain followers of men. And indeed there are more and more examples of female heads of governments and corporations. The world will become a better and better place for it.

The feminist movement (which I clearly support) is a backlash against the denigration of women that has been practiced by our patriarchal culture. Much of the Church's current attitudes toward women can be traced back to the Book of Genesis. The Genesis account of the serpent's temptation of Eve and the subsequent fall of humankind attempts to explain the existence of evil. Early orthodox Christians regarded Genesis as history with a moral, as do fundamentalists today. As Riane Eisler explains in *The Chalice and the Blade*, through this story, the male authors of the Bible placed the responsibility for evil upon women, in order to promote the domination of the masculine over the feminine. Stephen Hoeller, in an article published in *Quest* (September, 1997), quotes the following statement from the orthodox philosopher Tertullian, a sworn enemy of the Gnostic Christians, whom he considered heretics. To the female members of the orthodox Christian community, Tertullian wrote:

“...you are the devil's gateway...you are she who persuaded him whom the devil did not dare attack...Do you not know that you are each an Eve? The sentence of God on your sex lives on in this age; the guilt, necessarily, lives on too.”

However, as explained in this same article, the discoveries at Nag Hammadi show that early Gnostic Christians regarded Genesis as myth with a meaning. To them, Adam and Eve were not actual historical figures but representatives of two psychic principles within every human being. Adam represented soul or ego (the lower self), while Eve stood for spirit (the power of God). Some Gnostic accounts identify Eve as the daughter of the Goddess (Sophia), and rather than being formed from Adam's rib, she is sent to imbue him with spiritual life. It is her power that brings his Self to life. By these interpretations, Eve is Adam's superior, rather than his inferior. Indeed, most Gnostic Christians held that man was indebted to woman for bringing him to life and to consciousness. The Gnostic interpretation of the serpent and the apple was also very different from the orthodox belief. Rather than representing evil, the serpent represented wisdom. Rather than leading to damnation, eating of the fruit represented the acquiring of saving knowledge (“gnosis”) of one's true identity. This was opposed by the jealous and masculine God Jehovah, who wanted to maintain his own superior

position (much like our own wounded ego), but who was a false representation of the true God (the Spiritual Ground, or God/dess) to whom Jesus points the way.

In *Adam, Eve and the Serpent*, Elaine Pagels describes how the orthodox interpretation eventually won out. The reasons were largely social and political. The patriarchy was too threatened by Gnostic teachings, and Gnostic Christians were declared heretics. Most Gnostic writings were destroyed. Had it not been for the remarkable find in the Egyptian Desert in 1945, we may never have accessed the treasure trove of Gnostic Christian teachings that shed new light on the origins of Christianity and gave new meaning to the man Jesus.

In *The Myth of the Goddess*, Anne Baring and Jules Cashford point out the hidden images of the Goddess in the Old Testament. When the ancient Hebrews invaded Canaan, they adopted the Canaanite goddess. She became established in the lives of the Hebrew people up to the time of the Babylonian exile. Although she then vanishes, banished by the efforts of the Jewish patriarchy, the Goddess image reappears 1,500 years later as the Shekhinah of medieval Cabalism (Jewish Gnosticism). Old Testament vestiges of the ancient Goddess worship include the many references to the cherubim. Further, as pointed out by Caitlin Matthews in *Sophia, Goddess of Wisdom*, Biblical references to “wisdom” may be replaced by the Goddess Sophia.

Our Christian culture has suffered from the absence of the divine feminine. Roman Catholics may argue that Mary, the “Mother of God”, fills this role, but Mary herself is “created” and is not considered equal to God.

If Christians will open themselves to the reality of the divine feminine, Christian spirituality will be tremendously enriched. Some of the more liberal Protestant denominations have begun employing feminine references in the liturgy. This is a step in the right direction. Recognition and celebration of the divine feminine will help to heal the schism between Christianity and Goddess/new age religions that exists in large part due to the historical patriarchy promoted by the Christian Church.

Women should be encouraged to assume positions of responsibility within the Church. Great strides have been made in this direction in recent years. Several years ago, the Church of England, after much deliberation, voted to allow the ordination of women as priests. There continues to be opposition to women serving as clergy in many circles within the Church, and C.S. Lewis himself may have turned over in his grave, but I feel very strongly that the contribution of women in the Ministry is extremely important and will increase our understanding of God.

I dreamed that I met a middle-aged woman, whom I did not know, but who was obviously sad. She looked at me and said plaintively, "I'm hungry". Upon awakening, it occurred to me that what this woman and many others hunger for is spiritual truth, the knowledge of who they really are. Jesus instructed Peter, "Feed my sheep". Those who know the truth have a responsibility to share it.

We are all, male and female, fellow pilgrims on the road. God is at work in each of our souls, revealing to us, as we are ready to receive the knowledge, that we are not beasts after all, but rather we are beauty itself, images of the Divine. Thus we were born, and thus we will always be.

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While waiting near a news-stand at the airport to board my return flight, my eye happened to catch a popular magazine cover with a picture of a woman I had never seen before. She was not really your typical "cover girl", for she wore neither obvious makeup nor jewelry - she was, I suppose, simply herself. But the effect that this photo had on me was extraordinary. The woman struck me as being exquisitely beautiful, a veritable Venus. Never before had I viewed such beauty. As I experienced her beauty, a very strong, very pleasurable sensation arose from within the base of my spine. I recognized the sensation as being similar to what I had experienced several years earlier - it was the so-called "serpent fire" described in kundalini yoga. It was not an overtly lustful feeling, for I did not want to possess or control this woman to satisfy my own desire. Rather, it was as if I were seeing the face of a Goddess, and I wanted to be near her to appreciate her and to tell her how incredibly beautiful she was.

After arriving back home, I visited my parents to tell them of my "visions". Upon hearing of my encounter with my dead sister, my mother cried tears of joy, because this reinforced her Christian hope that her daughter was well and was with God in heaven.

Later, I dreamed that two young women had been abducted, and an unknown accomplice and I set out to rescue them. I was intercepted by a ghostly being who attempted to frighten me away. I mustered up the courage to grab this being in a masculine fashion and forced it to lead me to the captive women. I was led to a church, the name of which I don't recall but didn't care for. After changing the name of the church to "God is Love Church", I entered. Within there were unethical (though non-specific) activities going on, but I proceeded to search for the women. I found them

taking part in these activities – they had been brainwashed. Turning to the first of the two women, I said words that I knew would heal, simply, “You are Love”. When the second woman grabbed me from behind by the neck, I turned and made the same pronouncement to her. Then I awoke.

The next morning, my wife asked me to tell her about my “beautiful dream”. She had heard me say, “You are Love”, and it had sent a shiver of delight up her spine.

When I thought about the dream, I started to cry. I cried because I had forgotten that I, too, am Love. And this is how we remember who we are – by reminding others.

Chapter 17 – Feminine and Masculine Within

Because we have all been created in God's image, we are all, spiritually speaking, both feminine (the passive “yin” of eastern philosophy) and masculine (the active “yang”). Within the mind of every biological male there is an inherited archetypal feminine aspect - what C. G. Jung (about whom more will be said later) called the “anima”. Qualities associated with the anima are those typically considered feminine (and also generally ascribed to the right hemisphere of the brain), including: gentleness, creativity, intuition, sentimentality, tenderness, receptivity, fertility, flexibility, and spontaneity. Similarly, within every female there is an archetypal masculine component, the “animus”, characterized by: action, penetration, fertilization, aggression, rationality, hardness, toughness, planning, thinking (qualities generally associated with the left side of the brain).

In *The Ego and the Dynamic Ground*, Michael Washburn explains that the innate archetypal animus and anima are a part of the “archetypal instinctual unconscious”. However, as a result of cultural conditioning, men and women repress much of those parts of themselves that they may have attempted to express as children but that family and society deem unmasculine and unfeminine, respectively. Michael Washburn states that these become a part of the repressed shadow of their “personal submerged unconscious”. As adults, we often scorn those who express the attributes we have suppressed in ourselves, and may, unconsciously at least, fear the opposite sex. In order to be fully human and fully alive, however, it is important for us to discover, accept and integrate into our consciousness the opposite side of ourselves.

Those who have most deeply repressed their other half are those who are constantly searching for the projection of that which they have repressed. They search desperately for the perfect partner, often falling head over heels for someone who represents the sum of their repressions. But as Jung pointed out, in marrying this person, they are in fact marrying their greatest weakness.

In *Lying with the Heavenly Woman*, Robert Johnson elucidates the dangers men face if they do not recognize and deal with the influences of the various manifestations of the feminine within their own psyches. These include contaminations that can result in pathological attachment to one's mother or incestuous relationships with one's daughter.

For a boy child, his mother is the first concrete representation of his anima. Similarly, for a girl, her father is the first representation of her animus. The manner in which the child comes to know the parent of the opposite sex is therefore very important. If the

child's opposite-sex parent fulfils, more-or-less, the applicable Mother or Father archetype (see Chapter 19), and the child is loved and respected for being his/her true self (a very tall order indeed), the child will admire and cherish the qualities of the opposite sex and will not inhibit their natural expression in his/her own being. The child will be complete and will not embark on a desperate search for someone else to make him/her whole.

I have described how my own mother had repressed her natural femininity, and thus she did not represent for me a role model for my own latent femininity. Therefore, apparently from a very young age, I began to search for what I lacked outside of myself. Yet during this search, which continued well after I was married, I was extremely insecure - frightened that I would be rejected by that to which I had become so deeply and pathologically attached.

All of this is tied into the notion of the well-known Oedipus Complex elucidated by Freud. The Oedipus Complex is understood by classical psychoanalysis to arise from an instinctual sexual attraction on the part of the son toward the mother. In the normal situation, the son immediately encounters a powerful obstacle - the father. Feelings of aggression, guilt and an unconscious fear of being castrated develop. The son begins to compete with his father. If the situation is to resolve itself as it should, the son will seek to imitate the father's virility, to equal it, and eventually to surpass it. At the same time, he will transform his attraction toward his mother into an increasingly-virile protection, until adulthood.

Michael Washburn (*The Ego and the Dynamic Ground*) has a somewhat different interpretation of the Oedipus Complex. He posits that the oedipal conflict, though certainly relational, is not sexual at all. Regardless of the sex of the child, the boy or girl desires to assume the father's role of "independent intimate" of the mother. However, the child fears the wrath of the father and realizes that s/he cannot compete with the father for the right of intimacy with the mother. In capitulating, the child completes the act of separating from the Great Mother (the primary caregiver as representative of the Ground). Michael Washburn calls this original separation from the Ground "primal repression". The spiritual journey we are all on is about undoing the negative effects of primal repression and reclaiming the intimate relationship with the Ground (God), that we once enjoyed as infants.

As an adolescent, I was not aware of any feelings of sexual attraction toward my mother. She had repressed her own femininity, and was, to me, certainly very different from the seductive pictures in *Playboy*. Neither am I aware of having felt protective toward my mother. If I had been unconsciously aware that any feelings of sexual attraction were about to surface, it is likely that I would have repressed them because I most certainly

would have been very ashamed of them. As I have described, my inner child had been smothered by shame, and my false self was shame-based, particularly concerning sexual matters. However, I am uncertain of the degree to which I would have regarded my father as an obstacle in this particular situation, because there was no shared intimacy between my parents during this period.

According to Freudian theory, a woman who has denied her natural femininity may come to regret being anatomically female. She may come to see herself as more of a castrated male, with the attendant feelings of inferiority. In an effort to make up for her lack of a penis, she may attempt to control the males in her life. She may become aggressive and domineering (overtly or, as in the case of my mother, through psychological manipulation). Males who are controlled in this manner, be they husbands or sons, are psychologically castrated.

A dream informed me that the actions of one's siblings could also contribute to psychological castration. I have indicated that my older brother was very domineering, and he would often ridicule my "babyish" attitudes and even my body. In my dream, I was being shot at (formerly a common dream scenario but one that I had not experienced in several years). Initially, I was frightened, but I managed to muster up the courage to confront my adversary. Upon discovering, with considerable consternation, that my foe was my own brother, I charged at him as he repeatedly shot at me. The bullets had no effect, and I picked my brother up above my head and threw him to the ground. But I was immediately concerned that I may have injured him, and was relieved to discover that he was not hurt. On my brother's part, he simply acknowledged that he could no longer harm me, and there were no hard feelings on either side.

It took the love and understanding of a very special woman, my wife, to help me overcome my inhibitions and enable me to express my full being. This is true for both my masculine and feminine aspects. My wife's completely non-judgmental appreciation of my masculinity gave me self-confidence and freedom of expression. At the same time, in coming to fully appreciate and love my wife's femininity, I gradually lost my unconscious fear of the feminine, and began to acknowledge and express this side of my own being.

This new understanding prompts me to re-think the meaning of some other past events. During my initial kundalini experience many years ago, I felt the force of love coursing through my being, and I was ecstatic. At the time, I interpreted it as an out-pouring of my love for God. But when divine love is being experienced, the distinction between love of God and love for God is not at all clear. For is it not at least as likely that I was in fact on the receiving end - that I was the receptacle into which God was pouring his/her love, constantly and freely offered to all of us? At the time, I felt like my soul had been

reclaimed - like a child reborn - and I was finally able to love myself. During this experience, it may have been that the feminine side of my psyche, long suppressed, had opened to allow the love of the transcendent God to enter.

In fact, Francis Huxley, in *The Way of the Sacred*, describes kundalini as a “female principle”. He gives the following traditional account of the experience:

“When the snake is awakened from its cave in the place where the genitals are attached to the spine, it uncoils and climbs up the backbone, passing through the several centers of energy (the ‘chakras’) experienced in the belly, the chest, the throat and the eyes. It finally breaks through the roof of the skull and flowers as the thousand-petaled lotus of radiant enlightenment. This shows clearly how the fall into generation is reversed. The sexual power is repolarized and made to animate the tree of the backbone. This then serves as fuel for the inner light, termed the ‘Jewel in the Lotus’.”

More recently, during those times that I “saw” and “felt” the divinity of women, the sensation was so similar to this initial experience. It was a tremendously powerful attraction. Occasionally, I would feel this same sensation deep within me, and I recognized that it was something that I dearly wanted to be inside of me - a part of me. During these times, I would feel as if I were truly loving myself. I now believe that it is the presence of the feminine divinity within my own being that I was experiencing and loving.

But, in my own experience, it is not at all easy to repolarize the creative sexual power - to change the focus of the sexual force from a wounded ego-driven desire for physical love to a spirit-driven power of unconditional love (for self as well as others) and healing (of self and others). However, as described by Stuart Sovatsky in *Eros, Consciousness and Kundalini*, through a commitment to the practice of “tantric sublimation”, this repolarization is possible.

During our journey back to the Garden of Eden, we at some point have to deal with very powerful sexual urges. These may include incestuous desires, particularly if we are not aware that our true desire is for union with God. These can be especially alluring for two reasons: the excitement that the wounded ego associates with breaking a taboo, and the special intimacy that is shared by family members. It is very important not to project these desires outward in a manner that could cause injury to impressionable loved ones. Divine grace may well intervene to prevent us from causing harm in this way.

Our sexual attitudes and beliefs about “feeling good” are very much entangled in our condemnatory egos. In our own minds, we have removed the spiritual significance from

the powerful feelings of the sexual act. In fact, for many of us, the sexual act is associated with guilt and shame, and serves to diminish rather than increase our ability to love unconditionally. Thus, even for those who have spontaneously experienced kundalini, the struggle to associate orgasmic-like feelings with spirituality and unconditional love may continue for some time. However, the kundalini force is very definitely both highly orgasmic and highly spiritual. It is also overwhelmingly powerful, and will not be suppressed.

Shortly after our youngest child was born, I had a vasectomy. My wife and I both felt strongly that divine will had been fulfilled in the birth of all four of our children - that they were clearly “meant to be” - but we also felt that we were not to have any more children. A vasectomy was, we believed, a way to ensure this, while allowing us to continue to fully enjoy the communion of a physical relationship.

A while ago, I dreamed for the first time that I was in a different body. I was a woman, an incredibly beautiful woman. In this dream, I was firmly and capably putting off the advances of a clearly egotistical male stranger. There were no sexual feelings for this man. I was, however, aware of feeling very good about my own exquisite femininity.

Thanks be to God for revealing to me his/her feminine side. Thanks be to God for making me aware of the divine femininity of women, and for awakening in me the desire for, and then allowing me to experience, this femininity in myself. It is in this way that I am learning to love my whole being, and I am overcoming the neurotic requirement that I be loved by everyone else.

The satisfaction of our greatest needs is never found outside of ourselves. What we seek is inside us. We must become like a little child, who has not rejected his/her “other half”, to discover the kingdom of heaven within. This is the will of God.

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The night following my return from my business trip, I lay awake pondering the apparent relationship between my initial kundalini experience of my love for God and my similar experience on viewing the photo of the woman on the magazine cover. To me, this was confirmation of my growing conviction that the feminine aspect of God was extremely important. Suddenly, I began to re-experience the sensation at the base of my spine, but this time there was no direct external stimulus. I simply felt very good about myself and inside myself - it was a highly pleasurable feeling that I can only describe as

spiritual self-love. For some time, the sensation played gently at the base of my spine, and later seemed to move directly into my head - I was in a state of pure bliss (what I imagine the Hindu/Buddhist state of “nirvana” might feel like).

The next day I kept a promise to take the three older children downhill skiing. It had been more than twenty years since I had last gone downhill skiing, and I had been stalling for fear that I had forgotten how and would make a fool of myself on the slopes. The kundalini fire continued to play at the base of my spine, waxing and waning according to a schedule I did not set. On the slopes, I was fearless, and even managed to impress my harshest critic - myself. My inexperience showed, however, when twice I “screwed up” trying to get seated on the chairlift. But again, instead of being embarrassed, I apologized to the operator (for I was holding up other skiers) and found the incidents genuinely funny. What a relief it was to be able to laugh at my actions and not feel that they lessened me in any meaningful way.

That night, I again lay awake and tried to put these new pieces of the puzzle together with the old. What was the purpose of my life? Why had I experienced such pain, and why now was I experiencing such intense relief and pleasure? Was I supposed to help others obtain release from the grip of the wounded ego and find their inner child? If so, how would I do this? I went inside my mind looking for the answer, and rather quickly began to feel that I was losing my way. Frightened, I called my sister (the social worker). The advice she gave me was to trust God and “go with the flow”, and not try to find the answers on my own. I thanked her, and told her that she was my “guru”, which she politely denied.

So I went with the flow. I let my thoughts go, rather than trying to direct them. And off they went, on a strange and weird journey. Before morning, they had led me to the conclusion that I was a “new Adam”, and that my sister would be a “new Eve”, and that together we would help to usher in a new era of peace on earth. This seemed to make sense to me at the time. It was very important to me that I share my revelation with my sister in person as soon as possible, so that this relationship could be consummated.

When morning finally arrived (a Saturday), I arose early, left my family a hastily-scrawled message as to my destination, and excitedly drove the several hundred kilometres to my sister's house. When I arrived, she was alone (as I had somehow anticipated), her husband having left on an errand and her daughters being away for the weekend (her son was travelling in Europe). I greeted her warmly, and proceeded to proclaim my new-found knowledge. However, when my sister did not share my enthusiasm but rather expressed skepticism, a part of me, at least, was genuinely surprised. I tried to persuade her of the validity of my “revelation”, but to no avail.

I sat staring into my sister's eyes for a while, feeling as if things were at an impasse and not knowing what to do next, when suddenly I was overcome with compassion for her, and I began to cry. "You're going to suffer", I told her, but as I said it I knew that her suffering would have a purpose, although I didn't have any idea as to what form it would take.

During the drive home, I experienced very strong mixed emotions. They were of disappointment, shame and relief. But my overall depressed frame of mind on the return journey was in stark contrast with the false high that I had been on during the drive out.

I stopped to buy my wife flowers. She was very relieved to see me. Then I telephoned my sister to apologize. She, too, was relieved that I had arrived back safely. There was no need for an apology, she said. But it was important, she stressed, that I be there for my family.

Although I felt embarrassed and ashamed about what I had done, I now realize that it was essential. I believe that it was God's will, part of the divine plan and a necessary step in my spiritual pilgrimage. For, as I will shortly describe, it lowered my psychological resistance and enabled deeply repressed feelings and emotions to surface. Furthermore, in light of the pain my sister and her family were soon to experience, there seems to have been a dual purpose for my visit.

Chapter 18 – Healing Through Feeling

I think we all have repressed memories of abuse we endured as children. However, most children are raised in “good enough” homes by “good enough” parents and are able to enjoy their lives and function adequately in society. But for those of us who grew up in alcoholic and particularly abusive environments, the repressed pile of pain was enough to make us seriously ill.

As exposed by Alice Miller in her many books, including *Banished Knowledge*, *The Untouched Key* and *Breaking Down the Wall of Silence*, much of this abuse is condoned or even encouraged by authority figures and institutions. The consequences can be devastating, both for the abused child and for society. Perhaps the most dramatic illustration of the negative effects of childhood abuse on society is Adolph Hitler, whose merciless daily beatings at the hands of his father are described in Alice Miller’s book *For Your Own Good*. Societal acceptance of the unquestioned authority of the father was also responsible for the German nation blindly following Hitler.

Had Hitler been able to realize that he had not in any way deserved what his father did to him, and had he been able to recall and release the oceans of grief that had crushed his young spirit, he would never have felt compelled to direct this grief outward in a torrent of rage against the Jewish people. As ruler of his inner realms, and with a resurrected inner child, he would never have felt the need to rule the world.

Slobodan Milosevic, the former president of the Serbian/Montenegrin federation, is a more recent example of the consequences of unhealed childhood trauma. Mr. Milosevic was an indicted war criminal whose attempts at ethnic cleansing caused much suffering and death among Muslims in the former Yugoslavia. It is a fact that both of Milosevic’s parents committed suicide. A child raised by parents who had no love for themselves could not have received any love from them. This man carried a heavy burden of repressed grief. He needed to feel the pain of his inner child, and know that he was innocent. Only after having compassion for his own suffering would he have been able to have compassion on his victims. Unfortunately, this did not transpire, and he died under rather suspicious circumstances in 2006, before his war crimes trial could be concluded.

Alice Miller and others are working tirelessly to bring the terrible plight of the abused child to light, but there are powerful forces of resistance. Many in a position to effect some good in this regard resist doing so because it would require that they face their own pain. Alice Miller has recounted instances in which her work was refused publication for this very reason.

As described by Dr. Charles Whitfield in *Memory and Abuse*, many who deny abuse claim that the abused are actually suffering from “false memory syndrome”. However, Dr. Whitfield clearly shows that the accusation of false memories is seldom justified.

The Christian Church itself, which should be a haven for the child, unintentionally fosters child abuse. Religious abuse is particularly destructive, because it claims a special authority and interferes with the child’s proper relationship with the Divine. In *The Child’s Song*, Donald Capps describes how biblical injunctions have been employed to legitimize the physical abuse of children. He exposes theological ideas, taught by well-intentioned adults, which are inherently abusive because they create fear, causing a child to feel alone or of little worth. Further, he shows how religion has been used to legitimize adult detachment from the traumas of childhood, thus ensuring that the vicious cycle is perpetuated.

When once asked what was the question most central to one’s wellbeing, Einstein replied, “Is the universe a friendly place?” Through abuse in childhood, whether emotional, physical, sexual or religious, we became ill precisely because we came to believe that it is not friendly to whom we really are. We internalized parental shame, wrongly believing (at least unconsciously) that we are defective and unacceptable. In the face of this threat to our being, we developed a false self that at least allowed us to function in the world. Many of us have become over-achievers and perfectionists. But underneath it all lays a pervading sadness. There is a part of us that knows the truth, and we won’t get well until we bring it to consciousness, feel our grief, and understand that we are safe and loved just as we really are.

In *Toxic Parents*, Susan Forward exposes the widespread harmful effects of bad parenting in our culture and helps us heal from the damage done to us by our parents. She guides us in overcoming the pain of parental manipulation, including power trips, guilt trips, and other murderers of childhood innocence.

In *A Woman’s Guide to Making Therapy Work*, Joan Shapiro and Margaret Grant offer sound advice on how to face the pain of remembering child abuse. This they refer to as good pain, in that it leads to growth and healing, as opposed to bad pain, which is self-accusatory and leads nowhere. While directed especially to women, the book is, I think, nearly equally helpful to men.

Daniel Sonkin’s *Wounded Boys – Heroic Men* is a resource especially for men who were hurt as children. By courageously exploring our feelings, attitudes and behaviors, Daniel Sonkin shows how we can break the vicious cycle of violence, make peace with the abuser, and find peace within.

But until we do, we are crippled by our false selves. As our early fears threatened to arise from our unconscious, we turned to addictions to keep them at bay. Fears of being abandoned resulted in co-dependent relationship addictions (see Melody Beattie, *Codependent No More & Beyond Codependency*) and narcissistic/borderline personality conditions; while fears of emptiness led to alcohol and drug addiction, fears of powerlessness led to rage, and fears of worthlessness led to compulsive sexuality (see George Weinberg, *Invisible Masters: Compulsions and the Fears that Drive Them*).

In *I Don't Want to Talk About It*, Terence Real has demonstrated how abused women are likely to become overtly depressed, whereas men are likely to be covertly depressed. Covertly depressed men (whose numbers are at epidemic levels) attempt to escape from expressing the pain of depression through grandiosity or addictions (to chemicals, sex or work). As espoused by Tav Sparks in *The Wide Open Door*, twelve-step programs such as AA that encourage one to let go of one's wounded ego and replace pathological doubt and fear with trust in a higher power, can help the afflicted remember that s/he is safe, accepted and loved unconditionally.

The toll exacted by depression is staggering. It exists as a serious disease on its own, and it also often accompanies other physical and mental illnesses. In the prologue to the book, *Sacred Sorrows*, Dr. John Nelson and Andrea Nelson state that depression is known to affect more than one hundred million people worldwide. There are untold others who, though not clinically depressed, go through life with a reduced capacity for joy. More people seek relief from this disabling condition each year than any other illness, including the common cold. In 1990, the economic cost of depression exceeded \$43 billion in the United States alone, including medical treatment, lost productivity, and depression-related suicide.

The pain goes deep. The most healing thing we can do to help ourselves, and therefore society, is allow ourselves to remember the abuse and grieve for our inner child. The release of our trapped emotions relieves depression, and is therefore highly therapeutic. In *Emergence of the Divine Child*, Rick Philips describes how this emotional release process works to free us from self-judgment. In fact, he defines the ego as "the voice of the emotional body attachments". It was the unacknowledged wrongs done to us as children that made us turn against ourselves in self-rejection and self-condemnation. We had no other choice – we depended entirely on our parents and viewed them as omnipotent, and the possibility that their abuse of us was not justified could never enter our minds. Addictions developed to shield us from facing the pain of this truth, but they themselves cause pain that will increase until we are forced to surrender and face the truth of our emptiness and grief. It is this truth that makes us free.

Alcoholism is generally recognized as the most destructive addiction of western society. But addictions can take many forms. Most of us are addicted and don't even realize it. We are addicted to drugs, love, pornography, sex, our partner, religion, work, perfectionism, various "spiritual" states or even our own analytical ego – in short, anything that we are immersing ourselves in to avoid confronting our own buried childhood pain. In *The Thirst for Wholeness*, Christina Grof, herself a recovering alcoholic, gives another meaning behind addiction. She quotes C. G. Jung, who wrote of one of his patients, "His craving for alcohol was the equivalent on a level of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in medieval language: the union with God". Thus, in addition to hiding our pain, addictions represent a misdirected expression of our craving for spiritual wholeness – the union with the Ground, the return to Eden.

This explains why, above all else, recovery from addiction requires surrender. Buddhism recognizes surrender as the beginning of the pathway out of attachment. We got separated from our true Selves and became attached and addicted to falsehood when we began to believe that we were not worthy of union with God. We began marching to the dictates of our own screwed-up egos. Although I don't think I ever became an alcoholic (I was close), I was addicted to my own analytical mind, and I was a perfectionist. In *Unlocking the Secrets of Your Childhood Memories*, Dr. Kevin Leman and Randy Carlson describe perfectionism as "slow suicide". When the pain of my panic became unbearable to the point where suicide looked like the only way to end it, I finally surrendered. The immediate and miraculous disappearance of my pain, though temporary, marked the beginning of my return to the Garden of Eden.

Genetic links have been found for many mental illnesses including psychoses (especially schizophrenia) and addictions (notably alcoholism). Canadian researchers have recently announced the discovery of a genetic abnormality associated with panic disorder. I have described my own battle to overcome panic disorder and schizophrenic-like symptoms. My sister lost her battle with agoraphobia, schizophrenia and alcoholism. My father's sister suffered from mental illness for many years. My father and my mother's brothers were alcoholics. But this does not mean that genetics caused my illness. Although susceptibility to mental illness may indeed be genetic, resulting in a sensitive psyche (or "genetic predisposition"), it is my belief that the illness will not develop unless there is psychological trauma in childhood. I am by no means alone in this contention. In their ground-breaking book *Delayed Posttraumatic Stress Disorders from Infancy*, Drs. Clancy McKenzie and Lance Wright show how traumatic events in the first two years of life correlate with the later development of schizophrenia, while the same traumatic events in the next year of life correlate with the development of major depression. Unfortunately, children harmed in this way are also more likely to become abusers themselves. The inherited pattern won't be stopped until the sufferer undergoes the

necessary therapy, and is able to confront painful memories, release trapped emotions, and grieve.

In *Healing the Split*, Dr. John Nelson distinguishes between “malignant” and “adaptive” psychoses. Malignant psychoses are those that are considered incurable and for which medication is required, possibly for a lifetime. Schizophrenics typically report hearing voices, which may be threatening or friendly, perceived as coming from outside themselves. However, virtually all also report that there is a lag between an expectation of hearing voices and the voices themselves, i.e., the voices do not intrude of their own volition. Bringing this realization to the schizophrenic can help the sufferer come to understand that a split-off (shadow) part of his/her own personality is the source of the voices. In only approximately 20% of schizophrenia sufferers does there appear to be a genetic connection (manifested by enlarged brain ventricles), though this, too, may be a result of hidden underlying trauma.

Adaptive psychoses, on the other hand, may be associated with crises of identity that mark important milestones in the spiritual journey. Christina and Stanislav Grof have called these temporary psychotic states “spiritual emergencies”. *The Stormy Search for the Self* describes Christina Grof’s own spiritual emergency.

Though frightening and painful, these psychotic regressions have a purpose in that they pave the way for spiritual growth. In *Trials of the Visionary Mind*, John Perry states that if these profound psychic disturbances, involving schizophrenic-like hallucinations, are received in the spirit of empathy and understanding, they will reveal a self-organizing, self-healing process. Michael Washburn (*The Ego and the Dynamic Ground*) has called this process “regression in the service of transcendence” (RIST). Medication is generally contra-indicated in these cases, other than perhaps on a short-term basis (although it should not be withheld if the sufferer is in obvious distress and requests it). In the initial stages of the illness, it may be difficult even for the experienced practitioner to distinguish between these conditions, and many psychiatrists are not yet aware that psychosis can have an ultimately beneficial purpose. Therefore, opportunities for spiritual growth often go unrecognized and the full benefits of the crisis are not realized. However, it is important to understand that these mistakes are not “fatal errors”. Spiritual growth may be temporarily thwarted, but “the Spirit knows the way”.

As indicated, both Michael Washburn and Dr. John Nelson (*Healing the Split*) express the opinion that not all psychotic regressions are in the service of transcendence. They claim that the only way to distinguish RIST (adaptive psychosis) from classical psychosis is the end result. If the regression proves to be progressive (“malignant”), then it wasn’t RIST. I believe, however, that it is possible that all psychotic regression (and indeed all

mental illness) is in the service of Spirit, and is therefore potentially transcendent. Who is to say what sort of interaction with Spirit is occurring in the deepest levels of the mind during even the most severe and prolonged psychosis? We do not always know the reasons behind things. Someone's terrible ordeal may in some way be contributing to the greater good. Therefore, I believe we should be open to the possibility that all mental illness is potentially liberating in the grand and holy scheme of things. Grace works in profound and mysterious ways, and the situation should never be viewed as without purpose.

In my opinion, the process of getting well is essentially the same regardless of what label our illness has been given. In *Cure by Crying*, Thomas Stone suggests that the only difference between a schizophrenic and a neurotic is that the schizophrenic has a bigger pile of pain. The findings reported by Drs. Clancy and McKenzie (*Delayed Posttraumatic Stress Disorders from Infancy*) indicate that the developmental stage at which the trauma occurred is also significant. Traumatic events within the first two years of life are associated with schizophrenia, whereas the identical events in the third year of life are associated with major depression. In general, however, the more unprocessed pain within the psyche, the more difficult it is for the sufferer to focus attention and cooperate with therapy. Anti-psychotic medication may be necessary, at least for a time, but we should never give up hope. Drugs block access to the pain. The repressed pain and grief from early childhood must be felt and released for healing to occur.

The repression of memories and feelings and the denial of painful truths during our childhood served a purpose at the time. Repression and denial are defense mechanisms that protect us from the awareness of truths or experiences that could have threatened our very survival. As explained by Jean Jenson in *Reclaiming Your Life*, repression causes any reality or event that is too painful to deal with to be blocked from conscious awareness, at least in part, in order to allow the child to continue life as if it were not true, did not happen, or was not important. Then, as the child matures, denial takes over to continue the deception. Unfortunately, western society itself denies the reality of widespread child abuse because it represents a threat to each individual's denial of his/her own repressed pain. In general, it is only when the pain of the mental illness caused by the repression and denial outweighs the urge to maintain the repression that we are ready to face the truth.

It may be difficult for us to understand just how threatening our childhood abuse was to our very survival. Our parents were the most important people in our lives. They must have loved us, and our welfare must have been their top priority. What they said and did must be true and in our best interests. If our parents neglected us, starved us, beat us,

sexually abused us, called us names, ridiculed us, or denied our value in any way, we must have deserved it. If we were to conclude that we were innocent, then we would also have to conclude that our parents were wrong. We would have to conclude that we were not loved for being who we are, and that we were not safe in the universe. When we were little children, we couldn't consciously do this and survive, and so the escape had to be unconscious repression and denial. But the events did happen – the memories are there, and we unconsciously turned them against ourselves and accused ourselves. The guilty self is the “false self” – the self that we constructed in the hope that our parents would love us. But the larger the false self, the more distanced we become from whom we really are. We become estranged from God and the Garden of Eden.

In *Reclaiming Your Life*, Jean Jenson discusses the emotional consequences of repression and denial of childhood hurts in later life. Repression and denial are very much a part of the problem of severe mental illness. But even in the majority of situations, where the parents were “good enough” and the abuse was not severe enough to lead to clinical depression or psychosis, the consequences of repression and denial include under-reaction due to emotional shutdown, and over-reaction due to unconscious application of repressed childhood emotions to adult situations. Both of these types of reactions interfere with our relationships with others and hinder our enjoyment of life. Before we will be motivated to face our pasts, however, we must accept that the proverbial “happy childhood” is simply a myth without the underlying truth of the classic myth.

The painful truth would have been too much to handle in our childhood. But we are adults now, and we can handle it – we have support from our therapists and families. Together, we can face our fear of non-being, and discover the joy of true Being that lies behind it. Until we accept and be who we really are, we won't enjoy life as we were meant to. The only way back is through the pain.

There are other benefits of acknowledging the wrong done to us and grieving that may well surprise us. As the emotional channels are opened, we may find ourselves experiencing pleasurable and perhaps astonishing side-effects. These are gifts of the Divine, manifestations of the love of God that is always freely offered but whose reception we had blocked for most of our lives. They reinforce our growing conviction that we ourselves are divine.

Some professionals, including prominent transpersonal theorist Ken Wilber (*The Essential Ken Wilber*), believe that infants exist in a “fused state” in which they do not have any accurate perception of interpersonal realities and cannot differentiate themselves from their environment. However, as John Firman and Ann Gila argue in *The Primal Wound*, this outdated theory may encourage the mistreatment of infants.

Research indicates that infants from the beginning are in touch with reality, and interpersonal relationships from the time of birth are critical in determining later psychological development. As shown in the book *Delayed Posttraumatic Stress Disorder from Infancy*, separation trauma in the first two or three years of life is clearly correlated with the later development of mental illness. From birth to at least age three, the child needs the nearly constant loving presence and attention of the mother. In this regard, we are no less needy than orangutans (who have the third highest ratio of brain to body mass, after humans and dolphins). Those of us who did not get adequate nurturing from day one were abused. Whether this early abuse was intentional or not makes no practical difference, for the infant is incapable of this distinction.

Psychosynthesis theory, developed by Italian therapist Roberto Assagioli, labelled this early wounding the “primal wound”. Neglect and abuse resulting from our caregivers’ lack of empathy caused us to feel that we did not exist. The only way we could overcome this terrifying threat of non-being was to repress our early fears and memories and develop a false self, which is expressed to the world as the “survival personality” of Psychosynthesis theory. Even those who had “good enough” parents and/or who are not genetically predisposed to mental illness operate through a survival personality to some degree. The worst parts of our self-image, the parts that are too painful for even us to face, were split off and relegated to our “negative unconscious” (the Jungian shadow). In my case, this included the image of “the beast” (my negative father image internalized). But Psychosynthesis theory says that the bigger the negative sector caused by empathic failures (abuse), the more there is a need for a compensating positive sector (the positive unconscious). The real parent is idealized in equal proportion to the badness of the parent figures that have been repressed. And so my mother, a struggling human being with a great deal of repressed pain of her own, and the cause of much of my suffering, became, in my young eyes, a saint.

Psychosynthesis theory stresses the importance and power of relationship. It is through relationships with our caregivers that we have derived a sense of being that counteracts the threat of non-being. We are so fearful of non-being that we will embrace and even defend negative relationships over no relationship at all. This explains why so many abused persons, both children and adults, choose to remain with their abusers even when offered an alternative. This has also been offered as an explanation for “pacts with the devil” entered into by some who have been sorely abused. We would rather face damnation itself than confront the terror of non-being.

There is no particular or predictable order of things in the journey to wholeness, called by Psychosynthesis theory the process of “Self-realization”. As John Firman and Ann Gila describe in *The Primal Wound*, “Self-realization is not an orderly progression up

through developmental levels, but an often dizzying roller coaster ride, one moment plunging us to the depths, the next moment rocketing us to the heights, and the following moment presenting us with the mundane duties of everyday living”.

It may be difficult to remember. The early traumas are deeply buried and determination and effort are required to unearth them. Meditation has long been used as an aid to removing resistances and uncovering repressed contents of the unconscious. In *A Gradual Awakening* Buddhist meditation teacher Stephen Levine says: “When we let go of the resistance, we penetrate to the direct experience of the distraction, and its quality of distractedness, its discomfort, dissolves in the clear seeing of it”.

In *Making Sense of Suffering*, J. Konrad Stettbacher presents an alternative method to meditation - a self-help guide to a type of “primal therapy”, which uncovers early primal wounds, as first developed by Arthur Janov in *The Primal Scream*. Dr. Stettbacher describes four steps (perception, feelings, understanding and demands) to help us remember and release the trapped emotions associated with specific incidents of trauma. As do many other therapists, he recommends that sexual activity be curtailed during the period of therapy.

We should use whatever help is available to reconstruct events. Many primal therapists believe that the circumstances surrounding conception and birth are especially relevant. Is it possible we were not wanted? Was it a difficult delivery? Was everything done that should have been done to make us feel welcome and loved at birth? If our parents are living, especially our mother, perhaps they can provide useful information. However, we should be aware that our parents might be in denial. For instance, although I tried to talk with my mother about my childhood, she always insisted that I was happy. To bolster her position, she pointed out times when I enjoyed myself. She had no concept of the “survival personality” that develops at an early age and may work well in presenting a façade of happiness while hiding tremendous pain. When I confronted her about her frequent admonitions to my father to “do something about that child”, which always led to physical punishment, she denied ever having done so. In fact, she went so far as to deny that I was physically abused in any way. I am fortunate that my brother has verified my recollection of events (to me only, not to my mother), because otherwise I might be questioning my own memory. Further, I am fortunate that my father finally acknowledged the physical abuse and apologized to me shortly before his death.

As revealed in *Memory and Abuse* by Dr. Charles Whitfield, the more adamant that an abuser is that s/he is innocent, the more this individual denies having any problems in life, denies having any past trauma, and considers him/herself as “normal”. Indeed, my mother frequently remarked on how wonderful her life was, which I had great difficulty understanding considering her own child committed suicide.

How crucial is forgiveness? Self-forgiveness is vital. If we come to recognize that we have acted out our own abuse on others, for example our children, we should immediately apologize to them and forgive ourselves. We didn't know any better. Similarly, when our abusers admit the harm of their actions, it may not be difficult to forgive them. But as Alice Miller states in several of her writings, attempts to forgive before we have felt the true source of our pain can be detrimental to the healing process. And if our caregivers refuse to admit the hurt they have caused us, our forgiveness of them may come very reluctantly. However, in order for us to engage the power of unconditional love, we must release any demands upon others that certain conditions be met. We must come to recognize that our abusers acted out of their lost selves – that they did not recognize their own divinity. When we really understand that they, like us, have always done and will continue to do the best they can considering personal circumstances, we have forgiven. This is not to say that we must allow them to continue inflicting pain on others. We have a duty to protect the helpless, but we should always act out of love, not revenge.

There are other specific techniques available to support traditional depth psychology or transpersonal therapy. These include rebirthing and breathwork. Rebirthing is an aspect of regression or primal therapy that brings us back to re-experience our birth, possibly with traumatic memories of a long, difficult and often drugged passage through the birth canal, perhaps with the umbilical cord wrapped around our neck. Then we may remember being expelled into the cold and sterile delivery room where we were held head-down and slapped rudely on the bottom. We may also remember the trauma of being kept from the familiar safety of our mother's body for a prolonged period. As described by J. Konrad Stettbacher in *Making Sense of Suffering*, the recovery of these memories dissolves their power, so they no longer unconsciously affect our responses to present day situations.

Modern breathwork therapies have evolved from traditional eastern meditative techniques. They include “holotropic breathwork” developed by Christina and Stanislav Grof (see Kylea Taylor, *The Breathwork Experience*), and “circular breathing” (see Michael Sky, *Breathing*). Although I have often concentrated on my breathing to facilitate meditative states, I have never formally undertaken these therapies, but there is ample evidence of their efficacy.

From my experience, we can be our own therapist. Due to personal circumstances and the distance of my home from major centers of population, I did not spend a lot of time in formal therapy. Also, when I first got sick, transpersonal therapy was in its infancy, and the types of experiences I was having were considered pathological by traditional psychotherapy. Therefore, I was forced to do a great deal of research and work on

myself, with the help of books. Provided you have at least one empathic and patient support person, such as a spouse or sibling, you can do this work, too. However, if you do not have such an empathic family member available, I strongly advise that you find an understanding therapist, preferably someone who has overcome difficulties similar to those you are facing.

Psychotropic medication, judiciously prescribed, certainly has a place in therapy. Prozac (classified as a “a serotonin re-uptake inhibitor” or SRI) is a fairly recent wonder drug that provides lifesaving relief for many suffering from depression and other serious mood and body image disorders. But I believe it is very important to realize that chemical imbalances are a result of mental illness, not a cause. Drugs cannot heal the underlying disease of the spirit, and during their use, the spiritual growth process is short-circuited.

Paxil is a fairly new anti-anxiety drug that was first developed as an anti-depressant but that is now being marketed for relief from social anxiety disorder (social phobia). Social anxiety disorder is excessive or pathological shyness, experienced by up to 15% of the population. Social phobics feel everyone is watching and condemning them. They often drop out of school, run into work problems, and can’t form long-term relationships – 40% never marry. Many alcoholics are also social phobics. Paxil is apparently not addictive, but it normally isn’t taken for more than a year because patients tend to alleviate their problems through psychotherapy within that period.

I experienced a whole range of mental conditions during my own struggle. My panic attacks were excruciatingly painful because it was the first time that my life was disrupted beyond my control, and I felt hopelessly mired in an existential crisis of life-threatening proportions. Hopelessness is hell. I am grateful for the anti-anxiety medication I was prescribed because, although I tried to use it sparingly, I knew it was there if I needed it. But my panic attacks only ended when I discovered their divine purpose. As Jane Middleton-Moz states in her book, *Children of Trauma*, panic attacks are “a window to the frightened child”.

During my second great crisis, which Psychosynthesis theory might describe as a clash between my lower unconscious and my higher unconscious (both distortions of the I-Self relationship), I needed anti-psychotic medication to block the suicidal pain and fear associated with my belief that I had refused a divine call because I was “evil”. For a long time afterward, I fought a battle with my own shadow self. My mind was split, with a part of me wanting to do what I then perceived to be God’s will, and another part not wanting anything to do with God. The inner voices of condemnation affected my concentration, so for a time I had great difficulty reading and paying attention to others. The beginning of my healing occurred when I came to understand that my religious

upbringing by well-meaning parents who had denied their own pain had given me a false picture of both myself and God (whom I came to see as God/dess). This new understanding allowed me to examine closely the circumstances of my childhood and release trapped emotions that I had previously turned inward against myself. This process can't be rushed. From time to time, I still feel for my past suffering. Each time I do so, my spirit becomes freer.

To become truly well, we must come to love ourselves and have compassion for the suffering we experienced in our childhood and during our illness. For me, self-love required an experience of divine love - a gift of grace from the all-encompassing Creative Force. Through understanding that my childhood abuse, both active (spanking) and passive (withholding of affection), was not in any way deserved, I was able to embrace my wounded inner child. This led to a profound release of grief that brought deep healing. Though we are all responsible for our actions, there is never any blame to be assigned during the healing journey - our parents did the best they could in light of their own circumstances.

I suggest that in our healing journey, one of the last piles of pain to dissolve in recognition and acceptance is the accumulated anguish we have experienced during our own struggle for Self-realization. Acknowledging and then letting go of this anguish is a profoundly healing act of self-compassion. At the same time, we can acknowledge our courage - a quality of our being that our struggle has revealed.

The rewards of the spiritual growth process, termed by mythologist Joseph Campbell "the hero's journey", include understanding, forgiveness, compassion, joy and spiritual empowerment. We are freed to reach out with love to others. In the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, Jesus says, "Blessed are they who have been persecuted within themselves. It is they who have truly come to know the Father". Self-esteem that derives from knowledge of who we really are (daughters and sons of God), as opposed to our false ego image we mistakenly (but understandably) bought into, is crucial to mental health.

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Emotionally drained and exhausted after the long drive home from my sister's place, I fell deeply asleep on the couch, although it was still early. That night, I dreamed of being rejected and ridiculed by my childhood sweetheart and a few other high school

classmates. It was acutely painful for a while, but then it seemed as if the pain was dissolved in my knowledge of God's love.

The following night, while lying awake in bed, more long-buried memories from my childhood surfaced. They were extremely painful and vivid memories of being beaten by my father. I re-experienced the actual feelings I had felt as a child. However, for the first time in my life, I was completely aware that I had not deserved those beatings, that I was an innocent child who had been abused by an alcoholic parent. But I felt no anger toward my father. Rather, the feelings that came were of both grief and compassion (for my inner child), and the release of these feelings was like an exorcism. I cried and moaned, my chest heaving, for many minutes, and my wife comforted me.

My grief expunged, I got out of bed and went to the washroom. When I looked in the mirror, for the first time in my memory I truly liked and welcomed what I saw - a divine human being, someone created in the image of God, created good, like everyone else.

When I returned to bed, around midnight, I was very relaxed and at peace with myself. But I was not ready to sleep. What happened next may seem bizarre, but happen it did. I can only try to describe it as accurately as I can. My toes suddenly began to tingle and dance involuntarily in all directions, individual toes behaving as if they had minds of their own. They danced, and wiggled, and moved in circles, first one way, then the other, demonstrating a degree of movement far beyond that of which I was voluntarily capable. Interspersed with this very active toe dance were periods during which I felt the kundalini fire at the base of my spine (as always, an extremely pleasurable sensation).

Then, I began to experience cramps, or involuntary muscle contractions that were severe enough to cause pain, first in my toes, then the soles of my feet, then my ankles, and then my legs. Words like "rip" and "tear" entered my mind, and I was mildly alarmed, but I believed that what was happening was God's will. Suddenly, my head began to bend sharply backward at the neck, and the word "kill" (the very word that had formerly tormented me) came to my mind. I was truly frightened, and I actually expected my neck to break at any moment. But then I realized that I believed that even this, were it to occur, would also be God's will - an act of love. And so I accepted this fate.

The moment I knew that I trusted God completely, even unto death, my neck muscles relaxed and my head returned to rest on my pillow - but not for long. Soon, my head began to move in circles, first clockwise, then counter-clockwise. Then, it moved in a sideways figure eight pattern (the symbol for infinity). At this point, I was utterly entranced by what was happening.

Yet there was more. I began to feel a current of energy moving very gently through me, starting in the toes of my left foot, disappearing briefly, reappearing in the toes of my right foot, disappearing again and reappearing farther up my left foot, and so on, until the sensation had reached the level of my sacrum. Then it began again in my left foot, and the process was repeated several times. It was very relaxing and soothing.

When I now reflect on this experience, I think that God was comforting me with a physical manifestation of his/her presence, similar to the way a mother gently rocks her new-born babe.

I drifted peacefully off to sleep, and dreamed of two large, luminous and loving eyes that seemed to be floating in the vastness of space. Just before daybreak, I awoke to a sound I had never heard before. It was like a “thrumming” in several different tones, a sound of power yet peace, and it gave me the impression that I was listening to the very energy of creation.

Our infant daughter (who slept between my wife and me) suddenly woke up and called for me, and when I turned and looked into her eyes, I was entranced, for I saw the eyes of God. Then I laughed, and she laughed.

When, at about 8 a.m., I hopped out from beneath the covers, I was surprised to discover how cold the house was (this was a March morning in northern Ontario). The previous fall, I had replaced our old mercury switch thermostat with an electronic model, which was programmed to cool the house to 18 degrees C during the night, but warm it up to 20 degrees C by 6:30 a.m. It had been running perfectly. Perhaps the battery had simply failed. I hobbled (the soles of my feet were quite sore from all the activity during the night) into the kitchen to check the thermostat. The display was correct as far as the time and date were concerned, meaning the battery was still functioning. But the temperature indicator read only 17 degrees C. I pushed the manual temperature adjust button until it read 20 degrees C, hoping that this would ignite the furnace. As soon as I released the button, however, the indicator simply returned to 17 degrees C.

The furnace itself must be malfunctioning, I surmised, so I went downstairs to the basement and removed the cover to the electrical control panel to investigate. Spontaneously, I reached out to the control box with my right hand, and the instant my finger touched it, the furnace ignited. Although I was momentarily startled, it immediately occurred to me that this was a sign from God that s/he would make her/his power available to those who would serve her/him in love. The furnace continued to run perfectly from that point, with the original battery still in the electronic thermostat.

I had wondered whether there was any significance to my having reached out with my right hand, when in fact I am left-handed. It is only recently that I have learned from Stuart Sovatsky (*Eros, Consciousness and Kundalini*) the tantric principle that energy enters us through the left side and is transmitted out through the right. This is also consistent with my previously described experience of energy currents beginning in my left foot.

As I stated previously, our infant daughter slept in our bed. For many nights following the events recounted above, she would awaken during the night, crying. My wife and I both tried various methods to calm her. It soon became clear that the only way she would fall asleep again would be for me to walk with her in my arms while I contemplated the significance of my spiritual experiences, often in light of what I had just been dreaming. In order to calm her, it seemed that I had to mentally verbalize some spiritual truth. Some of these have already been discussed in this story, and others follow. One truth, especially significant to me, that seemed to comfort my daughter one night is, “We are one in the Spirit”.

Since that very memorable night, many years ago, I have often reflected with wonder and awe upon the marvelous ways in which God teaches the human soul and the very special gift I received. It has occurred to me that I was tested in much the same way that Abraham was when he was about to sacrifice his son, Isaac. But the purpose of the test was not to demonstrate my trust in God to God (who knows all things) - rather, it was to demonstrate my trust in God to myself.

I am reminded of the song *Killing me Softly*, and again of the words of C. S. Lewis: “The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and his compulsion is our liberation”.

Chapter 19 – Honoring Our Suffering

For the next few years, I often asked myself whether what I went through could be of benefit to others, remembering the Bible passage that I encountered some time ago – “Cast your bread upon the waters”.

I decided that by writing down my story, I could perhaps ease the suffering of some of my fellow travelers on their journey of self-discovery. For the peeling off of the old self, the integration of the shadow, and the liberation of the beautiful child within, is certainly painful and often frightening, and we can use all the help, support and encouragement we can get.

In this aspect, however, I have discovered a wonderful paradox. Near the beginning of this story I recounted how, when I first began experiencing panic attacks, I wanted more than anything to have things return to the way they were. In other words, I wanted my old self back. Any many times during the subsequent years, although I would occasionally glimpse purpose and meaning in my suffering, I would still wish that I did not have to go through it. At the least, I would question whether my struggles had been worthwhile.

But one day some years ago, as I mentally recounted my experiences, my eyes filled with tears, not of remorse or self-pity, but of gratitude and joy. For I saw the holy, divine purpose in all of this, I saw God’s love throughout the whole process, and I was truly grateful. More than that, I was grateful to be grateful. There was no one to blame, there was only the One to love, and I realized that my struggles were, in fact, a precious gift. God had allowed me to lose myself and to descend into hell in order that his/her love could be manifested through my recovery. I had been granted the privilege of being an instrument of his/her peace. And in so doing, I had learned that within me was an innocent and lovable child who held the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

Some professionals argue that it is not useful to “romanticize” our wounding by entertaining the possibility that we have chosen our family of origin for spiritual reasons. They claim that this places the blame on us, the victims, and deflects the pain and outrage of our betrayed inner child. I don’t agree. My belief that I chose my life circumstances to learn important truths which would help others has contributed to my self-esteem. This belief didn’t stop me from feeling my pain, but it did prevent me from developing a “victim personality” that might want to blame others for my suffering. Yes, on one level, we are victims, but on a deeper level, we are learning what we must learn. And some day we will discover that the rewards of the journey are more than worth the pain. There is no one to blame.

My firm conviction is that there is a metaphysical purpose in all things – a grand scheme of things. No one, I believe, is afflicted with mental illness, not even genetically-linked psychosis (and a hereditary basis cannot be found in most people prone to psychosis), without reason. God is not flippant and does not play dice with the universe or with our minds. Regardless of our degree of neurosis or psychosis, it is important that we understand that all of our suffering has a profound and holy purpose, and is anything but shameful. As Polly Young-Eisendrath describes in *The Gifts of Suffering*, this knowledge can impart strength to help us bear our pain, work through it, and ultimately be transformed by it.

In her book, *Travel Tips from a Reluctant Traveler* (which my wife found in the travel section of a bookshop!), Jeannette Clift George talks about how she tried to tell God what she could and could not do for him, and of how frustrated she became when God's ways didn't correspond with her plans. Finally, she just quit. Immediately, she heard heaven sigh, for God could now do through her what she had been trying to do for him all by herself!

Ms. George paraphrases Philippians 1:6, “God will complete what he has begun”. On impulse, she had once repeated this verse to a depressed, lonely and previously violent psychiatric patient who had been brought by a friend to one of her Bible classes. This verse began a miracle of spiritual healing. Over a period of several months, the sick woman gradually became well. She is now helping other psychiatric patients find a vision of an all-loving, all-accepting God that overcomes their former self-hatred.

Why must we endure this type of mental confusion and pain in order to learn the truth about ourselves and our relationship with God? The experience of this suffering is really the objections of our wounded ego (our false self-perception) to change. But there is another paradox here. At some point, we come to discover that our suffering was a blessing. For suffering fosters understanding, compassion and spiritual strength. Suffering forces us to discover our true natures, because it is only this discovery that will end the pain. Suffering frees us to love. It is therefore a welcome teacher for those who seek to rediscover that they are made in the image of God.

This is the gift that is greater even than life - the gift of God him/herself, of his/her nature, that is the essence of the natural child within all of us. For the spirit of the inner child is indeed pure and holy.

However, in order to discover the nature of God in ourselves, in order to be re-united with the innocent child, we may well have to suffer. We may have to lose that which we think is important. The shedding of our false self, our accusatory ego, with its myriad of defenses, is painful.

But there is absolutely no question that the knocking down, and its attendant pain, is worth it. The core that is gradually exposed represents an expression of God, the spirit of the natural child. Although the inner child, created in God's image, is naturally compassionate, this natural compassion can be refined and tempered by suffering. Suffering forces us to look beyond ourselves. Through suffering, we come to understand ourselves, and we are able to empathize with the suffering of others. Once this whole process has begun, once we have been given a glimpse of reality, the pain involved in the metamorphosis itself becomes a driving force behind the shedding of our old self. For now there is no going back; the only true relief is to be found in forging courageously ahead to the triumphant conclusion.

Low self-esteem is at the core of our illness. We were treated in ways and taught things that caused us to come to believe that we are much less than we really are, that we are not lovable and good, but rather shameful and guilty. Our wounded ego feeds upon this low self-esteem and guilt in building our false selves. The ego protects itself with false pride, which says "I am better than you". However, rather than condemning ourselves for our pride, we should understand that it stems from our own ignorance and insecurity. When we subsequently have to fall in order to learn the truth, we should have compassion on our suffering.

Consider also the suffering of others. We may tend to look on others who suffer, whether through mental illness, physical illness, poverty or abuse, in a way that demeans the value of their suffering. We may tend to shy away from them, and treat them as second class persons. We may look down on them. But in demeaning the value of the suffering of others, we demean our own.

As Carolyn Myss elucidates in her book, *Anatomy of the Spirit*, the essential self, the Spirit, of each and every human being enters into a contract with the Universe prior to birth. We are spiritual beings having human experiences. Suffering is an essential part of this contractual experience. When we realize that we voluntarily took our suffering upon ourselves, for a holy, cosmic purpose that transcends the individual, we accord our suffering the honor and value that it deserves. With this realization, we cease being the victim, and we are empowered. We understand that our suffering has a divine purpose. It brings us in touch with our essential selves and teaches us how to love. It also provides opportunities for others to learn compassion and practice love for one another. Therefore, when we encounter our fellow sufferers, we should thank them for the opportunity to practice divine love that their suffering affords us. And in honoring the suffering of others, we honor our own suffering, and we come to value and love ourselves. We are all one in the Spirit.

Acknowledging our suffering includes having compassion on ourselves. Allowing ourselves to feel compassion for the myriad of hurts we have endured does not mean wallowing in a sea of immobilizing self-pity. With our increased understanding, self-compassion means allowing ourselves to grieve for past suffering and losses, whether as a child or more recently. As we compassionately allow ourselves to recover memories of past hurts, we may cry a great deal. As Thomas Stone describes in *Cure by Crying*, this is very important to our healing. Find a safe place to do this. It's helpful to have a mature human being, perhaps a spouse, sibling or trusted friend, acknowledge our tears, but it is not appropriate to cry in front of children who will not understand and may feel responsible. Remember that at the deepest level, our present circumstances are of our own choosing. We should give ourselves credit for choosing especially difficult and painful circumstances that have been designed to teach us and others important spiritual lessons. And one day, we will find ourselves grateful for the privilege of being an instrument of divine will.

As Gerald Jampolsky urged, we can say *Goodbye to Guilt*, because we are not guilty. We can say goodbye to pride, because there is no need for false pride to boost our own opinion of ourselves. All that we are and have is a gift of God. God has no ego that demands to be inflated by pride. God has no one to compete with for top marks. God is God. And the fact that we have been made by such magnificence, and have God's image at the core of our being, should make us feel very, very good about ourselves.

God is pure and holy; this purity and holiness is within us also. This is the way we were born; it is the state of the natural inner child, the state of grace. Do not believe that you were born evil. Parents who believe that their children are innately bad are not able to fully love them. This withholding of love will affect the child's self-perception and can be a serious impediment to the unfolding and blossoming of the fresh and beautiful image of God that comes into the world with the birth of each child.

As previously stated, it is clear from the New Testament that Jesus placed great emphasis on the value of children. Unfortunately, it seems to be the rule rather than the exception that the lack of understanding of those who had responsibility for our upbringing, and from whom we came to learn how to see ourselves and to feel about ourselves (i.e., our ego perception), leads to the development of neurotic and self-deprecatory attitudes; and, in severe cases of abuse, to serious mental illness.

The reality is that we all have the image of God within us. We will all eventually come to this discovery, enriched during the search by the suffering that fosters compassion. Then we also will be able to love others and ourselves unconditionally, and we will be able to love God with our whole hearts. This will be the end of competition, of striving to

be better than others, because there will be no need for these artificial boosters of self-esteem.

God wants us to discover our true nature, to be re-united with our natural inner child. God wants us to come to realize that lasting happiness can only be found in the discovery that we exist in a state of grace, in a loving relationship with him/herself.

In *Home Coming*, John Bradshaw quotes St. Augustine, whose own childhood woundings are described by Donald Capps in *The Child's Song*. St. Augustine said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you". Mr. Bradshaw infers that there is a limit to how reunited with God it is possible to become while in a physical body, that we are all "divine infants in exile". However, Jesus was able to claim his divine birthright in totality. I believe it is possible for any of us to rest in God and delight in his/her unconditional love while alive on this earth.

My own struggle has made me strong in the knowledge of God's love and of my acceptability in his/her sight. The struggle has also enabled me to empathize with those who suffer from panic attacks or are confined to a psychiatric facility due to an illness of the spirit or are depressed because they are not aware that they are loved. It is my fervent desire that my story will bring some measure of hope and peace to such persons.

I don't purport to know the meaning behind all human suffering. There are many physical ailments that seem to have no purpose. The suffering of young children is especially troubling. However, I urge the sufferer not to be blind to a possible reason for and purpose in all things. In *You Can Heal Your Life*, Louise Hay suggests that even physical ailments have a spiritual cause, and that by changing our attitudes and outlook, we can be healed. She, herself, was able to overcome cancer in this way.

At times, it may seem as though the world is being overwhelmed with suffering. It helped me to remember that the amount of suffering in the world is really no greater than the most that must be endured by any single being.

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My sister's only son was in Europe. Just sixteen years old, he had spent the year with my wife's sister's family and had attended a local school. The school year had just ended, and, not having to write exams, he had decided to take the opportunity to see some more of Europe before returning home.

My sister called with the distressing news that her son had gone missing. He had instructions to telephone home at least every four days, but had not been heard from for more than a week. The last anyone had heard was that he was headed for Greece, intending to climb Mt. Olympus. The embassies of several European countries had been alerted, and Interpol had been contacted, but there continued to be no news.

I tried to comfort my sister with words I truly believed, which were that, in God's infinite love, things would work out in the end. But I had no idea whether my nephew was alive or dead. All I knew was that, whatever happened, God was in control.

We all began to fear the worst. Even though I trusted God, I lay awake at night, crying and worrying and praying. I couldn't begin to imagine the pain my sister, her husband and their other children were experiencing.

Finally, just when my sister was on the point of flying to Greece herself to look for her son, we received the good news! Her son had called from Italy, and he was fine. Apparently, somehow my nephew had simply not understood that he was to call home while he was in Greece (although this explanation is clearly inadequate).

My sister subsequently talked about this experience. She said that when the appointed day for her son to call had passed, she began to fear the worst. She was especially distressed because I had told her during a recent visit that she was going to suffer. My sister said that the agony she had experienced during those subsequent days and sleepless nights had been almost unbearable, worse than any physical pain she could imagine. She had witnessed her husband cry for the first time in their more than twenty years of marriage. She believed that God had taken their son away, and then in his/her mercy had given him back, and she knew that she would never be the same again.

But she had found a reason, a holy purpose, for this suffering. As I have previously indicated, at the time she was a social worker, and was admirably suited to this work. She told me, however, that she had had no idea how painful it was to lose a child. Now, she would be able to offer true compassion and understanding to those she encountered who had suffered such a loss.

Yes, spiritual suffering always has a reason. It is God's way - and also that of our true Self - of teaching us important lessons to make us whole. Rather than trying to avoid our pain through artificial means, we should endeavor to embrace it as best we can. Through overcoming the cause of our pain, which lies solely in ourselves, we will find the truth. And then we will be able to experience the joy of using our own suffering to help and to heal.

The issue of animal suffering was brought to my mind in a personally painful way. While visiting relatives in a neighboring city, we received some very sad news from other family members who were caring for our pets. Our beloved dog, just four years old, had died. What was most difficult to bear was not the fact that he was gone from us but the way in which he apparently died - by consuming rat poison (which did not belong to us). This poison contains a powerful anti-coagulant and the victim painfully bleeds to death internally (although the vet to whom our dog had been brought did administer painkillers). We wished that we could have been there to say goodbye and to comfort him. But one strange aspect of this was that I had dreamed about a week earlier that our dog was dying - and I was so relieved to awaken and discover that it had just been a dream.

We buried our dog in our back yard, and planted flowers on the grave. I don't know whether dogs have an immortal soul, but I do know that they, too, are God's creatures, and I believe that our dog's spirit has returned to the Source.

It hurts to think about how the life of such a fun-loving and lovable animal was so prematurely snuffed out, albeit accidentally, by the actions of men - by us. This tragic episode has made me question the morality of methods to attempt to control various pests. Although I agree that some pests such as rats can represent a menace and threat to human health, and should be controlled in some circumstances, surely there are more humane methods than painful poisons. We humans do not have the right to cause such suffering to any animals.

We must never be complacent to the suffering of other people or animals. Jesus had compassion for and healed many who were suffering both physically and spiritually, and we are to follow him. Offering help and comfort to the sufferer are acts of love. As Jesus said to his disciples, "Inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these my brothers, you have done it to me". Through individual acts of love, the goodness of God is manifest, and both the comforter and the sufferer discover more of whom they really are. Do as Jesus instructed: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven".

Both the sufferer and the comforter can gain assurance from the words of the apostle Paul: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known... For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure".

One afternoon, a few days after my sister had called to tell us that her son was alive and well, I was driving home from work and contemplating the marvelous workings of God in my life. A song that I had never heard before began to play on the radio. It was *Hope*

of Deliverance by Paul McCartney. This song is very meaningful to me, and it is my hope that my story will shed some light upon “the darkness that surrounds us”.

Chapter 20 – Archetypes and Dreams

In this chapter, I will amplify on some aspects of what I have previously experienced and described in the context of “depth” psychology, specifically Jungian psychology and recent theories in transpersonal psychology (including Psychosynthesis). In particular, a more detailed discussion based on the theories and findings of C. G. Jung, about which volumes have been written, is appropriate. As explained in *Man and His Symbols* (edited by Jung), Jung’s most important contribution to depth psychology is his concept of the “unconscious” – not (like the “subconscious” of Freud, of whom Jung was a student) merely a glory hole of repressed desires, but as vital and real a part of the individual as the conscious ego, and far wider and richer. The language and “people” of the unconscious are symbols, and the means of communication are dreams.

Before proceeding, however, I want to state that I am well aware that the contents and workings of the mind are extremely complex. My interpretations of my feelings and reactions and the meaning of my dreams that I give in this story are not “carved in stone”. I am presenting what makes the most sense to me in my current state of understanding.

According to Jung, we all have a “personal unconscious”. As described by Michael Washburn (*The Ego and the Dynamic Ground*), the personal unconscious consists of two parts – the “personal embedded unconscious” and the “personal submerged unconscious”. Of particular importance to our healing is the personal submerged unconscious, which contains our “shadow” – disowned and repressed memories and emotions that are responsible for our hang-ups and neuroses and guilt. In *Owning Your Own Shadow*, Robert Johnson asserts that until we have accepted and honored our own shadow, we cannot be whole, for what is hidden and ignored can unexpectedly and painfully turn up. Indeed, it was the sudden resurfacing of my own disowned shadow, demonized through many years of repression, which resulted in a spiritual crisis for which I was hospitalized. Just as important, we must own our shadow to avoid projecting it on others. I am saddened by the realization that, until I understood what I was doing and why I was doing it, I projected my shadow onto my dear son (for which I have asked his forgiveness).

Jungian psychology says that we also share a “collective unconscious” - a supra-personal unconscious that contains a vast wealth of knowledge accumulated by the human species since the dawn of man. My understanding is that this collective unconscious may be considered to be an offshoot of the Spiritual Ground (or at least a link between the ego and the Ground), and is therefore replete with transformational potential. Within

the collective unconscious are found, among other things, symbolic mental images or “archetypes” that move us like an invisible wind and shape the way we act and think, without us being aware of their presence. But when the mind has been freed of its pathological complexes, the knowledge and force of the archetypes within the collective unconscious can be accessed and assimilated into our consciousness. The collective unconscious is the birthing ground of the great myths that express the deep truths of our spiritual evolution.

Jung viewed the archetypes of the collective unconscious as inherited spiritual symbols that contain pre-determined meanings not amenable to personal alteration. However, as described by Dr. John Nelson in *Healing the Split*, recent field theories of consciousness hold that the collective unconscious is not fixed, but rather evolves in synchrony with the evolution of human consciousness. This is a dynamic give-and-take process, in which information from our collective past is incorporated within personal experience to help shape our collective future.

In *The Primal Wound*, Psychosynthesis therapists John Firman and Ann Gila cite Alice Miller in stressing the therapeutic importance of recognizing the specific causes of childhood psychic wounds. For example, injuries caused by an abusive mother cannot be healed by addressing one’s anger toward the destroyer Hindu Goddess Kali (representing the “devouring mother” archetype in the collective unconscious, whose destructive actions are generally considered to enable rebirth at a higher level). Rather, memories of abusive situations and the accompanying feelings must be uncovered from the personal unconscious and grieved.

It has been claimed that access to the collective unconscious (or Ground) is premature in the case of those who suffer from schizophrenia, but my own view is that natural (i.e., not drug-induced) access to the collective unconscious is always for our good. I say this because I believe that the will of the universal Spirit, God, is expressed in this manner. I believe that the collective unconscious is a part of the “cosmic consciousness” - the mind of God. Each one of us can discover the will of God in our lives - our true happiness and joy - when we are able to connect to this channel of awareness with trust and love (i.e., when primal repression has been overcome, at least temporarily).

Archetypes are expressed via symbols that may vary depending on personal cultural influences and beliefs. In general, the archetype of God in the western mind is the essentially masculine all-powerful, creative (or destructive) invisible force, which may be symbolized in an individual by the sun (and light in general), the father (itself an archetype), mountain peaks, the phallus, the psychoanalyst, authority figures (e.g., policemen), political groups, religious sects and so on. The notion of culpability or guilt is also an archetype that itself gives rise to the archetype of the “Savior”.

But according to Jung, it is the feminine archetype of the Mother (what he called the “Great Mother”) that has an especially profound influence on the psyche. The archetype of the Mother may be symbolized in many ways, including: women in general, the womb, the breast, the unconscious mind, the earth, the Church, water, fruit trees, the shade, the “motherland”, and of principal importance, one's own mother - in short, all that gives life, nourishment and shelter.

Jung's archetype of the Great Mother (represented by the primary caregiver, generally the biological mother) has two sides: the “Good Mother” that nourishes and protects us with unconditional love, and the “Terrible Mother” (which develops later) that threatens our developing self-hood by requiring certain behaviors of us and by not always being available. Confidence in the archetype of the Mother (the Good Mother) is reflected in confidence in life and in death; while fear, distrust and profound hostility toward the Mother (the Terrible Mother) translate into fear of life, fear of the unconscious in our own minds and fear of death. Small wonder why it is so often very difficult for one to completely separate oneself, in a psychological sense, from one's mother - the accomplishment of which is a crucial aspect of psychological maturity and ultimate spiritual well-being.

But Jesus' statement that one must become like a little child in order to enter the kingdom of heaven is no less valid or important. As infants, we basked in the unconditional love and bliss of the Ground. We have lost this connection through primal repression and over-identification with the wounded ego. Jesus was saying that we must rediscover our childlike innocence and wonder, that we must give up ego-based activities like judging and competing with others. Jesus was saying that we must find our true selves and our proper relationship with the Ground, upon whom we are dependent for all things. Jesus was not saying that we are to remain dependent upon our biological parents.

It is the childlike mind, in the sense described above, that is “tuned-in” and responsive to the collective unconscious and the mind of God.

The distinction between the archetype of God and that of the Mother is a reflection of western, but not eastern, thought. I have previously discussed how the predominant western image of God as a masculine figure is largely a product of Judeo-Christian culture, but that the feminine aspect of God (the Goddess) has long been recognized in eastern religions as well as many so-called primitive religions. However, the power and significance of the archetype of the Goddess is becoming increasingly significant in western spiritual evolution, as witnessed by the plethora of recent Goddess writings. Indeed, archetypes of both God (Father) and Goddess (Mother) reside within us all and are revealed at the opportune times when our individual development reaches the

appropriate level of understanding. This is because the creative power of love that upholds the universe necessarily encompasses all, and is therefore both fully masculine and fully feminine. This makes sense in the context of Jung's "animus" and "anima" - and the fact that we are all, male and female, made in the Creator's image. However, at this point in our history, the spiritual pendulum in the west is undergoing a swing toward Goddess expression, which is necessary to balance the excessive power and influence of patriarchy that has existed for the past few thousand years.

Indeed, in *The Ego and the Dynamic Ground*, Michael Washburn expands the Great Mother archetype to include this connection with God, in that he posits that the Great Mother archetype fully represents not just the primary caregiver but also the Ground. This conception, which from my experience is valid, gives the Great Mother not only archetypal and personal reality, but also dynamic reality, which has the power to effect our spiritual transformation in a profound way.

So Jesus says in the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas: "My mother [gave me falsehood], but my true Mother gave me life".

To a child, both the father and mother represent God, but there is a distinction. From my perspective, the behavior and actions of the father are primarily incorporated in the development of the image of the "God without", the transcendent, creative and masculine God of power, whereas those of the mother develop the image of the "God within", the immanent, nurturing Goddess of love. Subsequently, during our return journey to unite with the Ground, we discover (or remember) that this split is artificial - God and Goddess are one God, which is expressed in the archetype of the Self.

The image we have of God within - the core of our being, is especially crucial to our own self-image. The ideal situation, of course, is to have very positive role models for both the transcendent and immanent aspects of God. However, those who have a nurturing and protective mother figure are much better able to withstand abuse from the father without internalizing it.

For me and others who grew up with an abusive, alcoholic father and an unprotective mother, it was "double jeopardy". We developed a terrible and deep-seated sense of guilt and shame, and an image of a tyrannical God whose love was conditional, and from whose judgment there was nothing and no one to protect and defend us. We couldn't simply be ourselves, so we had to forget who we really are and become something else - something phony.

In order to be healed, we have to learn that the largely unconscious images that we had of ourselves, our parents and God were wrong. We have to come to recognize our

parents for what they really were – wounded human beings who did their best considering their own circumstances and understanding. We have to come to understand that our image of God was largely cultural and the product of our upbringing - that by nature God is not only masculine creative power, God is also feminine unconditional love and wisdom (Goddess). We have to come to understand that we were all created in God's image. And we have to use this new-found understanding to remake our self-image from that of a sinful beast to a divine reflection of God. This is the journey described by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

The heroic journey of inner transformation and ego-submission to the Ground will be reflected in the character of our dreams. At the beginning of the process, as knowledge of the presence of the Ground begins to well up from our deep unconscious, where it has lain since primal repression, our wounded ego views it as a threat. This is largely because we see it as being very different from ourselves. Our ego perception is still clouded by misunderstandings of our true nature – we don't yet know that we are loved unconditionally, and we don't love ourselves because we are attached to false notions like guilt and shame. We don't yet know that our true nature is the same as God's nature – unconditional love. Because we have been taught to be afraid of whom we really are, our God-given natural instincts have been disowned and repressed. As explained in the essay *Dialogue with the Demonic Self* (Hal Stone and Sidra Winkelman), found in *Meeting the Shadow* (edited by Connie Zweig and Jeremiah Adams), severe repression of our instincts can result in their demonization. Therefore, we might have nightmares of being threatened by monsters, ravenous wild beasts or even devils. These threatening dreams are characteristic of the spiritual growth phase that Michael Washburn (*The Ego and the Dynamic Ground*) calls "regression in the service of transcendence", or RIST. These dreams will gradually give way to dreams in which the actions of the beasts are discovered to be non-threatening, even loving. For example, I dreamed that that a large wild wolf approached me, but instead of causing me to flee in terror (as in earlier dreams), it immobilized me (by sitting on my lap) and proceeded to vigorously lick my arm. Dreams such as this, in which we learn that the powerful instinctual energies of the Ground that we previously disowned are loving rather than harmful, are characteristic of the next phase of spiritual growth, which Michael Washburn calls "regeneration in spirit". During this phase, we may also dream of being naked (or nearly so) in public while experiencing little or no discomfort, for we are becoming less and less afraid of being who we really are.

In *Awakening the Heroes Within*, Carol Pearson shows that the hero's journey isn't just for certain people under certain circumstances. For some of us, a crisis may force us to

embark on the journey against our wills, but all of us, by exploring the paths available at every point in our lives, can live heroically.

I read somewhere that our myths express the collective dreams of humanity, but our own dreams express our personal myths.

I have had several dreams that may represent the freeing of the power of the “sage” and “warrior” archetypes in my own spirit. These dreams have been about older men, seemingly either wise or strong, who manage to escape from life-threatening situations in which they were very nearly drowned by anonymous opposing forces. I anticipate with great excitement the continuation of my spiritual journey.

Discovering within one's own mind the there-to-fore unconscious symbols of these powerful archetypes, replete with spiritual significance, is very important in the healing process. It is not surprising, then, that during our journey to wholeness, we will encounter a good many of the archetypal symbols mentioned above. The symbols first come to us in dreams, for it is while dreaming, when our minds are not distracted by things around us and our defenses are lowered, that the unconscious (and God) can most readily speak to us.

Chapter 21 – Dream Messages

I had two dreams that impressed upon me the fact that the young child worships and adores his/her parents, as representatives of the archetypes of God and Goddess. If the child is fortunate to have wise and loving parents, the result will be wholly positive and will help the child to develop a true understanding of the nature of God. But if the child does not see the parents love for him/her reflected in a caring, attentive and nurturing environment, the child feels that s/he is to blame, that s/he is not lovable, and that God is punitive.

The first dream concerned my father, but a prelude is in order. My father died of a heart attack several years ago, after suffering from prostate cancer for many years. The medication he was prescribed had weakened his heart. He did not have an easy life. His mother died from complications of childbirth when he was eight years old, and his father emigrated soon after. He was shuffled among dirt-poor foster families for four years before himself emigrating to come to live with his father and stepmother. Having only a partial primary school education, at the age of thirteen my father went to work in bush camps cutting pulpwood. He was finally able to obtain permanent employment in a paper mill, where he spent forty years working shifts.

My father's younger brother was killed at the end of World War II. He apparently walked into a known mine field. Shortly before my father died, he revealed a family secret that had contributed to the unconscious pile of shame in which we were immersed. He confided in me that he had long suspected that his brother's death was a suicide. He had heard second-hand accusations that his brother had engaged in homosexual activities during which he had performed "favors" for his superiors, and he believes that the shame was too much for his brother to bear.

My mother's life, on the surface at least, seems to have been far less turbulent and stressful. From what she has told me, she knew her parents loved her and she was not mistreated; yet the fact that her younger brother died from the effects of alcoholism says that all was not well in her immediate family. She was teaching in a rural school when she met my father, and she continued to teach until her retirement.

During a social visit by my parents some years ago, the topic of conversation turned to childhood memories. My parents, in particular my mother, had difficulty understanding the cause of the spiritual upheaval I have described. The reader has learned that my mother was spiritually rigid and emotionally needy, while my father was an abusive alcoholic. I recounted to my parents how I had experienced a vivid recollection of childhood physical abuse, sanctioned and often ordered by my mother but carried out

by my father, but that I didn't blame them for it, for I knew that they were doing their best. Without hesitation, my father told me that he was sorry for having hurt me, and it was obvious to me that he was sincere.

My mother, on the other hand, denied that she had ever requested that my father physically discipline me, which surprised me. She insisted, as she had on many occasions during recent years, that she had always loved all of her children a great deal. I do not doubt that she loved us to the best of her ability, but it is also clear that she was not prepared to accept any responsibility for her daughter's suicide or my spiritual pain.

And now concerning the dreams. In the first, which I had shortly before my father's death, my father was being carried in a procession on a throne of some sort, and I was holding up one corner. As we walked, a choir of men was singing absolutely beautifully in his honor, and I was enthralled. When I awoke and remembered this dream, I was pleased. I loved my father and know that I have forgiven him (which was made easier for me by his expression of regret). I believe that, considering the circumstances of my father's life, he was a hero.

In the second dream, I was a very young child. I was with my mother, and she was young and beautiful, and I loved and worshipped her. My feelings on awakening from this dream were a mixture of nostalgia, regret and hope. I know that I once loved my mother deeply, but my love was betrayed. I also know that on a spiritual level of understanding, I still love her. And I told her many times that I love her. But on the healing level of feelings and emotions, I have had great difficulty expressing this love. Could it be that I am afraid to love my mother? Or could it be that I have not yet completely forgiven her, and I am attaching conditions to my love? Do I feel that by withholding my love, I am somehow punishing my mother? Am I not aware that by holding back my love, I am hurting myself? Why is it so difficult for me to love my mother unconditionally?

More recently, I again dreamed that I was observing my mother and father in the kitchen (the same place they were when I dreamed many years ago about overhearing my father ask my mother "Where is the beast?", which I knew referred to me). But in the more recent dream, my mother was berating my father about his drinking. My father looked terribly sad, and then he started to cry. I felt so badly for him that I started crying too. I am coming to realize the extent to which my mother's coldness and lack of true empathy affected the rest of our family, in particular, myself. There is great pain associated with lack of nurturing that I am in the process of allowing myself to feel. This non-empathic environment, and my subsequent attempts to be perfect for my mother, is the main reason my shadow grew to such ominous proportions.

As my poor mother aged, she began to lose her short-term memory. It was frustrating for her family, but it must have been especially so for her. She also had bouts of hypochondria. It seems that her repression of her unconscious pains and fears, which she had so steadfastly maintained with the help of her religious addiction, may have been weakening, possibly because there was no longer anyone around to carry her shadow baggage for her.

Another dream I had concerned my brother. He went through a painful divorce. Two years older than I, he, too, was subjected to physical punishment as a child. Perhaps as a consequence, he has suffered from ulcerative colitis (a serious bowel disease generally regarded as being of psychosomatic origin) for many years. He also has vitiligo, which Louise Hay, in her book *You Can Heal Your Life*, claims is a reflection of low self-esteem.

In my dream, my brother and I were underground, within some buried ruins of some sort. We encountered a narrow, dark tunnel, into which my brother proceeded, but I was too frightened to follow. So I waited and waited, apprehensively, until finally my brother reappeared from another direction. But he had changed. He looked absolutely radiant, self-confident, and entirely comfortable with himself. And accompanying him was a woman I did not then know, but they were partners, and they were happy together. I am pleased to report that my brother has since remarried and is indeed happy.

Many years ago, I had a terrible nightmare. In it, my wife had entered the former home of my grandmother, in which my mother had been raised. This home was located next door to my parents' home, my childhood home. I went to find my wife, but on entering the door, I saw within only a mysterious, dark hole. I called my wife, but it was apparent to me that she had been consumed by the hole. I became very frightened, and retreated to the back lawn. It was very dark, so dark that I couldn't see a thing, but I was aware that something very threatening - some nameless monster - was coming out of that hole to get me. I was extremely frightened at this point, and began to wail, and then I woke up.

My wailing also awakened my wife, who told me that I had sounded like a pack of wolves. Our young daughter had been sleeping only fitfully, and shortly thereafter she awoke screaming "There's no monster", as if to reassure herself of this fact. She used this phrase several times over the next few weeks, and each time we assured her that, indeed, there is no monster. We could only assume that this fear of a monster arose from something one of her older siblings said or did. But, as I have stated, we are one in the Spirit, and perhaps this applies especially to young children and their parents. As this dream pointed out to me, in my unconscious I perceived the presence of a monster in my mother's childhood home. What was it?

In discussing the meaning of this dream with my wife, she asked me whether I could remember experiencing anything frightening when I visited this home as a child. The answer is no. Why, then, did I have this dream?

This home was my grandmother's home, where my mother was raised. I was very fond of my grandmother, and I especially remember her laughter and her generosity. However, I am aware that she was quite bigoted. My wife has reminded me that my second-eldest sister (the social worker) told her that she believes that my grandmother contributed greatly to the dysfunction in our family. Apparently, my grandmother belittled my father, because he was not good enough for her only daughter. She probably resented him even more for having got her daughter pregnant so she would have no choice but to marry him.

My mother told me that her own mother adored her, that she thought that she was the "cat's meow". My mother, apparently, could do no wrong in my grandmother's eyes. But my mother also told me that she used to be very frightened of death - that she would reassure herself that she would not die, because she would simply refuse to close her eyes. And I know that she was forced to hide her true self, her natural child, very deeply. I believe that her attempts to express her natural sexuality were severely repressed during her childhood. Later, her own response to the shame of becoming pregnant out-of-wedlock likely was to repress her femininity even more. During my childhood, she always wore a thick mask of pale face powder and penciled-in eyebrows, she seldom dressed in feminine attire, and she covered her face with her hands whenever she laughed. I never heard her sing, even in church, for she always insisted that she had a horrible voice.

Is there not a message here for me? I have prayed for the ability to truly love my mother, but to this point, I have encountered internal resistance. Although I understood that my mother was also very much a product of her own upbringing, I had failed to appreciate how dysfunctional her upbringing must have been. Now that I have felt the horror of her childhood home, I can understand how she had to bury her true self beneath a cold and sterile mask. With this understanding comes real compassion, and I feel a great sadness over what happened to my mother.

This dream has caused me to examine more closely the circumstances of my mother's upbringing. My mother's surviving brother has confirmed that my grandmother "wore the pants" in her family - she was the dominant force. My grandfather, who died of lung cancer at a relatively young age, a few years prior to my birth, was apparently a quiet and reserved man who had difficulty expressing affection even to his own children. The fact that both of my mother's brothers had themselves married very dominant and emotionally cold women (both marriages failed) is evidence of my grandmother's

personality, for it is true that many men marry reflections of their mothers. My brother, too, made the mistake of marrying a cold and selfish woman, and I feel that I was very fortunate not to have fallen into the same trap.

So now has the blame been shifted from my mother to my grandmother? No! My grandmother, too, was very much a product of her own upbringing. She was not born a domineering bigot. Is it not crystal clear that there is no one to blame?

Does the monster now have a face? Again, the answer is no. But the monster is no less real. It is the real void of ignorance, hatred, shame and fear that develops when unconditional love is absent. And it is this monster that forces the inner child into hiding.

My own natural child was forced deeply into hiding. It was replaced by my false self, what I perceived to be an unlovable beast. And I suffered as a result. I suffered to discover the truth about myself, because it is impossible to fool oneself. My suffering did not end until I fully understood that I was innocent, because only when I understood that I did not deserve my suffering was I able to have compassion on myself. And through having compassion on myself, my demons of self-hatred were exorcised, and I discovered to my great joy that I love who I am – a divine child of God.

Dreams can also provide assurance and guidance in making important decisions in our lives. For example, shortly after I had felt compelled to leave my job, in the midst of very difficult circumstances with an unknown outcome, I dreamed that I was hanging from the tail of a twin-engine plane, and I was very concerned because one wing, complete with engine, had fallen off. Somehow, the pilot was managing to keep the plane airborne. However, the situation deteriorated further when the remaining engine caught fire. The plane began a steep, apparently uncontrolled decent, and my concern increased. But then I realized that the rapid decent had extinguished the fire in the remaining engine. Hopefully, I began to search for someplace for the pilot to land. The only option was a long-abandoned runway, covered with shrubs and rocks. As the pilot skillfully slowed the plane, I wondered how he could possibly land safely. Miracle of miracles, he brought the plane down as gently as can be, as if on a bed of feathers. Upon landing, I approached the pilot (whom I did not recognize) and proclaimed that he was a hero. Then, as if to reward his skill and perseverance, I began to massage his shoulders. At this time I awoke, and gave thanks for the message.

Of course, dreams need not necessarily express obvious archetypes in order to be meaningful. I have previously stated that I did not attend my grandmother's funeral, her death having followed my uncle's and sister's in rapid succession. And so I had never said goodbye, until I dreamed of encountering an old woman lying at the side of a path.

She was exclaiming that she was sick and wanted to die. I told her that she still had living to do – that life was precious and she had not yet completed her task. She then jumped up with great vigor and began to dance down the path. After she had gone a short way, she turned to face me, and I recognized my grandmother. She said, “I love you”, and I said, “I love you, too”. Then we each continued on our separate ways.

We are all on the hero's journey, the inner spiritual journey to freedom, the journey to recover the lost inner child. Our dreams will reflect our progress and give us clues to guide us, so we should pay attention to them. Keeping a dream journal is helpful. When I awaken in the night (which often happens just as a significant dream is ending), I immediately jot down what I can remember about my dream(s). The dream message may be readily apparent, or it may require several related dreams to reveal a significant pattern. Over time, I have found that the content of my dreams has evolved in sync with my spiritual evolution.

Don't be concerned if you have difficulty recalling details of a particular dream that you feel may be especially significant. Important material not made conscious one night will be repackaged and presented, perhaps in a different context, at a later time.

There are many reference books available that help in dream interpretation by providing the most commonly accepted meanings of dream symbols. For example, the bear is purportedly a powerful symbol of the feminine and the anima. This helped me understand the significance of what used to be a common dream - being chased by a bear. However, if the book interpretations don't help, remember that we are the creators of our own dreams, and we are therefore also their best interpreters.

Repressed material from our unconscious often manifests in our dreams in a seemingly-menacing form. I used to often dream of frightening feminine apparitions, in ghostly or cat-like form. Courage is important. We should try to be aware in our dreams that, while the fear is real, the danger is not. Whenever we can turn and face the object of our fear, we take a big step toward wholeness. When I found the courage to confront the feminine ghost, it dissolved. The next time it appeared, I was able to use it for a greater purpose, and it has not reappeared.

“Lucid dreaming”, wherein the dreamer becomes aware that s/he is dreaming, has been recommended as a way to help us confront our fears. I have never made any serious attempts to cultivate lucid dreaming, although I have had a few spontaneous experiences that have been interesting, perhaps because I keep a dream journal. It seems to me that if we know that what we fear is just happening in a dream, we may not be pushed to do the work required to truly benefit. It takes a lot more courage to

confront our dream fears when we don't know we are dreaming than it does when we do know that it's "just a dream".

Some time ago, I dreamed that I was admiring a beautiful, snow-capped mountain that was visible from our summer cottage (although there are in fact no mountains anywhere in the vicinity). I called my wife and children to come and see it, and suddenly the mountain was right at my feet with the peak soaring majestically immediately above my head. I was at once awe-struck and excited in a very spiritual sense.

When I awoke, I remembered the dream with fondness and reverence, and considered the spiritual symbolism of mountains. I recalled *The Ascent to Truth* and *The Seven Story Mountain*, which described Thomas Merton's spiritual pilgrimage, and *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* by St. John of the Cross, and I thought about Moses receiving the Ten Commandments and about Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The mountain having moved from the horizon to my feet also reminded me of Jesus' exhortation to his disciples that if they even only have faith equivalent to a grain of mustard seed, they can indeed move mountains.

Several nights later, I dreamed that I was very bothered and upset - I seemed to be lost and didn't know which way to go. Then it suddenly occurred to me, while still dreaming, that I had to read the Old Testament book of Isaiah, and at once I felt relaxed and at peace.

Upon awakening, I remembered this dream, and wondered why it apparently was important for me to read Isaiah (a book that I wasn't especially familiar with and had never before read in its entirety). I was actually a bit nervous because I was afraid that I would read it and not find the answer that I seemed to be looking for. For this reason, I waited several days before deciding to heed the message in my dream. But when I finally did open my Bible, the very first passage to meet my eyes was Isaiah 29:13: The Lord says, "These people come near to me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men." Sometime later, I learned that Jesus quoted this same passage from Isaiah when he chastised the Pharisees in Mark 7:6.

I was fascinated as I continued to read the prophetic words:

"Therefore once more will I astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish. Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the Lord, who do their work in darkness and think, 'Who sees us? Who will know?' You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what

is formed say to him who formed it, 'He did not make me'? Can the pot say of the potter, 'He knows nothing'? In a very short time, will not Lebanon be turned into a fertile field and the fertile field seem like a forest? In that day, the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of the gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. Once more, the humble will rejoice in the Lord; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. The ruthless will vanish, the mockers will disappear, and all who have an eye for evil will be cut down – those who with a word make a man out to be guilty, who ensnare the defender in court and with false testimony deprive the innocent of justice. Therefore, this is what the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, says to the house of Jacob: 'No longer will Jacob be ashamed; no longer will their faces grow pale. When they see among them their children, the work of my hands, they will keep my name holy; they will acknowledge the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel. Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding; those who complain will accept instruction.' (Isaiah 29: 14-24)

I knew that Isaiah's prophecies applied to Jesus, but in light of God's undeniable workings in my own life, and my dream message to read Isaiah, I suspected that they might in some measure apply to me and to all others who are struggling through a spiritual transformation. Jesus himself told his disciples that they, too, would perform miracles. To my mind, the phrase "those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding" was especially significant. For what is mental illness, but a lack of understanding? And during my spiritual journey, I came to understand the importance of the divine feminine, and I had recently and very emotionally acknowledged that God was my "mom". I was becoming increasingly convinced that it was God's will that a revolution of sorts in the manner in which Christians perceived God was to occur - that we were to pray, "Our Mother, who art in heaven" at least as readily as "Our Father". Perhaps "Goddess" is the "new name" of the Spirit of God referred to in Revelation 3: 12.

As I continued to read Isaiah, I encountered several references to mountains that reminded me of my previous dream. "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7); "These I will bring to my holy mountain, and give them joy in my house of prayer" (Isaiah 56:7); "But the man who makes me his refuge will inherit the land and possess my holy mountain" (Isaiah 57:13); "And I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah those who will possess my mountains; my chosen people will inherit them, and there will my servants live" (Isaiah 65:9); "They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord" (Isaiah 65:25).

It occurred to me that a very important message of my mountain dream was that God's holy mountain had been given to me - that it was the inheritance and the dwelling place of all of God's children.

Chapter 22 – Synchronicity and Intuition

There are numerous mileposts, or significant occurrences, along the road to wholeness. These may take the form of seemingly chance interactions with something outside of the sufferer that coincide with particular stages of the sufferer's journey. C. G. Jung coined the term "synchronicity" for this type of "meaningful coincidence". It is, of course, derived from the word "synchronous", meaning "existing or occurring at the same time". Another word that I consider applicable to these situations is "serendipity", defined as "the gift of being able to make delightful discoveries by pure accident". A coincidence cannot become meaningful until the individual discovers the meaning.

The reader may have noted an apparent inconsistency in the above definition of serendipity, for how can a gift be an accident? A gift is given with purpose. The inconsistency disappears when we allow that, although on the physical plane there was nothing to cause the synchronicity, the same cannot be stated on the non-physical or spiritual plane. Indeed, in order for a synchronicity to take on meaning, we have to come to accept that the interaction was not the result of chance alone but was due to unseen activity on the spiritual plane. We have to come to understand that the synchronicity was a gift from a loving higher power given to help us on our journey.

The point in our own journey at which we come to accept that chance occurrences are indeed synchronicities (i.e., gifts from the spiritual plane) cannot be predicted. But, it seems that all travelers eventually reach this conclusion. It may be after a particularly powerful experience early on in the journey, or it may be after a succession of more minor experiences. However, once we come to recognize the presence of synchronicities in our life, they begin to pop up with considerable regularity, or rather they begin to be recognized with regularity.

In my case, the first and perhaps the most significant synchronicity occurred early on in the particularly intense "panic" stage of my struggle. As previously described, I had reached the end of my rope, and had begun to consider that suicide would be the only way to end the pain. In utter desperation, I prayed to the creative force for help. I lay on my bed, and my mind seemed to go momentarily blank. At the same time, my two-year old daughter jumped up on my back and called out "daddy". Instantly, I was lifted out of my wounded ego and freed from all fear. I was home again.

Although this state of perfect peace was short-lived, even after I found myself submerged in fear once again, I knew that I had been the recipient of a miracle – a major synchronous event that gave me sufficient hope to enable my inner transformation to begin.

Another major synchronicity occurred when, about a month later, my family and I flew to my hometown to spend Christmas with my parents. Upon arrival, I was concerned to discover that I had forgotten to bring along my anti-anxiety medication – I couldn't see how I could possibly forget something so important. But it was only shortly afterward, while pondering the meaning of these recent events, including the state of peace I had experienced, my dreams, and the fact I had forgotten my medication, that I came to the conclusion that I – the unlovable wretch – was loved by God. This sparked the passionate electricity in my being – the kundalini fire that ended my panic for good. And so my forgetting my medication was synchronous with, and perhaps necessary to, my experiencing the love of the Divine.

Subsequently, there have been many other coincidences that I have recognized as synchronicities in my journey.⁷ There were the very meaningful Bible passages that I encountered on three separate occasions when I was searching for direction. There was the anonymous phone call I received one evening, just when I felt the need for some external reassurance that I was not alone in my struggle. Then there was the time I impulsively drove several hundred kilometers to meet privately with my sister, and found her alone at home even though her husband and children would normally have been at home also. Another example occurred as I was driving home from work, meditating on the marvelous workings of God in my life and wondering where it would all lead. The car radio was on, and I heard for the first time the new song, *Hope of Deliverance*, by Paul McCartney. These inspirational words led me to begin to consider that I could help others overcome the darkness in their lives.

One evening, after I had been thinking about the nature of love and the rewards of selfless service, I answered a knock at our front door. It was a stranger, who apologetically explained that he had “stupidly” driven into the ditch just up the road, and did I know of anyone who might have a chain with which to pull him out? I retrieved a sturdy rope from the trunk of our car, invited him to hop into our truck beside me, and drove the short distance to his vehicle. In no time at all, we had his truck out of the ditch. The stranger was very appreciative, but I was a bit taken aback when he asked if he owed me anything. I said of course not, wished him well, and we parted company. Later that evening, I thought about how good it made me feel to perform this small act of kindness. Who owes whom?

7. The concluding Part III of this book describes a further major synchronicity of divine grace in my life.

Most of the synchronicities I encountered, while stretching the realms of coincidental probability, nonetheless required faith to be ascribed to activity of the Divine. There was, however, one incident in which the Divine was clearly and directly involved in an interaction of an external material object with my own being. I am referring to the time, previously described, when after a night of physiological kundalini activity in my body, I awoke to discover that the house was cold because the furnace, which was modern and had never given us any trouble, had stopped running. I was startled when the furnace started up immediately when I touched the control box with my finger.

Later, while flying out-of-town on a business trip that I didn't really feel up to, I met and fell in love with my inner child, and then while driving from the airport, I received healing words of love and forgiveness from my dead sister. As if on autopilot, I was able to go directly to my hotel, without needing to consult a map. This is an example of intuition. That my intuition appeared at that time to guide me to my hotel enforced in me the validity of my encounters with both my inner child and dead sister. This, therefore, also represents synchronicity. Intuition and synchronicity are closely related in that both involve a highly personal contact with the Divine at specific periods in our lives.

Intuition is traditionally considered to be a feminine characteristic – hence, the term “feminine intuition”. The following incident helped me to clarify the relationship between intuition and the feminine. During a visit to Europe, shortly after I came to accept and feel within my heart the reality of the divine feminine - that God was also Goddess, and my Mother who loved me - I set out by car with my son to locate the home of his friend. I really didn't know the way. Again, I was intuitively guided directly to the home we were looking for, and again, I knew that this was a synchronicity that was meant to convince me of the power of the divine feminine.

A later example of synchronicity occurred in connection with my father's death. During the funeral, I delivered a eulogy (reproduced in Appendix B), in which I summarized my spiritual struggle and my father's beneficial influence in my life, and how I believed that he now wore the “crown of life”. Immediately afterward, my family and I gathered at the cottage in order to plant a tree in my father's memory. Upon our arrival, a beautiful Monarch butterfly alighted on my hand and remained there for several minutes, while I walked about the grounds and displayed this symbol of regeneration and new life. The meaning was unmistakable.

Synchronicities tell us that there is a loving intelligence, God, behind the physical universe. If we remain open to synchronicities in our lives, we will recognize them, and they will give us inspiration and guidance for the journey.

Chapter 23 – Unconditional Love

I write this while seated at a desk in a restored thirteenth century farmhouse in southern Europe. When I gaze out the second-story window, I see golden fields of corn, ready to be harvested, and on the horizon, the rolling foothills of the mountains.

My family and I have been living with my in-laws for the past several months, while my wife undertakes graduate studies at a nearby university. Our three oldest children are enrolled in local schools. Thanks to computers and faxes, I communicate with the office “back home” with relative ease. For all of us, this is a very special time in our lives. For me personally, it is an opportunity to unwind, to relax, to spend more time with the children, to experience another culture, to improve my foreign language skills and to contemplate. This time is a very special gift from God.

What I have been contemplating, mostly, is the concept of “unconditional love”. Previously, I have described how a completely unconditional love is central to my understanding of God. Although this is an understanding that has been shared by many over the centuries, it is still quite new for me. It has certainly revolutionized my whole outlook on life, and is absolutely central to the spiritual healing with which I have been blessed.

“Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect”. So Jesus told the multitudes during the Sermon on the Mount. These words caused me considerable consternation for several years following the revelation of God’s love at Christmas, 1981. It was impossible for a human being to be perfect, I believed. Perfectionism was a curse with which I had struggled for almost all of my life, and it had made me miserable.

Jesus’ instruction, of course, had absolutely nothing to do with how well one performs academically, or in sports, or in business. It did not mean being perfect in the sense of not committing errors. I believe that Jesus was telling us to be perfect in love. Perfect love is unconditional. Unconditional love entails forgiveness for mistakes and shortcomings, both one’s own as well as others. We should always try to love. But loving unconditionally means accepting ourselves and others as we and they are, and realizing that growing spiritually involves making mistakes, by which we learn.

In the eyes of love, in the eyes of God, we are perfect. We will be complete when we have become as we have always been in God’s eyes.

I am reminded of an experience that occurred one night many years ago, while I lay awake trying to discern God’s will for me. How was I to go about using my God-given

understanding to help others? I believed that God would make his/her power of spiritual healing available to those who would serve him/her in love, but how? Then suddenly it came to me (how could I have been so blind?) - the power had to be unconditional love, the very nature of God. The instant that this revelation occurred to me, my younger son, who was asleep at the foot of our bed, suddenly sat bolt upright and shouted "Yes! Yes! My name is John!" (although his name isn't John), and then quietly settled back into his blankets.

Although I was convinced that unconditional love is the healing force, I spent considerable time pondering how one knows when one is experiencing unconditional love for another and how it can actually be applied to effect healing. Unconditional love was, I thought, something that one somehow gave.

However, I have come to understand, as a result of personal reflection and experience, that unconditional love is not ours to give, or take, or trade. Rather, is it actually and simply the recognition of the image of God in another human being or in oneself.

It is possible for one to be truly aware, if only momentarily, of this "divine nature" of unconditional love, the image of God, that is in each and every one of us. However, suffering may be necessary in order to break the self-serving barriers of the wounded ego and enable one to first obtain this awareness, which is a gift of God that is constantly and continuously offered to each of us. The excruciating pain of the panic and depression that I experienced forced me to turn to a God I did not know (or rather had forgotten) for salvation from my own self-hatred. God, in his/her compassion, made me aware of his/her intense unconditional love for me, which re-awakened my own intense love for God. God has subsequently proceeded to peel away the layers of my false self, my wounded ego, to begin revealing the beautiful child within me - my own Self made in the image of God. The nature of the inner child is my true nature and that of all of us - the way we have always existed in God's eyes. Though this process is by no means complete, I know that I have come a very long way, and I know that God will complete what s/he has begun.

The ability to express unconditional love, which is God's nature, is a particularly amazing gift from God. As I have discussed previously, the gift of God's nature is the greatest of all gifts. The fulfillment of this nature is the full revelation of the natural child in the adult. For most, if not all, this process requires suffering in order to break the grip of the wounded ego. But the rewards of suffering are compassion and understanding. God's nature, I believe, has been fulfilled in Jesus. For the rest of us, it is an ongoing process, the completion of which we must pray for and strive toward.

The recognition of the Divine, like all acts of unconditional love, is its own reward. It is an intensely spiritual, though very real and profound reward. On several occasions, I have experienced the joy of momentarily “seeing” the beauty of God in the visages of several women, of various races and ages, and not all of whom would be regarded as classically beautiful. I believe that it is the beauty of God that I have seen because of the way it makes me feel - it is so similar to (though less intense than) my original experience of kundalini, which was both a long-suppressed outpouring of love for God and the rediscovery that I loved myself. I have seen this beauty in real flesh and blood, as well as in television images and magazine photographs.

I cannot help wondering whether the recognition of the divinity of others, which is unconditional love, can of itself be a healing experience for those who are suffering because they do not know who they are. I hope and pray that, perhaps in this way, I can be an instrument of God’s peace.

Unconditional love is the most powerful force in the universe. It is the power of creation itself, and therefore it must also be the power of spiritual healing. It carries with it the revelation that we are truly sons and daughters of God, created in God’s image, and it is this understanding that liberates us from the bondage of the wounded ego.

Sooner or later, we will all come to realize that we are exquisitely beautiful works of art in progress. And, eventually, the masterpiece that we are will be complete.

This is our certain destiny - yours and mine.

Chapter 24 – Revelation and the Morning Star

The reader might well be questioning the significance of the term “morning star” in the title of the book and this chapter. As discussed in Chapter 12, the “morning star”, or the planet Venus, was at one time referred to as “Lucifer” (Latin for “light-bringer”). Rather ironically, the name Lucifer was later given by the Church fathers (who evidently didn’t read Revelation 22:16 – see below) to the “prince of demons”, although the Bible itself makes no connection between Lucifer and the devil. But the term “morning star” is very significant to me for two other reasons. One of these reasons concerns the relationship with the word Venus. Besides being the name of the second planet in our solar system, Venus is the Latin word for love and is also the name of the ancient Roman Goddess of Love. The term is used poetically to connote a very beautiful woman. And, as I have described previously, it is in the beauty, both spiritual and physical, of women that I have come to more fully appreciate the beauty of God.

But the main reason why the Morning Star is so significant to me will be evident from the following passages, full of hope and promise, from the book of Revelation:

- 1:8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega”, says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”
- 1:17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said, “Do not be afraid, I am the first and the last.”
- 1:18 “I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”
- 1:19 “Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.”
- 2:7 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”
- 2:11 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.”
- 2:17 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.”

2:26 “To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations.”

2:28 **“I will also give him the morning star.”**

2:29 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

3:5 “He who overcomes will be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.”

3:6 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches.”

3:12 “Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.”

3:13 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

3:20 “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”

3:21 “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.”

3:22 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away; and there was no longer any sea.

21:2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”

21:4 “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

- 21:5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."
- 21:6 He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life."
- 21:7 "He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son."
- 22:16 "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright **Morning Star**."
- 22:17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

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The book of Revelation has been the object of much attention from many modern-day prophets, who claim to have the "inside track" on its hidden meaning. But even a superficial reading of Revelation may well leave one with the false impression that it prophecies some great final physical battle, the "apocalypse", which is to begin at a place called "Armageddon", in which the forces of evil will be finally destroyed in a sea of blood. The "elect" will be saved from this destruction by being transported to heaven (the "rapture"). A frightening and potentially dangerous aspect of this interpretation is that some so-called Christians actually look forward to - and would do what they could to hasten - the arrival of such a violent end to our world.

I do not believe that this is the real message of Revelation. The real message of Revelation, God's message to us, is that evil has been overcome - that Jesus has vanquished. The Lion is the Lamb, and the Lamb is the victor. There will be no final world battle. The battle that Jesus fought has been won for us all - John's message is one of Universal Salvation freely given by a loving God. However, during our lifetimes we all have to fight our own inner battle against the ignorance and prejudice of our wounded ego to claim the victor's prize - the kingdom of heaven within us - alongside Jesus. And we all have a responsibility to fight against "evil" - bred by ignorance - that is the cause

of man's inhumanity to man so painfully expressed in violence and hatred the world over.

However, when John was writing to the seven churches, he really did have apocalyptic expectations of the imminent end of the world, including the return of Jesus, the destruction of evil, and the everlasting glory of the new world. In this he was wrong. But I suggest that there is another paradox here. The paradox is that although for John the apocalyptic vision was a central part, perhaps the central part, of his message, I do not believe that this was why the Spirit moved John to write. To me, the central message of the Spirit, which John conveyed in spite of his apocalyptic beliefs, was the message of the victory over the demons of the wounded ego that will be the reward of all who take up their cross and follow Jesus. The Battle of Armageddon, I believe, is a spiritual battle. It is the battle to resurrect the abused child that is fought within the individual human soul.

It is understandable that Christians who revere the Bible may have difficulty acknowledging that its authors sometimes held incorrect views. God necessarily uses human thought and human beings to communicate with humans. In the first century, apocalyptic thought was one of the prevalent ways of thinking about God and the world. Another false first century view expressed in Revelation was that the earth was flat (see Revelation 7:1). The vehicle of apocalyptic thought used to express John's message of salvation does not nullify its validity.

Just as Christians should have no compunction to promote flat earth societies on the basis of Revelation 7:1, so they need not believe in the impending end of the world on the basis of Revelation 1:3. There is, however, something for us to appreciate from the early Church's expectation of the near end of history. Without sharing their chronology, we can share their sense of urgency, the sense that our generation is the only generation we have in which to fulfill our calling. It was not necessarily naiveté, egotism or presumption for the early apocalyptists to believe that God had led all history to its time of fulfillment in their generation. Although their chronology was false, their apocalyptic expectation was nonetheless a valid expression of the faith taught by Jesus that every life within every generation is of unique and immeasurable value in the eyes of God, without whose infinite care not a sparrow falls.

So to me this is the wonderful promise of Revelation. Those who overcome the effects of child abuse and reclaim their birthright as sons and daughters of God will eat from the tree of life and will never die, for they will be given the Morning Star.

For those who want to read more scholarly interpretation of the Book of Revelation, I recommend *Revelation* by M.E. Boring (to whom I am grateful for many of the above insights), and *Revelation* by W.J. Harrington, O.P.

Goddess Reborn

I was mom's own, but she knew not
How love to bestow on the one she begot.
Hungry for her, my cries ignored,
My beauty denied, my spirit gored.

Stifling yearnings, becoming unreal,
Until myself no longer to feel.
Life a contest, I struggling in vain
To surface from under vast oceans of pain.

Then from the depths of heart's despair,
Divine love revealed – the soul's repair.
At long last Spirit's value shown,
And precious seeds of Self were sown.

Blossoming to the cosmic day,
Goddess reborn, and I can play.
Carried aloft upon wings of a dove,
I am Her child, I am Her love.

Robert Keith
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PART III: A KNOCK AT MY DOOR

Jesus said: “Whoever does not hate his father and his mother as I do cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not love his father and his mother as I do cannot be my disciple. For my mother [gave me falsehood], but my true Mother gave me life.”

Gospel of Thomas

Jesus said: “Blessed are they who have been persecuted within themselves. It is they who have truly come to know the Father.”

Gospel of Thomas

“In the end, nobody can attain redemption while his fellows remain still unredeemed.”

Paul Brunton
([paulbrunton.org/
notebooks/para/25778](http://paulbrunton.org/notebooks/para/25778))

Chapter 25 – Grief and the Shadow

It is at this point that the narrative of my original e-book *Kundalini and the Morning Star*, first published on my website (www.broadcasters.org) in 1999, ended. A couple of years later, I added the following text of this chapter as an update to my site.

In recent months, I have had several dreams involving our summer cottage. I had spent many happy times at our cottage during my childhood, but I also experienced fear and pain there. For example, my mother has told me that, as a two-year old, I pulled a pot of boiling coffee off of the cottage stove and burned my right leg. I was rushed to the hospital, though it took some time to get there. Although I have no recollection of this incident, I have a photo of me with my leg swathed in bandages. On another occasion when I was about three years old, my brother and I were outside in the yard with my mother. My mother spotted a young bear at our garbage can by the road, and immediately fled inside, calling for us to follow her. I was very frightened, but we got safely in. I remembered this incident during the late recovery phase from my psychosis, and I cried about the fact that my mother was apparently more concerned for her own safety than she was for her children's. I also remember disturbing a hornet's nest and being stung numerous times at about the same age. A final frightening incident at the cottage occurred when I was seven or eight years old, and I was suddenly awakened in the middle of the night by a very loud shotgun blast. My father had heard a bear at our garbage can in the yard, and he had fired at it in the dark. About a half an hour later, we heard another gunshot from farther down the lake.

There are three cottage dreams that I think are pertinent. I will describe the first two at this point. In the first, which I had some time ago, our cottage was completely engulfed in flames. I was inside it, but I was protected from the flames by a mattress, and there was a wise old woman with me who told me where to stand to avoid being burned. In the second, more recent dream, I was at the cottage with some former business associates, when a woman, who was accompanying one of my associates, came up to me in a seductive manner. I became somewhat excited, but I was surprised when this woman looked at me and said, "You've been crying". I told her that I hadn't cried for a long time (which was true), but as soon as I said this, I felt extremely sad and broke into tears. I awoke sobbing.

I realized that in spite of all the experiences I have previously described, I still felt some underlying angst. I still sometimes exhibited neurotic behavior, nervously chewing my moustache, for example. Occasionally, I would feel a constriction in my throat, and my breathing would become momentarily tight and labored. I still didn't feel quite at home

within my own being, and so I knew there was more work yet to be done. Therefore, when my wife and children left to visit her family in Europe for a month, I took this as an opportunity to work on myself without the presence of diversions at home or the risk of causing upset to my family.

In order to do this, I used the same technique that I had previously been guided to use when I felt the need to go inside myself. I concentrated my attention on the feelings in my chest – where I had noticed an ache that to me signified a blockage at my heart chakra. And I purposefully began to listen for the presence of the accusing and unloving voice of the vestiges of my wounded ego. I found it right away – that same “kill” word, though far less intense than during my psychotic episode. Although I now viewed this “bad” word as a tool that I was using to force me to drive deeper into my unconscious, it nonetheless caused me to become depressed. Or rather, it released the repression that I had exerted on my residual covert depression and allowed it to be expressed as overt depression. It was a familiar feeling and I believed I could handle it. I had learned to trust the process, but it was still accompanied by fear, albeit not of the intensity I had felt previously. But I was concerned that I might turn wholeheartedly against myself again, so I focused on the notion that the cause of my pain was my mother’s inability to love and protect me as a child. However, having acknowledged some time ago that she herself had a deeply wounded inner child, I did not actually confront her as I had attempted to in the past.

That night, sleep came reluctantly. Toward the morning, I dreamed that I was apprehensively going down an elevator shaft deep into the earth. Then I found myself at the cottage. There were several packages lying on the road, burning. These packages I identified as evidence, and threw snow on them to extinguish the flames. Then I noticed a semi-prone man, partly snow covered. Fearfully, I asked those around, “Is he dead?”, seemingly hopeful that he was. At these words, he arose, and I decided it was time to leave. As I was walking away, this stranger hurled a baseball bat at my head. I managed to deflect it, but then he hurled two bats simultaneously, which arced in from either side. I knew I wouldn’t be able to deflect these, so I turned and ran. I intended to head to the “Mexican coast” and then north. But as I planned my escape, I felt that he would track me down, regardless. At this point, I woke up. I immediately knew that this man represented an aspect of my shadow that I hadn’t recognized before. I didn’t know what it was, but before falling back to sleep, I mentally told him that we belonged together and that I would not reject him. When I did this, I felt the familiar “spiritual tingle” up my back and into my head.

The next day, I kept thinking about my situation and what the shadow man represented. I sent an e-mail to my older sister, with whom I hadn’t spoken in some time, describing

my state of mind. In her loving response, she told me that she couldn't begin to relate to my suffering, but that she thought I was very brave, and that she was there if I needed help in integrating my shadow. This expression of compassion made me begin to cry, because until then I hadn't been sure that she would understand.

Then I just knew that I was completely innocent! I knew that I hadn't deserved to suffer the way I had. I understood that what I had endured, though a necessary learning experience, wasn't just for me – that what I learned would help others. In this way, I had made a sacrifice of sorts (as do all victims of abuse), but it had been a very painful one. So I felt compassion for myself for all I had gone through since I first experienced panic attacks nearly twenty years ago. The tears just poured from me, they flowed and flowed like a river. The pent up grief came flooding out of me. And immediately I felt lighter. While I had kept my burden of grief inside, I unconsciously felt that I must have deserved to become ill. In releasing my burden, I was acknowledging the totality of my innocence. And in acknowledging my innocence, residual self-rejection was dissolved by my tears, and my depression lifted.

So this is crucial. We must allow ourselves to shed tears of grief, not only for our inner child, but also for us. Grieving is not self-pity. When we grieve, we are not feeling sorry for us in our present situation (in fact, we may be very grateful for the progress we have made). Rather, we are being compassionate for the terrible pain we endured in the past, when we didn't realize we were innocent. Nor is grieving suffering. I know what suffering is. Suffering happens when we turn against ourselves. Grieving, on the other hand, is acknowledging that we have been hurt - it is siding with ourselves, it is empathy. Grieving is the healing of suffering.

The sick ego that is badly wounded by unacknowledged grief cries “kill”, but it is the sickness that dies as the grief is felt. This heals the ego and frees our true Self.

I can still feel the ache in my chest sometimes. It has a divine purpose. As long as it is there, it reminds me that I have more grieving to do. The pain of the infant deprived of a mother's unconditional love has not yet been brought to full consciousness. In order to grieve this pain, I might have to regress to remember what I had to repress into my unconscious in order to survive. Thus, I may need to experience more depression, but it will not be as severe as in the past, and I now know that God is with me. The process is in the “service of transcendence”, and therefore I welcome it.

I also know I have more shadow work to complete. I rejected so much of my precious Self in order to try to be what my parents and society wanted. For example, I rejected my natural creativity. I have reclaimed much of myself, but my shadow still occasionally shows up in my dreams to tell me there is more work to do.

But, on the whole, my dreams are increasingly positive and encouraging. Recently, I dreamed that a beautiful and extremely feminine woman told me that she had “exchanged minds” with me. In my dream, I thought that if she had indeed done this, I would know. When I awoke, however, I realized that this dream referred to the future completion of an ongoing process - the spiritual integration of the divine feminine.

God is leading me home.

Chapter 26 – Stress and Relief

I completed a correspondence course in counselling, while continuing full-time employment as an environmental consultant. For the next several years, I responded to e-mails to my website requesting assistance on psycho-spiritual matters, for which I did not charge. Numerous free copies of my e-book were downloaded, and several hard copies of the book were also purchased. I was pleasantly surprised to receive an anonymous \$50 cash donation in the mail (postmarked Las Vegas) from a reader who evidently found the e-book to be particularly helpful. Although reader and reviewer comments were universally positive, after about five years I shut my site down, telling myself that the level of response did not justify the cost of maintaining it. However, based on what was to come, the real reason was likely that I knew subconsciously that I was not yet fully ready to share my story with the world.

Fortunately, I continued to have some “big” dreams that gave me much-needed encouragement. Although I was a somewhat wary of what I might yet have to face, possibly including additional bouts of depression as more memories and repressed feelings surfaced, one dream in particular reinforced my conviction that this healing process of self-discovery was progressing on a divinely-ordained path and would be completed. In the dream, I was struggling to control my car that was inching toward an incline that led underground beneath my mother's childhood home. I knew that if I held on very tightly to the steering wheel, the car's progress toward the incline would be slowed. But the current owner of the house, who was busily shovelling snow from the entrance to this incline, didn't appear to notice my approach, and I was worried that I would run her over. It seemed that the only way to warn her would be to loosen my grip on the wheel and honk the horn. After debating briefly with myself, this I did, and immediately the car proceeded down the incline and under the house.

Rather alarmed, I suddenly found myself out of the car and tumbling and turning as I was carried down the slope along with snow, water and dirt. Apprehensively, I thought about the mess I would encounter when I finally reached the bottom. But then, I noticed that the walls of the passageway were neatly paved with stones. And when I got to the bottom, there was no mess at all. Rather, everything was spotless and tidy (but still wet) and the floor boards were all properly in place, though I knew that things had been rearranged by an unseen hand. I marvelled at the neatness and cleanliness of the floor and walls, and the presence of a window with light streaming through it. As I turned to leave the room, I heard myself say, as if aloud, “Praise God indeed!” And as I said these words, I was imaging God not so much as a person, but rather as “the ground of being” - the divine force of incomprehensible love that is the foundation of everything in

existence and that will never cease leading us toward complete psycho-spiritual integration.

Still, I was apprehensive about what I might encounter on my journey back. Mustering my courage, I began to head upslope. Suddenly, I found myself floating on my back while being carried gently aloft to the surface. I felt marvellous, and I awoke, full of gratitude. This dream reinforced my belief that my life, indeed my very Self, was unfolding as it should, cradled in the unseen hand of God.

For the next several years, I generally functioned well, was productive at work, and enjoyed life with my family. However, although I knew I was loved by God, I still struggled at times because I continued to harbour unresolved issues that prevented me from truly loving myself. I had no idea how much difficulty I was yet to face.

In an effort to reconcile, spiritually, with my mother, I tried to initiate a discussion with her about the way her actions and attitudes may have contributed to the psycho-spiritual issues in her children, in particular my deceased sister. My mother became very defensive, and threatened to disinherit me if I ever raised the matter again. I never did, not because I really feared the loss of any inheritance (we were not a wealthy family), but because I didn't want to upset my mother further. However, this made it more difficult for me to forgive her.

In 2003, my employer was sued for professional negligence by a large national corporation, and I was first among those named in the lawsuit. I and others in our company felt that the lawsuit was unjustified given the circumstances. Regardless, it progressed inexorably toward trial, and the various pre-trial examinations were very stressful. To my considerable relief, in 2006 the plaintiff agreed to a relatively small out-of-court settlement offered by our insurance company.

In 2007, I had a colonoscopy (my first), during which a rather large polyp was removed. However, my internist did not seem concerned, and so I was shocked when he called me a few days later and told me that the polyp was cancerous. Medical personnel consulted among themselves, and it was decided that follow-up surgery or other treatment (aside from regular precautionary colonoscopies) was not indicated. Still, I was naturally quite alarmed.

My stress level increased further when my mother died later that year. She had been suffering from Alzheimer's disease, and spent her final few years in a nursing home. Eventually, her bodily functions started shutting down, and the medical staff advised us that it was time to let her go. She fell into a coma, and my siblings and I waited by her bedside. It was very difficult to watch as her breathing became irregular and labored.

We moistened her dry lips to try to keep her as comfortable as possible. She would stop breathing for quite long periods, and then would take a very deep breath. At one point, she suddenly sat bolt upright with her eyes wide open, and appeared very agitated. I painfully urged her to let go. I think that at the end, in spite of her having clung to religion for comfort over virtually her entire life, she was afraid to die. She had once told me that as a child she was very afraid of death and had resolved that, when it came time for her to face the end of her mortal existence, she would simply refuse to close her eyes. Finally her breathing stopped, and didn't start again. I broke down sobbing. My son comforted me with the words, "The Universe loves you, dad".

My mother was buried two days later. That evening, while driving to my niece's house in the country for a family gathering, we were treated to the sight of a magnificent meteorite which streaked across half of the sky and disappeared beyond the horizon. It was the largest and brightest such display any of us had ever witnessed. My first thought was that it was a sign from the heavens in honor of the memory of my mother. The Divine sees the big picture.

In 2008, I began experiencing severe discomfort in the left side of my lower back. Getting out of bed in the morning became increasingly difficult. I visited the local clinic where I was prescribed a strong painkiller (which I was reluctant to take), and an X-ray was taken. I was told that my family doctor would call me later if anything potentially serious was found. The next day the pain was so bad that I had to roll out of bed onto the floor before struggling to stand upright. I had never before visited a chiropractor but decided I had nothing to lose. My wife drove me. The chiropractor examined me and concluded that I was suffering from "sacroiliac joint dysfunction" of unknown cause. He recommended that I return for regular treatments. When I told him that I had had a cancerous polyp removed from the lower left part of my colon the previous year, and that an X-ray had recently been taken, he seemed concerned and offered to call the clinic later that afternoon to inquire about the results. I accepted his offer with gratitude. That evening, he called me at home and told me that nothing out of the ordinary had showed up on the x-ray. This was a considerable relief. Nonetheless, my back pain continued to worsen, and began to bother me even when lying flat on my back, so that I started to lose sleep.

My wife and I had planned to drive from our home in northern Ontario to Calgary, Alberta, where we were to greet four relatives on my wife's side, including her sister and brother, who were to fly in from Europe. The trip would also give us the opportunity to visit with our elder daughter in Calgary and our elder son in Vancouver. We would then spend nearly two weeks exploring Alberta and British Columbia, camping most nights, before driving together back across the prairies to Ontario. Our relatives were to spend a

few restful days visiting with us at our home before boarding their return flight to Paris. This had been the plan. My relatives had purchased their airline tickets, and my wife had developed the itinerary, including booking of campgrounds (this was peak tourist season in the Rockies) and the occasional chalet and hotel room.

But how could I possibly go? I couldn't sit for any length of time, and even with a back brace, I had great difficulty walking and could only take tiny, shuffling steps. In general, I have always enjoyed driving, and had planned to drive virtually the entire distance (which my wife is quite happy to let me do, provided I am not feeling over-tired). Driving was now completely out of the question.

The morning of our scheduled departure, I lay in bed and contemplated staying at home. My wife, naturally, had resolved to drive by herself to Calgary, if necessary. As I thought about this, I realized that I simply could not let her go alone. Not only was she not accustomed to driving such long distances, I knew that she would be concerned about me and would have difficulty enjoying this long-planned vacation with her family. And so I popped a painkiller, struggled out of bed, and packed a suitcase, with assistance from my wife. She arranged some pillows in the back seat of the van, and I tried to get as comfortable as possible while still keeping my seat belt attached. Off we went. However, it was not long before the pain had me second guessing my decision to come along. I considered catching a flight back home from the nearest airport, but that would mean sitting upright in the confines of a plane, which also seemed out of the question.

In our hotel that night, I barely slept. My attempts to get out of bed the next morning were met with excruciating pain. I had to roll sideways and slide off the bed onto the floor, before slowly and carefully grabbing onto furniture and pulling myself to a standing position. Once upright, however, I felt better, and managed to take a shower. My wife helped me get dressed, and we had some breakfast before setting out again.

Lying across the back seat of our van, I knew I was in need of Divine intervention. I prayed. At the next rest stop, I slid out of the van and stood upright, and immediately knew that something was different. Hesitatingly, I took a slightly larger step than I had been reduced to taking during the previous few weeks, but instead of pain, I experienced a tingling sensation at the base of my spine, like a mild electric shock. I took another, slightly larger step, and again there was a tingling sensation. This continued during the course of several consecutive larger steps until I could walk more or less normally. I was dumbfounded, and I was also extremely grateful. My prayer had evidently been answered.

When we got back into the van, I was able to sit upright with virtually no discomfort. We continued on across the prairies, and stopped for the night at a motel called (fittingly, I

thought) the Pilgrim Inn. Lying in bed that evening, there was no pain. In its place, I felt the familiar extremely pleasurable stirrings of kundalini. My sleep was positively blissful, and breakfast the next morning was thoroughly enjoyable. I decided that I felt well enough to drive, and so I did. I had to be careful to avoid sudden movement, however, and I wore a back brace for several more days. But suffice it to state that we had a wonderful vacation, and I have not suffered any recurrence of this pain to this day.

Chapter 27 – Crisis and Coincidence

My brush with cancer and the manner of my mother's passing continued to weigh rather heavily on me. I quite looked forward to a glass of wine to "relax and unwind" after work, and another with dinner. During this period, I became acquainted with the *Conversations with God* series of books (nine in total) by Neale Donald Walsch, all of which I found interesting and have included in Literature Cited at the end of this book.

However, one day in late 2009, I was forced to acknowledge that, in spite of all I had been through and all I had learned, I did not feel ready to die – I was not "prepared to meet my maker". I was concerned that I had too much ego, and I became determined to get rid of it (an impossibility, I have since realized, for how can the ego dissolve itself?). But that was my firm resolve at the time. And so I began to meditate in earnest. I went deep within myself, intent on rooting out the remaining memories and emotions that were keeping me from realizing my real identity. However, for me, going within has also meant depression. My appetite dwindled, and I had great difficulty sleeping. When I did manage to sleep a little, I had disturbing dreams.

It was a real struggle to try to remain positive, and eventually I became so tired of the battle I was waging with myself that I knew I needed to find comfort and solace in whatever way I could. In my book, I have described my previous spontaneous experiences with kundalini, and how they were always powerful healing events for me. I decided that I needed (and indeed deserved) to once more feel the pleasure at the base of my spine. And so, that night, I went even further within, and I entered a great and very still void. From within this void, I gave myself permission to feel the exquisitely soothing pleasure. It began immediately, and it was indeed a welcome respite from my struggles. However, I had the sense to know that I wasn't ready for anything more, and I purposefully shut it off after a few moments.

Although it was a revelation to discover that I apparently had a degree of conscious control over this spiritual energy, I continued to slip deeper into depression. I was very concerned about the stress I was causing my family, and suicidal thoughts that I hoped had been put to rest many years prior re-emerged. Finally, I became so distraught that I told my wife that perhaps I should go out into the forest and just shoot myself (essentially echoing the fate of my younger sister 24 years earlier). I recall my wife crying out and collapsing onto our bed, holding her chest. She told me later that she had actually (and understandably) been very angry with me.

I managed to regain some composure and told her I needed to go for a drive. She was too upset to accompany me so I drove off by myself. However, my mind was in turmoil.

The thought occurred to me that the experience of kundalini I had brought upon myself was an act of the ego, rather than of Spirit, and that all of my previous spiritual experiences had been contaminated and were somehow fake and meaningless. Indeed, it seemed as if my entire struggle over the past 29 years had been some sort of cruel joke. My heart sank so far it felt like it had dropped out of my body.

This was a typically frigid January day in northern Ontario, and I decided I would drive into the wilderness until my gas tank ran dry, and then walk into the bush, lie down, and freeze to death. I drove for several miles, feeling absolutely hopeless. I didn't really want to die, but how could I continue living? And then, suddenly, I knew the truth, as sure as sure can be. It was indeed Spirit, and not ego, that was responsible for my recent kundalini experience. Spirit had been in control all along. There was still hope! I grasped at this revelation, and immediately decided to drive myself straight to the hospital, about an hour away.

The drive seemed to take a very long time, and I was very concerned that I might change my mind and turn around. But I didn't. Upon arrival at the hospital, I called my wife and told her where I was and that I was feeling much better. She expressed relief. When I described my situation to the emergency room physician, he immediately admitted me to the psychiatric ward. I had to spend two days and nights in the hallway waiting for a bed to become available, but this was mostly a peaceful time for me. I was comforted by the thought that I would receive the rest and help I needed.

After being assigned a room, I decided to be as sociable as possible with my fellow patients. One attractive female patient who appeared to be about my age sat down at my table. I asked her name, and was surprised by the answer, for she had the same uncommon first name as my first love, with whom I had not even spoken since high school. As I have previously described, I fell for a girl in early public school (initially in response to her encouragement), but although my feelings for her continued and even intensified right through university, they were essentially unrequited. Intrigued, I asked her what her surname was, and she confirmed her identity.

I nearly fell out of my chair. I had experienced synchronicity many times, but this was certainly a particularly powerful example. I knew without a doubt that the powers of the Universe had conspired to bring this encounter about. Feeling I had nothing to lose, and no reputation to defend, I proceeded to describe to the others at our table how I had been so head over heels for this girl (henceforth referred to as "Y"), but how, ultimately, I had been rejected. Immediately, Y stated that she had never rejected me, but that she had always been competitive and had felt intimidated by my intelligence. I protested, explaining that the reason for my success in school was based more on my fear of failure and rejection than on any superior intelligence.

Anyway, so began anew a relationship that continued via e-mail (with me in Europe and her in Canada) for some time. For awhile, I wondered if the Universe might have more in store regarding the two of us. My wife was naturally somewhat concerned that Y and I were in the hospital at the same time. She later told me that she had also wondered about the purpose of this encounter. I love my wife, and certainly did not want to hurt her. However, I felt that it was important that I be open and honest about my feelings, knowing full well from experience that denial of feelings created more difficulties than it might appear to solve. Therefore, I let myself feel. My childhood hopes for requited love were reflected in my dreams. But I finally came to understand that this part of me was living in the past, and did not fit with the reality of the present. Both Y and I are now different people. From my current perspective, it seems that the purpose of my meeting Y in the hospital was two-fold: to give me further proof of the divine intelligence of the Universe, and to help heal my original ego wound. Neither Y nor I wish to further our relationship, although we remain friends.

The reason that Y had admitted herself to hospital, shortly before my arrival, was related to a failed marriage. Upon discovering that her former husband had apparently abused their daughter, she became extremely angry and depressed, and was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

My psychiatrist listened to my story. She concluded that I was likely suffering from some type of bipolar disorder, which had first made itself evident following the birth of my first son (as described previously). However, she also stated that my case was certainly unusual and atypical. I was prescribed a sedative and an antidepressant.

My hospital stay lasted about two weeks. At one point, an elderly female patient divulged to me that Y had asked her whether God would be upset if she fell in love with a married man. The possibility that my first love could actually love me back made my heart beat faster. Prior to my voluntary discharge, a few days following Y's departure, my psychiatrist told me that there had been rumors regarding a developing romantic relationship. I was advised not to pursue it.

Some weeks after I had returned home, my wife and I decided to take a brief vacation in a nearby town, accompanied by our younger daughter and her friend. I had been feeling a lot of anger toward the vestiges of the demanding and judgmental male deity in my psyche. During the drive to our hotel, I allowed myself to internally verbalize this anger, knowing that the true Divine has no ego and could never be offended. Still, I spent another fitful night, managing only scant sleep. The next morning, we toured some of the local arts and crafts shops, and then it was time to grab some lunch. As usual, my mind had been quite active, but what happened next was certainly unexpected, and is difficult to describe. As if in a single thought, I saw precisely how I had created my

reality. I completely understood that it was my thoughts and my decisions that had resulted in many of the most emotionally significant events of my life, both pleasant and unpleasant. I saw the intricate interconnections, and knew I was completely responsible for where I was at that moment. It was a power that I had attributed to the Divine, but it was actually my power. In truth, I and everyone else on this planet are divine – we are all one with God.

This awareness of my personal truth was an extraordinary experience, and it was accompanied by a profound feeling of self-acceptance and love. However, I immediately understood that it was not something to be grasped. I knew that this realization that we all have this divine power to create our reality was TRUTH – that it was itself a deeper level of reality, but that I had to let it go for now, because I was not ready to assimilate it. At the time, this having to let go did not bother me in the slightest. I was certain that it would return to me (or rather me to it), eventually, because it was real, and that was all that mattered. This realization lifted my depression immediately. I thoroughly enjoyed my meal, and then we left for home.

This feeling of wellbeing did not last long. That very night, lying in bed and unable to sleep, I felt myself, almost literally it seemed, descend into a dark pit. Vainly, I grasped at the memory of my recent experience with divine thought. However, I was unable to recall how I had been able to see and understand the manner in which I created my personal reality. It seemed impossibly complicated, and so I began to question the validity of the experience. The ego is essentially a fear monger, and I found myself battling against illogical and paranoid ideas. In particular, the fear arose that my reality was entirely limited to me, that I had somehow created everything and everyone in it, and that therefore my struggles, and indeed my entire existence, were meaningless. This same fear, which essentially reflects the philosophy of solipsism, had been a thorn in my side many years before. It was as if the ego was trying to tell me that the truth was actually too good to be true, because I didn't deserve all that goodness and love. I felt terribly isolated and alone. This continued for several weeks.

In the midst of this darkness, I received a healing glimpse of reality. A replacement window that I had planned to install in our house laid leaning against the basement wall. One day, while trying to distract myself in the basement, I happened to glance at this window and suddenly felt suffused with love at the simple idea of installing it. When I climbed the stairs and entered the kitchen, I knew beyond any shadow of a doubt that I was not alone. This was an incredibly welcome relief.

Alas, my dark mood again returned with a vengeance. I began to fear that I could eventually cause harm to myself, or perhaps even turn against my family, if my situation didn't improve. These fears fed my downward spiral. Finally, I called my psychiatrist,

and she advised me to return to the relatively safe environment of the hospital. My brother kindly drove me. I was extremely disillusioned and disheartened at having felt the need to re-enter the hospital.

At one point, while lying in my hospital bed, I felt so fed up and so unloved and unlovable that the notion that I might end my existence in some tragically vengeful manner entered my mind. This really frightened me. Thankfully, my deeper knowledge of the innate beauty and goodness of existence and of my own being, as well as the idea that perhaps I had something important to say, that I had a light at my core that needed to shine, was stronger than my wounded ego. I soon found myself wanting to leave. I discharged myself after a few days, determined to do whatever it took to get to the root of my problem.

The fact that some persons do choose to use violence as a way of seeking revenge and/or notoriety continued to cause me considerable distress. My wife has remarked that I have an insatiable need to understand and discover the truth. If others had succumbed to the lies of the ego, what was stopping me from doing the same? After all, we are all created equal, and I believe we remain equal. But how was true self-acceptance, let alone self-love, possible in the face of any potential for violence? I think I now understand why some deeply wounded persons, full of anger and self-hatred, might seek revenge and attention through acts of violence. They don't realize that they are responding through their false and impermanent self, the ego. It's like they're saying, "You've taught me that I'm bad – I'll show you bad". Their innate beauty and goodness, which is eternal, has gone unrecognized by their significant others, and indeed by society as a whole, and therefore they are unable to recognize it in themselves. This is where our so-called justice system has gotten it sadly wrong. Criminals can never be truly reformed until they come to realize the truth of their innate goodness, because no one who knows who he/she really is could ever intentionally cause harm. We are created in the image of the Divine, and our true identity is the same as God's, which is love. The root cause of "evil" is ignorance, but the truth makes us free.

I think there are those who seem rather self-satisfied when others commit crimes, because they can then say to themselves: "I'm better than you". These are often the same people whose motivation for abstaining from doing "evil" is fear of God's judgment and spending an eternity in hell. All fear originates in the ego. If such persons really knew who they themselves are, they would also know who the criminals really are, and they would feel compassion rather than disdain and judgment. When we know ourselves, we do not require any external motivation to pursue goodness, for our true nature, the nature of Spirit, is love. Fear of being judged, as well as a need to judge others and feel

superior, is rooted in the ego that is unable to see the truth that we are all equally divine beings. The Ten Commandments are unnecessary for those who know who they are.

Chapter 28 – The Knock

I often slept (I use the term loosely) in an outbuilding (equipped with bunk beds and a washroom) so that my wife could sleep more peacefully. One snowy evening, I felt a need for an even greater separation from my family, and so I drove to our cottage, accompanied by our dog. After lighting the wood stove for warmth, I lay on the bed in the dark and allowed myself to feel a quite extraordinary pain – the pain of completely acknowledging the devastating consequences to my psyche from not having been loved by my mother for simply being me – her son. I had subconsciously recognized this from an early age and had struggled throughout my childhood to earn her love, not realizing that the unconditional love required by a child must be freely given and cannot be earned. Previously, I have described my experience of grieving and releasing the psychic pain caused by the physical abuse inflicted by my father. Although I had felt the stirrings of the pain related to my mother’s emotional abuse on several previous occasions over the course of my illness, I had never before allowed myself to fully experience it. But this time was different. The pain was truly excruciating, and I sobbed and moaned uncontrollably. As a child, I could not allow myself to feel it, because it could literally have killed me. Now, as an adult, the pain itself could no longer kill me, but still I did not know how I could possibly deal with it. I simply did not have the resources within me.

Suddenly I experienced another completely unexpected miracle. I heard two very distinct sharp knocks, like a fist on a door, coming from thin air directly in front of my face – “knock, knock”. Let me state here unequivocally that this was not a hallucination created by the ego, nor was it due to an organic brain disease or a side-effect of drugs (I had not been taking any psychotropic medication for some time). I knew right away that this was a communication from the Divine. It would be difficult for me to overstate its significance. What sprang immediately to mind was the Bible verse, “Knock, and it shall be opened to you”, and I responded desperately by mentally returning the knock. I lay awake pondering this event for the rest of the night, and drove home the next morning, still feeling rather down, but with a renewed sense of hope and determination.

Six years have passed, and I have been living in Europe with my wife for the past five of them. As I will later describe, I continued to experience some rather difficult periods of

struggle with my false self. As has always been the case, these were very valuable learning experiences for me. Daily walks with my dog, and occasional excursions with family into the mountains or to the seashore were very helpful. However, the miracle of Jesus (in his spiritual identity as the Christ) knocking on my door has been a truly profound blessing. Its real meaning, I am now convinced, is found in a different Bible passage (Revelation 3:20): “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my knock, and opens the door, I will come in and sup with him, and he with me”. This knock was my personal proof of the validity of Jesus, and of my own journey. The timing of the knock, I believe, was a message that Jesus knew the depths of my desperation, because he had been there. I believe that Jesus struggled, as many of us do, to undo the damage caused by his caregivers, and bring his innocent, loving and lovable inner child back to life to once again experience real joy on this earth. He discovered the truth about his own divine birthright, and he wanted others to discover this same truth about themselves, and to live it. He said, “Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”. He also told his disciples, “Let the little children come unto me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven”. I believe the real message behind the words “I am the way, the truth and the life - No one comes to the Father but by me” is not that we must accept Jesus as savior in order to gain entry to heaven after death, but that we are to do as he did – we are to imitate him in order to find heaven on earth. The conditions are not yet right in me for the complete expression of my inner child, but I am very hopeful.

As previously described, I have kept a dream journal and flashlight by my bedside for many, many years. Dreams are reflections of our subconscious, our inner self, and can tell us things that are hidden from the conscious ego. In Chapter 20, I wrote about the personal meaning of dreams. Some dreams are more significant than others. There are dreams that make no obvious sense, and then there are “big” dreams that seem to impart knowledge from beyond, from “cosmic consciousness” perhaps. I have had many dreams of being lost, or confused, or not being good enough, but I have not had a single dream in which I have made any attempt, or had any desire, to hurt another (other than in self-defence, and I have not had this type of self-defence dream in years). On the other hand, I have had several dreams in which I have felt deep compassion for other innocent persons who have been mortally wounded. This has helped reinforce my conviction that, contrary to what I was taught and swallowed (hook, line and sinker) as a child (i.e., that I was “by nature sinful and unclean”), I am innately good; as are you - as

is the worst criminal, including Hitler and other mass murderers⁸. The cause of all criminality is an absence of true self-love. It is as the Buddha said, “Whoever truly loves himself can never harm another”. I am not speaking here of narcissism. Indeed, narcissistic persons lack true self-love. The self-love that I am speaking about is the self-love we are born with, which is our natural condition in the absence of learned self-rejection. It is complete inner acceptance of who we really are, at our core, with no need for any sort of external validation, whether from others or through admiring our reflection. It is being at home in our own skin. When we truly love ourselves, we don’t need to look good (either to others or in a mirror) in order to feel good.

As I have previously stated, I do not believe that Jesus died as a sacrifice so that a judgmental masculine deity could forgive our sins. He lived his life on this earth expressing his divinity, which is also our true nature. He did die on the cross, but yet he lives, and he is, in a real sense, my savior, just not in the manner taught by traditional Christianity. Jesus demonstrated “the way, and the truth, and the life”, and he remains available to guide us. I am reminded of the dream I had shortly after my panic attacks started nearly 35 years ago. I was “swimming” in dense fog, feeling completely lost. Then I noticed a light on the distant horizon, and I started to swim desperately toward it, but I seemed to be making very little headway. However, I wasn’t alone – there was a figure alongside me, trying to guide me to the light. I believe this was Jesus, who has always been with me. Had he not knocked on my door that cold spring night in 2010, the past few years would certainly have been far more difficult. I have received an enormous amount of reassurance from that fully loving act, and I am truly grateful.

Jesus (in his spiritual identity as the Christ) is there to guide us, if we let him. But we have to do the work, just as he did. We are urged to “take up our cross” and follow him. We have to be willing to sacrifice our ego to the goal of Spirit. This process can be very frightening, because the ego fears death, but in fact it is a return to who we really are. It is a return to love and joy. If we are sincere in our quest, and are prepared to relinquish what the ego holds dear, we will be given the necessary guidance and support. Indeed, if our intentions are truly in the service of Spirit, we may even be given the power to perform miracles. Jesus said, “Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even *greater things than these*, because I am going to the Father”. The divine universal force of which we are all a part (call it God, Divine

8. For those interested in learning about the origins of Hitler and his hatred of the Jews, I recommend *For Your Own Good – Hidden Cruelty in Child-rearing and the Roots of Violence*, by Alice Miller.

Intelligence, Cosmic Consciousness, or whatever you are comfortable with), sets the stage, and we become the delivery vehicle for the miracle.

For those who are interested in finding out more about the real Jesus, I recommend reading up on the so-called Gnostic gospels (discussed in the Introduction), which were rejected for inclusion in the Bible at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 323. The exclusion of these books was a political decision, meant to strengthen the power-structured male-dominated Church hierarchy and entrench patriarchal dogma into the teachings of the Church. One of the first (and, in my opinion, best) books on this subject is Elaine Pagels' *The Gnostic Gospels*. As noted previously, I am particularly fascinated by the Gospel of Thomas. This has been called a "roadmap to enlightenment". Sayings attributed to Jesus by the Gospel of Thomas that are especially meaningful to me include: "My mother [gave me falsehood], but my true Mother gave me life", "Blessed are they who have been persecuted within themselves. It is they who have truly come to know the Father" and "Blessed is the man who has suffered and found life". However, as with virtually all "spiritual" books (certainly including the Bible), aspects that reflect the personal views of the writer, views distorted by the ego and therefore not representing ultimate truth, are found within the Gospel of Thomas. Sayings that I would place into this group include, "Every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of heaven". Jesus was actually a feminist, who had a special relationship with a female disciple named Mary Magdalene (see both the Gospel of Philip and the Gospel of Mary Magdalene for more on this relationship).

Jesus, I am convinced, never intended to found a new religion, with its own rules, creeds and hierarchy. Religions are power structures that try to convince us that we must look outside of ourselves for the answers to life's most important questions, when in fact the answers are within. Jesus came to show us the way back to true selves, wherein lies our joy. He said "The kingdom of God is within you". He also said, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full". He never claimed that he was God's sacrifice for our sins, and he certainly would not be pleased with much of what is being preached in fundamentalist "Christian" churches in his name. These churches teach that, in order to avoid God's judgment that would otherwise cast us into hell, we must believe that Jesus died for our sins and accept him, and him alone, as our savior. This is a fear-based teaching. What Jesus actually taught is that, in order to be truly saved (i.e., from our own egos), we must come to know who we truly are - innocent and loving children of the Universe, and part and parcel of the Divine. We must forgive all, and love everyone, unconditionally, beginning with ourselves. We must care for those who are less fortunate than ourselves, and that means sharing our wealth. We must treat others as our equals. And we will do these things, when we realize that in doing them, we are expressing who we really are. Anything done

as an expression of who we really are will bring joy to all concerned. If we find that doing these things does not bring us joy, it may be better to not attempt to do them at all. I subscribe to daily inspirational e-mails called "Tut – A Note from the Universe" (www.tut.com), and this is a recent message: "Robert, be on guard against those who help others in the name of sacrifice, selflessness, or altruism, instead of in the name of joy. Because usually, they don't really help all that much."

Chapter 29 – More Dream Messages

Not long after moving to Europe, I dreamed that I encountered two strangers, who directed me to enter the basement of the home of my childhood friend, where I would receive a special gift. As a child, I spent many happy hours with this friend and his family. In particular, I had appreciated the affection displayed by his mother. Nevertheless, in my dream, I was apprehensive going down the stairs, because the basement was very dark and I had no idea what I might find there. As I descended, I noticed a small shadowy figure in the corner of the room. My apprehension grew as I approached cautiously for a closer look. The figure turned to face me, and I was amazed to discover that I was staring at myself, as a little boy of about three years of age. I immediately felt a very deep love for this little boy, and lifted him in my arms. I asked him if he knew who I was, and he replied, “You’re my daddy”. Feeling a tremendous sense of responsibility for his wellbeing, I asked if he was okay, and he said that he was fine. However, I knew I could not hold him for long. I told him that I hoped to see him again soon, and gently placed him on the floor. When I did so, he went limp like a rag doll. I awoke, and marvelled at the depth of my love for my inner child. Although it is not a feeling I am yet able to maintain on a continuous or even regular basis, I know that this child is my divinity. In order to rediscover the kingdom of heaven within us (heaven on earth), we must let our inner child live through us.

A few years ago, I dreamed that I had a revelation concerning my father’s feelings about me when I was an infant. In my dream, I suddenly realized that my father had harboured a death wish for me. This realization shocked me awake. I love my father – he did the best he could. He was an honest man, but he suffered from low self-esteem and could get extremely angry, especially if he had been drinking. As I have previously described, I, more so than any of my siblings, bore the brunt of his anger. I had no idea of the degree to which the physical abuse I had experienced had affected my psyche until I self-compassionately gave myself permission to express and release the anguish some 20 years ago. As described at the end of Chapter 18, this was the single most cathartic event of my life.

As noted previously, I used to have frequent nightmares of being stalked and threatened by bears. As a child, I developed a fear of bears, likely due mainly to a couple of incidents that occurred at our summer cottage (see Chapter 25). I have read that bears in dreams can symbolize the mother and/or family in general. The bad dreams continued up until about three years ago, when I dreamed that I encountered a very large female bear. However, for the first time, I was not frightened, but rather I felt a surge of love for this creature. It was like the bear and I were old, dear friends. I thought

perhaps that signaled the end of my scary bear dreams, but just recently I again dreamed that I was being threatened by a large bear, and I cried out for help (perhaps explainable by my having just watched *The Revenant*). I also dreamed that a large polar bear was chasing my wife. I was so frightened for her safety that I cried aloud, which wakened both my wife and me. This dream awaits interpretation.

Just over two years ago, I dreamed that my older sister was chasing another vehicle in which her grandchildren were being held against their will, and were at risk of severe harm. I watched as she pulled up beside the driver of the vehicle she was chasing, who then drew a gun and aimed it at her. I feared for her life, and decided I had to take action. Looking around for some sort of shield, I located what resembled a metal garbage can lid. I held this in front of me and charged, shouting, at the man with the gun, intending to wrest the weapon from him. Then I woke up.

In my experience, emotionally-powerful dreams like this are meaningful, and so I told my sister about it.

A few weeks later, I received the awful news that my niece, who was my sister's eldest child, had died of an apparent overdose of narcotics. Her marriage had already become a victim of her struggles with addiction, and now her two young children were innocent victims as well. My wife and I flew back to Canada to support my sister and the rest of her family at this very difficult time. During our conversations, my sister told me that, when she herself had heard the terrible news, she thought of my dream warning.

Although I was not faced with the terrible trauma of having lost a child, I had felt quite close to my niece, and had tried to help her in her battle with alcohol and drugs. Her death precipitated another difficult time for me. I again had trouble sleeping and experienced quite rapid mood swings. At times, I feared my own thoughts and worried that I was a bad person. At other times, I felt loving and hopeful. I had battled through several bouts of depression in the past, and was comforted by remembering that I had always come out of it spiritually stronger than before. I knew it had a purpose.

Still, in the midst of this struggle, I had an extremely disturbing dream. There was a fence around me, protecting me from potential intruders who were seeking to gain entry. I felt very threatened, and desperately went around the perimeter seeking to ensure that all entry points were securely closed. In spite of my best efforts, I apparently made a "silly" oversight and the unwanted persons gained entry. They proceeded to castigate me for my carelessness, and I was certain that the consequences of my carelessness would be my own death. Feeling enormously disheartened and without hope, I awoke. I initially interpreted the dream as telling me that I had indeed made some sort of fatal mistake during my spiritual quest for wholeness. I felt so desperate

that I immediately woke my wife in order to talk things through with her. As she has done many times in the past, she reassured me that it was just a dream that reflected a fear in my ego. It is impossible for the ego to make any sort of mistake that could permanently separate oneself from one's true divine identity. The intruders were of my own creation, and I could learn from this dream and grow spiritually as a result.

I think that this dream was telling me that I had been trying too hard and was becoming too rigid in my pursuit of my true self. It was a case of the ego trying to use itself to find Spirit. In fact, Spirit cannot be found by the ego. Love is our true identity, and it is this identity that surfaces when ego is seen for the illusion that it is and dissipates.

Although I knew this to be true, the impact of the dream remained with me for some time, and the fear that I might never succeed in finding the "pearl of great price" occasionally resurfaced. Four memories of events that I have previously described helped ground me by reminding me of whom I really am, a completely loving and lovable divine being. The first was the realization that we are all powerful co-creators of our personal reality, the second was my hearing, while in a fully awake state, the Spirit of Jesus compassionately knocking at my door, the third was my dream of the loving encounter with my inner child in the basement of my childhood friend's home, and the fourth was my dream of risking my life to try to save my sister and her grandchildren.

Chapter 30 – Compassion is Key

Compassion is a very important aspect of love, and that includes self-compassion. As Buddha is reported to have said, “Unless your compassion includes yourself, it is incomplete”. For me, self-compassion has been crucial. We are self-compassionate when we finally acknowledge our childhood wounds, and that we did not deserve to have been hurt like that. We allow ourselves to grieve the pain of the past. This is instrumental in releasing the self-rejection that has been trapped for so long within us and that has affected our ability to live happily as adults. We are finally freed to love ourselves in the present. This is distinguished from self-pity, which keeps us focused on our present suffering, and does nothing to release the original cause of the pain.

As a result of having acknowledged and grieved my own childhood wounds, I am able to feel compassion for the suffering of my fellow human beings. This includes not only the obviously innocent, such as young children exposed to physical, sexual or emotional abuse, but also the adults who as a consequence of such abuse in childhood, have lost contact with their true selves and end up hurting themselves or others. No one is born into this world with the intention to cause harm. Unfortunately, abused children are robbed of their ability to love and to trust in the Universe, which is the source of joy. I think this is the greatest tragedy in the world today, and is the cause of virtually all conflict. This is what Jesus was referring to when he spoke harsh words to this effect, “If any man would cause one of these little ones to stray, it would be better for him if a millstone had been tied around his neck and he was cast into the sea”.

I believe that we all came into this world with an innate sense of our own magnificence and divinity – we were not born “humble”. One of the Psalms says, “You are gods, and all of you are children of the most high”. Jesus referred to this passage when his claims to divinity were challenged by his own people, answering “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods?’” Why should a child of God, part and parcel of the very force that created the universe, be humble? We certainly have reason to be thankful, but any humility would be false humility. On the other hand, I am not saying we should be proud. Pride inflates the ego through comparison with others. We are equally magnificent beings. Unfortunately, many caregivers, and society as a whole, are determined to “put children in their place”, and any attempts by children to express their true identity are largely met with scorn and derision or more serious forms of abuse. Children are regularly taught that they must both worship and fear God, as if God commands this of them. This distorts the image of the Divine within the child. God is infinitely gentle and entirely loving, and does not want to be either feared or worshipped, any more than Jesus wants to be feared or worshipped. God’s will, above all

else, is our wellbeing. If it is important to our happiness that we worship God, then that would be what God wants, but it is not required of us. God wants us to know and enjoy his/her closeness. Do loving parents want their children to worship them? Recognizing the goodness of God, in whose image we are created, and enjoying the gift of life, naturally leads us to love and appreciate God. God does not require us to be grateful (for unconditional love requires nothing in return), but gratitude comes naturally when we realize the truth of what we have been given. Like love, the experience of gratitude is its own reward.

Children raised in a fundamentalist environment are exposed to the false doctrine of “original sin”, which teaches them that they are born “sinful and unclean”. They are taught that they must believe certain things and act certain ways or they will be judged and condemned by God. Fear is instilled in their vulnerable hearts through teaching them that there is an evil creature called the devil that wants to steal their souls away. This is horrendous religious abuse. Any judgment we imagine that God might pass on us or others is a reflection of the fear in our own ego. Would loving parents allow their children to be condemned to everlasting torment in hell? The intent may be to stop children from “getting too big for their britches”, but the result is low self-esteem, indeed even self-hatred. This self-rejection can manifest in physical and/or psychological illness, possibly leading to anti-social behavior and criminality. As Anita Moorjani describes in her fascinating book “Dying to be Me”, it was her deathbed realization of her own power and magnificence that allowed her to self-compassionately heal from terminal cancer. She has made it her mission to help others understand the importance of unconditional self-love above all else. Learning to love others begins with learning to love ourselves.

I also feel increased compassion for animals. Last summer, we rescued a fledgling chimney sweep that had evidently fallen from the roof of a house and landed on the sidewalk, unable to fly. We could not return it to its nest, so we brought it home, in the hope of nurturing it long enough for it to take flight (chimney sweeps spend virtually their entire adult lives in the air, except when nesting). We prepared a small shelter that provided protection from potential predators and the elements, and gave “little George” food and water, based on recommendations we found online. He seemed to be thriving. However, on the morning of the third day, we found him dead. I was surprised by the depth of my grief, and how badly I had wanted him to live and experience the joy of flight. Not long after, I spotted a small rat in our compost. Without much thought, I put some commercial product containing rat poison in a bowl and placed it in the compost container. When I went to deposit some leftovers into the compost a few days later, the rat was crawling along the ground, clearly suffering. I felt awful. I couldn’t bring myself to dispatch the poor creature, and decided instead to provide it with water in the slim

hope that it might recover. The next day, it was dead. I will never again try to poison one of God's creatures.

The other night I dreamed that I was sharing some laughs with my brother and a family friend. It started out with the friend recounting how his own father (deceased) had had a self-deprecating sense of humor. He used to say, for example, that his need for an alarm clock to tell him when it was time to get up was even greater than for those who were obviously mentally-challenged. I commented that "at least he didn't say he felt like shit". This struck me as quite amusing, and was apparently even funnier to an older woman who was passing by and overheard my comment and laughed out loud.⁹ Then, as my dream continued, my brother said something that made me laugh, but I don't recall what it was. What I do remember is that my laugh sounded like a dog's bark, and hearing my own funny laugh made me laugh even harder, to the point that I was crying from laughter. I tried to say, "I sound like Cindy" (Cindy was the family dog when my brother and I were children), but I was laughing so hard I couldn't even get the words out. I woke up, knowing that the joy of laughing at yourself because you know that nothing can take away from who you really are is a great way to start the day!

The Universe is a determined teacher, and relentlessly leads us to the realization of our true identity. Love is behind everything, even those circumstances and events that seem to hurt us. When we understand that, our resistance softens and our suffering is eased.

9. To add some perspective, as described in Chapter 3, one of the first things a psychiatrist told me over 30 years ago, when I was desperately searching for relief from panic attacks, was that I thought I was "shit".

Chapter 31 - Hard Truths about Islam

During the course of my research, I discovered that there are two principal factors that operate to conceal the dark side of the religion founded by the Prophet Muhammad. The first factor is that, when discussing the nature of their religion, Muslim apologists, who may be credentialed academics^{10,11} or even media personalities, are often less than truthful. For example, they may insist that “Islam is a religion of peace”, or “Muslims are forbidden to lie or deceive”, or “female genital mutilation is not at all a Muslim problem”, or “Islam does not call for the subjugation or killing of non-Muslims”, or “women are not second class citizens in Islamic culture”¹², or “Islam does not advocate the eradication of the Jewish people”, or “‘honor killing’ is not condoned by Islamic law”, or “brutal acts carried out by ISIS and similar groups are based on ‘ancient tribal customs’ that have no basis in Islam”¹³, or “there is no religious compulsion in Islam” (as if forced conversion does not exist).¹⁴ Sometimes these apologists will make reference to the Quran to attempt to back up their false claims, but conveniently ignore the Sunnah (Islamic scripture consisting of the Hadith and the Sira, which collectively represent the teachings, deeds and sayings of Muhammad that are ideals and models to be followed by Muslims). Or they may be quick to cite loving passages in the earlier parts of the Quran but neglect to point out that they have been superseded (through the uniquely Islamic doctrine of abrogation) by later unloving passages. They may

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10. Saudi Arabia, a fundamentalist and oppressive Muslim state (see next footnote), is largely responsible for the establishment and ongoing funding of Islamic studies departments in American universities. It is also a major donor to CAIR (Council on American and Islamic Relations) and other Muslim organizations in the U.S.
 11. The degree and vulgarity of anti-Semitism displayed by faculty of Middle East studies departments in many American universities is disturbing; see: <http://www.campus-watch.org/article/id/14853>.
 12. The unfathomable inequality of the sexes in Islamic doctrine is clearly elucidated at <http://www.answering-islam.org/Authors/Newton/women.html>.
 13. A 2014 poll published in the Saudi-owned newspaper *al-Hayat* [found that 92 percent of Saudis](http://www.al-hayat.com/2014/09/15/92-percent-of-saudis-believe-that-isis-conforms-to-the-values-of-islam-and-islamic-law/) believe that ISIS “conforms to the values of Islam and Islamic law.” See: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/09/15/we-need-to-talk-about-islam-s-jihad-problem.html>.
 14. Muslims are disproportionately represented in Western prisons, and forced conversions of non-Muslims by Muslim gangs have been reported. See: <http://www.islamist-watch.org/21323/islam-in-british-prisons>.

themselves be relatively enlightened to the point where they don't accept all of the unloving commands in the Quran, but in that case they should own up to this rather than make false claims about Islamic scripture or related matters in a deliberate attempt to mislead. And if they really do not know the truth about the teachings of Islam, they should not be putting themselves forward as authorities.

A case in point is the popular Muslim-American academic Reza Aslan, who has falsely claimed to have a Ph.D. in Western Religions and who, during a July 2013 Fox News interview concerning his book "Zealot" (see below), falsely claimed to be a "Professor of Religion, including the New Testament". In fact, he holds a Ph.D. in Sociology (dissertation title: "Global Jihadism as a Transnational Social Movement: A Theoretical Framework") and is an Associate Professor of Creative Writing at the University of California, Riverside.^{15,16} Aslan has unjustifiably characterized several of his most vocal critics (notably Sam Harris¹⁷, who has a Ph.D. in Neuroscience) as being unqualified to criticise Islam because they do not have appropriate academic credentials. During an interview with the Huffington Post, Aslan stated that "the very first thing that Muhammad did was outlaw slavery".¹⁸ This is, at best, extremely misleading and, at worst, a bald-faced lie. Muhammad did decree that a Muslim could not enslave another Muslim, but enslavement of infidels (including sex slavery) is pervasive in the Quran.¹⁹

Aslan's best-seller "No God but God: the Origins, Evolution and Future of Islam" misleadingly glosses over some very problematic aspects of Islamic doctrine. He apparently cannot bring himself to admit, at least publicly, that some of the hateful and harmful commands in the Quran are the cause of real problems.²⁰ His refusal to state the facts could reflect an unscholarly obstinacy in defense of his religion, or it could possibly be because to do so would be tantamount to apostasy, potentially punishable by

15. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2014/10/12/reza-aslan-scoffs-that-you-can-only-be-a-credible-public-atheist-if-youre-a-religious-scholar-with-a-degree/>.

16. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/wwjtd/2015/08/response-to-matthew-facciani-about-reza-aslans-credentials/>.

17. <http://www.samharris.org/blog/item/can-liberalism-be-saved-from-itself>.

18. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/15/reza-aslan-isis-muslim_n_5992110.html.

19. <http://www.jihadwatch.org/2014/10/reza-aslan-the-very-first-thing-that-muhammad-did-was-outlaw-slavery>.

20. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2014/10/22/reza-aslan-people-dont-derive-their-values-and-morals-from-religion/>.

death. To add insult to injury, Aslan has utilized his creative writing skills to the full in his latest book “Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth”, in which he makes unsupportable statements that present an untrue picture of Jesus and his mission. His duplicity concerning both Christianity and Islam is exposed clearly and eloquently by James Beverley and Craig Evans in their new book “Getting Jesus Right – How Muslims Get Jesus and Islam Wrong”.²¹ This book also presents a detailed analysis of the origins of Islam and its holy writings, and effectively challenges the claims of Islam itself on this matter. It is disturbing to me that Aslan has signed a motion picture deal concerning “Zealot”, and he was also offered his own CNN TV show exploring various religions.²²

The second factor operating to hide the full truth regarding Islamic ideology is that both politicians and representatives of the mainstream media are apparently so concerned about being labelled bigoted or “racist” that they often act as if they have blinders on.²³ Islam is not a race - it is a political and religious ideology. Cries of “Islamophobia”²⁴ should not be allowed to silence legitimate criticism. Unfortunately for the truth, the liberal media will often either accept what Muslim apologists say at face value, without attempting to verify the facts on their own, or they will refuse to publish accounts that paint Islam in an unfavorable light.²⁵ This is dangerous for the future of an open and honest society.

21. Beverley and Evans are both Christians who are obviously eager to defend their faith, which they seem to manage without resorting to pure conjecture or outright lies. However, I strongly disagree with their stance on the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, to which they assign virtually no importance relative to the traditional Gospels.

22. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2015/03/11/cnn-gives-reza-aslan-his-own-tv-show-on-religion-working-title-believer/>. The few episodes that aired portrayed other religions in a largely negative manner, and the show was abruptly canceled following a profane anti-Trump tweet by Aslan.

23. Some Hollywood personalities also have blinders on. See <http://www.frontpagemag.com/fpm/242767/ben-affleck-portrait-islams-clueless-apologetics-raymond-ibrahim>.

24. “Islamophobia” is an invented term designed as a weapon to advance a totalitarian cause by stigmatizing critics and silencing them. See: <http://www.discoverthenetworks.org/viewSubCategory.asp?id=777>. For a complete and rather troubling expose, see: <http://www.discoverthenetworks.org/Articles/Islamophobia.pdf>.

25. <http://www.jihadwatch.org/2014/10/reza-aslan-the-very-first-thing-that-muhammad-did-was-outlaw-slavery>.

I find it alarming that proponents of Islam are being increasingly favored by various institutions at the expense of valid criticism and even constitutional rights. As a case in point, the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) has been running a deceptive billboard campaign in a number of U.S. cities. The billboards proclaim that “Muhammad believed in peace, social justice, women’s rights”, and provide a phone number to find out more about Islam. However, as we have learned, Islam’s holy books generally paint the opposite picture, which fundamentalist groups such as ISIS and Boko Haram use to justify their terrorism. Muhammad may have started out proclaiming noble ideals, but he ended up being an oppressive and brutal warlord. When the American Freedom Defense Initiative (AFDI) attempted to counter this campaign of misinformation by running their own ads which truthfully stated that “Muhammad believed in war, denial of rights to women, denial of rights to non-Muslims, deceit of unbelievers”, the ad was rejected. AFDI submitted a new ad, using Muhammad’s own quotes from the Quran: “I have been made victorious through terror”, “I have seen that the majority of the dwellers of hell-fire were you (women)”, and “I have been commanded to fight against people”. This ad was also rejected. Claiming (justifiably, in my opinion) that this is a violation of their First Amendment rights, AFDI has taken the matter to court.

The Muslim Students Association (MSA) is actively promoting Islamism on campuses across North America.²⁶ The MSA is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood (considered a terrorist organization and now outlawed in Egypt), with ties to the Palestinian group Hamas and other terrorist organizations. Originally financed largely by Saudi Arabia, several MSA alumni themselves are known to have become directly involved in terrorist activity. The MSA’s Pledge of Allegiance (recorded January 2011 at UCLA)²⁷ is built upon the credo of the Muslim Brotherhood, and goes as follows:

Allah is my Lord;
Islam is my life;
The Quran is my guide;
The Sunnah is my practice;
Jihad is my spirit;
Righteousness is my character;

26. <http://counterjihadreport.com/tag/muslim-students-association/>.

27. <https://creepingsharia.wordpress.com/2011/03/19/muslim-student-association-pledge-of-allegiance-jihad-is-my-spirit-i-will-die-to-establish-islam-video/>.

Paradise is my goal;
I enjoin what is right;
I forbid what is wrong;
I will fight against oppression;
And I will die to establish Islam.

Clearly there are some noble sounding phrases, such as enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, but the potential difficulties for non-Muslims are apparent when one considers the many unloving passages in the Quran and the darker side of Muhammad's character presented in the Sunnah. Islam is founded on the belief that the entire Quran and Muhammad's example are perfect and beyond reproach. Assuming that Allah's hatred of unbelievers (i.e., all non-Muslims), and the hostility and outright violence to infidels displayed by Muhammad during his conquests, are considered as "right" by members of the Muslim Students Association (as indeed they must be for all true Muslims), we obviously have a problem - one which is greatly magnified by the last line of the pledge.

Any claim that jihad is un-Islamic, or that it refers only to an inner struggle and not to armed aggression, is simply not supportable. Some Muslims who are willing to admit that violent jihad is promoted in the Quran try to justify it with reference to the Christian Crusades of history. However, there really is no comparison.²⁸ The spread of Islam from Mecca to eventually encompass virtually all of the Middle East, North Africa, much of southern Europe and a large part of Southeast Asia was accomplished via the sword, with millions being murdered or enslaved in the process.²⁹ The Crusades were launched with the goal of freeing formerly Christian lands that had been conquered through Muslim jihad³⁰, although Jews and heretics were also targeted by so-called Christians who did not understand Jesus' message.

Muslims in the West do not yet have the means to wage all-out jihad. Rather, what is happening is "stealth jihad" (or "soft" jihad), whose goal is the eventual imposition of Sharia law over every region of the earth by non-confrontational means. Under the banners of "tolerance" and "civil rights," stealth jihadists introduce, in piecemeal

28. https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=307&v=I_To-cV94Bo.

29. <http://www.politicalislam.com/why-we-are-afraid-a-1400-year-secret/>.

30. <http://www.intercollegiatereview.com/index.php/2014/05/13/you-thought-the-crusades-were-evil-until-you-read-this/>.

fashion, elements of Sharia into Western societies and then demand that non-Muslims make allowance for those elements.³¹ Moreover, stealth jihadists smear those who dare to discuss the negative aspects of Sharia (and Islam) as racists and Islamophobes. Ultimately, stealth jihadists seek - by exploiting the West's respect for minority rights and cultures - to transform pluralistic societies into Islamic states and to gradually sweep away Western notions of legal equality, freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, and more. In addition to the afore-named ICNA and MSA, groups that are actively promoting stealth jihad in North America include the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the Muslim American Society. Both of these groups, while not designated as terrorist organizations in the U.S. (although there is strong evidence that they are linked to the Muslim Brotherhood), have in fact been designated as such by the United Arab Emirates.³²

Islam is the world's fastest growing religion.³³ Concern regarding its spread in the West is not Islamophobia – it is Islamorealism. History has shown what happens to other cultures and beliefs when Islam gains a foothold and is allowed to disseminate misinformation and grow unchecked. A recent poll in Denmark found that 77.2 percent of Danish Muslims agreed that “the Quran's instructions should be followed completely”.³⁴ That is a marked increase from 2006, when 62.4 percent agreed. Similarly, a poll in the U.S. found that slightly more than one-half of all U.S. Muslims would prefer to have the choice to be governed by some form of Sharia law.³⁵ Those who value freedom have a responsibility to challenge Islamic propaganda. Failure to do so could result in the eventual loss of basic human rights, especially for women, with our children's children possibly being forced to convert to Islam or face terrible consequences.

I urge readers who are still not convinced of the barbarity of much of Muhammad's message, and the danger to our freedom posed by orthodox Islam, to do some research of their own. There is a plethora of online resources (some of which are cited in this

31. For examples of stealth jihad, see <http://www.discoverthenetworks.org/viewSubCategory.asp?id=815>.

32. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/11/17/why-the-u-a-e-is-calling-2-american-groups-terrorists/>.

33. <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/04/02/living/pew-study-religion/>.

34. <http://www.thelocal.dk/20151013/danish-muslims-more-devout-than-in-years-past>.

35. <http://www.jihadwatch.org/2015/10/51-of-u-s-muslims-want-sharia-60-of-young-muslims-more-loyal-to-islam-than-to-u-s>.

chapter). One caution I would urge is that many of the sites that expose the amorality of Islamic ideology are fundamentalist Christian, and may themselves take liberties with the truth and overstate their case (some of these sites claim that Islam is the “beast” of Revelation). Further, based on viewer comments, it is clear that many of the anti-Islam sites unfortunately inflame hatred (rooted in fear) of Muslims, when the real enemy is Islamic ideology, into which Muslims themselves have been brainwashed. A site I have no hesitation in recommending is www.samharris.org. Dr. Harris (who, as previously noted, has been unfairly criticized by Reza Aslan) is an atheist, so he cannot reasonably be accused of having an opposing agenda (i.e., the promotion of Christianity at the “expense” of Islam). His most recent book, written in collaboration with a moderate Muslim (Maajid Hawaz), is titled “Islam and the Future of Tolerance – A Dialogue”. The book effectively argues that beliefs matter, motivation matters, religious doctrines matter, and increasing secularism in the Islamic world is essential if Islamic oppression is going to recede. Although it falls short of the criticism of Muhammad himself that will be required before true reform can be effected within Islam, the book is nevertheless a strong primer that everyone who buys into the hype of “Islamophobia” should read. It is okay and sometimes necessary to criticize religion.

In my view, the best hope for change lies with Muslim women. Unfortunately, a Muslim woman living in a Muslim country who comes to the realization that change is needed also realizes that it is virtually impossible to effect such change from within her own country and religion. The gender apartheid of Islam is based on the Quran and the Hadith (Muhammad’s example), neither of which can be successfully criticized from within orthodox Islam. To attempt such criticism is to invite at best, scorn, and at worst, death. The only recourse for such enlightened Muslim women is to flee to the West. This has been the case for Malala Yousafzai, Nonie Darwish (founder of Former Muslims United³⁶ and author of “Cruel and Usual Punishment: The Terrifying Global Implications of Islamic Law”), and Ayaan Hirsi Ali (author of “Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now” and other best-sellers critical of Islam). Another former Muslim woman courageously arguing for change is Sarah Haider (a co-founder of Ex-Muslims of North America³⁷), who was born in Pakistan but was raised in Texas. However, even in the West, calls for change are met with very stiff opposition from within the established Muslim community, and the risk of retribution remains real. Women seeking reform who choose to continue to identify as Muslim, such as former

36. <http://formermuslimsunitied.org/the-islamic-tactic-of-terror-and-lure/>.

37. <http://www.exmna.org/>.

Wall Street Journal reporter Asra Nomani (born in India but raised in West Virginia) also face stiff opposition from their fellow Muslims in the West. Muslim women who have felt that they have no option but to renounce Islam, and become either Christian or atheist/agnostic, are targets of both Muslims and non-Muslim Islamic propagandists within the liberal Western media. Ms. Ali has established the AHA Foundation, which fights misogynistic Muslim practices (rooted in the Quran or Hadith) including female genital mutilation, forced marriage and honor violence ongoing in the U.S. She is being roundly criticized by Muslims and some liberal media for calling for a whole-scale reformation in Islam, arguing, among other things, that Muslims should rethink the status of Muhammad as infallible and question whether the Quran is truly the word of God. A recent article by an American Muslim writer for Time magazine³⁸ flatly rejects the possibility of any such reformation, stating “That’s not going to happen, not in a faith whose bedrock creed is that ‘There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his Messenger.’” Unfortunately, this appears to rule out any possibility of real change.

As I was completing this chapter, I came across an essay published in Canada’s National Post newspaper, written by a young Canadian prior to his death while fighting with Kurdish forces against ISIS in northern Syria. His sacrifice in defense of freedom was honored in the Ontario legislature. The essay is titled “We Are All on the Front Lines”.³⁹ ISIS battlefield strength has thankfully been severely decimated since this essay was published, but it remains so germane to the topic at hand that I am reprinting the entire text, as follows:

First, let me get the obvious out of the way: I do not expect anyone to agree that it is a wise course of action to volunteer to fight against ISIS. Would-be terrorists from all over the world, including Canada (including some I probably went to school with) are flooding into the Middle East by the thousands. They’ve got the numbers and the weapons to win this war, so to go stand on the other side of the battlefield is objectively insane.

I also respect the viewpoint that the last thing any westerners ought to do is get involved in another Middle Eastern conflict. We’ve already done tremendous damage to the region; the rise of ISIS is a direct result of foreign policy blunders

38. <http://time.com/3825345/what-ayaan-hirsi-ali-doesnt-get-about-islam/>.

39. <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/we-are-all-on-the-front-lines-canadian-reportedly-killed-fighting-isil-wrote-essay-about-why-he-went-to-war>.

by the last two Presidents (at least!). If you think that for the good of the region we should all sit this one out, I can understand that. But I can't agree.

I'm prepared to give my life in the cause of averting the disaster we are stumbling towards as a civilization.

The cause of a free and independent Kurdistan is important enough to be worth fighting for all on its own. The Kurdish people are the largest ethnicity in the world without a country of their own, and have suffered enormously under the boot-heel of regional powers. Now they are under threat from another genocidal foe, yet they have not given themselves over to the joint manias of religious fanaticism and suicide murder. This should be enough reason for the West to give them whatever support they need in such a time of crisis. But there is an even better reason.

For decades now, we have been at war. This war has been unacknowledged by our leaders, but enthusiastically proclaimed by our enemies. This war has produced casualties on every continent, in nearly every nation on earth. It has had periods of intense fighting, followed by long stretches of rearming and regrouping, but it has never ended. It is not even close to being won. Someday historians will look back and marvel at how much effort we put into deceiving ourselves about the nature of this conflict, and wonder how we convinced ourselves that it was not even taking place. This war may have started in 1979, or earlier; 2001 increased the intensity of the conflict; the withdrawal from Iraq kicked off the latest phase. Like the American Civil War, World War II, and the Cold War, this war is about ideas as much as it is about armies. Slavery, fascism, and communism were all bad ideas which required costly sacrifice before they were finally destroyed. In our time, we have a new bad idea: Theocracy.

We live in a society that's grown around a very basic philosophical principle: That the world around us can be understood using our senses and our minds. From this simple insight comes the moral revelation that all human beings are equal in this capacity, and therefore equal in dignity. This radical idea was the turning point in human history, before which all civilizations had been dominated by the idea that class hierarchies and racism were perfectly justified according to the revealed wisdom of ancient texts, and sanctified by holy men with a special relationship to some 'divine' power. We began to see justice as something which could be measured by its effects on living people, not as superstition.

This idea has been under threat ever since its inception, because it's the most powerful force for human emancipation that has ever been, and so it is a deadly threat to the privileged. It is also a threat to those who fear a world where human

beings must be the judges of our own actions. Some prefer to subordinate their own morality to a doctrine they know they can never fully understand; this is more agreeable than facing the thought that we are alone in this world. This terror at our own freedom, and hatred for the mind that makes its realization inescapable, has given birth to movements that promise to give us back our comforting delusions. Communism and fascism were both answers to the problem of human freedom. These ideas were defeated. But always in the background the germ of these ideas was aggressively breeding. Theocracy isn't just as dangerous as fascism; it's the model of fascism, and all totalitarianisms. Communism said 'instead of god, the Party.' Fascism said, 'instead of god, the Nation!' Theocracy simply says 'God.'

There is nothing uniquely Islamic about this trend, except that it just so happens that the most violent proponents of theocracy today happen to be Muslim. In the 1500's, it was the Christians. By hard fighting and a brave defense of our principles, the forces of secularism managed to wrestle control of European society away from the theocrats, and we have been fighting the regressive movements that have tried to take their place ever since. The Muslim world has been dominated by theocratic politics for decades now, and that war has overflowed to engulf the rest of the world.

We are all on the front lines of this conflict, whether we know it or not. We can measure the casualties not only in the body counts of deadly terror attacks, 'mass demonstrations,' embassy assaults and assassinated artists; we can also measure it in the terror produced among cartoonists, satirists, publishers and booksellers, news media and educators who are being prevented from doing their necessary work of maintaining the machinery of the enlightenment. Not only have we all been threatened; in many ways we are all already casualties of this war.

Because of our beliefs, we live in the most racially inclusive, sexually liberated, and anti-imperialist society which has ever existed in human history, and to teach young people anything different is a criminal act of intellectual violence.

The stance of pacifists and the appeasement left on this issue is not tolerance, but ironically, what it claims to oppose: fearmongering, and even 'Islamophobia,' since it betrays their utter terror of offending the sensibilities of immigrant communities and the so-called 'community leaders' who are presumed to give them their marching orders. Their pre-emptive apologism for barbarity betrays a deep contempt for the character of immigrant Muslims, since it presumes that they enjoy their mental oppression and prefer the moral stagnation of sharia law and the hadith to the pleasures of an open, cosmopolitan, secular society.

I have met plenty of self-described Muslims who have never even read the Qur'an, don't care what it has to say about the role of women or the punishment for blasphemy, who don't know or care how Muhammad treated prisoners of war, or how he dealt with dissenting poets in Mecca. That's fine. I personally wish they would learn a bit about those last points and take more responsibility for the company they keep, but the point is that they are not an active part of the problem. Yet elements of our government are perfectly willing to accept that thuggishness is something we must automatically and un-judgmentally expect from Muslims, that it is US who must accommodate ourselves to THEM. What we need here is more historical education, not cultural sensitivity.

The war that is ongoing in the Middle East is a war against theocracy. In many ways it is a civil war, and I believe more depends on its outcome than anyone in power is prepared to face. But it is also a distant front in a civil war within Western society, since we are sending troops to fight on both sides. And here the stakes may be even greater. Our war is not just about theocracy; it is between those who still believe in the enlightenment, that self-determination is the most basic and most crucial of all human rights, that the first duty of every man in society is to defend the mechanisms by which we make ourselves free; and those who ultimately lack the capacity to believe in anything. These people have been corrupted by the masochistic fables circulated by leftists and identity politicians that tell us Western society is inherently racist, inherently sexist, and inherently imperialist, when it is Western society which pioneered the ideas that racism, sexism, and imperialism might be a problem in the first place.

Because of our beliefs, we live in the most racially inclusive, sexually liberated, and anti-imperialist society which has ever existed in human history, and to teach young people anything different is a criminal act of intellectual violence. And the crisis we face today is the direct result of this 'progressive' thinking: we are now under threat by those who take advantage of the masochism and apathy fostered by the left to recruit people who will take a violently affirmative ideology over nihilistic pessimism, even or especially if that means committing atrocities that would make the average 'imperialist' vomit. Those who contribute to this environment of moral decay and vulnerability are the useful idiots of jihad and fellow travelers of theocracy, and it is the duty of thinking persons to oppose their influence by every means at our disposal.

I was raised in a fundamentalist religious environment. If today I have any intellectual or spiritual existence worth fighting for, it is because it was impossible for the religious forces in my life to have their way and shield me from the assaults

of reason and conscience. They could teach me that evolution was a lie, but they couldn't prevent me from reading about it or prohibit the public schools from teaching it. They could tell me blasphemy was a sin, but they couldn't prevent me from sneaking Monty Python and South Park. The mechanisms of society, in other words, gave me the tools by which I could make myself free. They saved my life. Who safeguards the social machinery now? Only an overbred political elite and intelligentsia who burble about the urgent need to never give offense. This is not only a disgraceful failure; it is a national emergency.

Like theocracy today, fascism used to be an international movement, with fascist parties in every western country. Then World War II happened. Nazi Germany became the standard-bearer of fascism, and when it was crushed, the movement wasn't just destroyed, it was discredited for all time. Ironically, the rise of ISIS gives us the same chance now. We have the ability to eradicate jihadism in our lifetime. The terrorists' own playbook sees the taking and holding of territory as a necessary step to discredit Western democracy and prove that the Caliphate is a real political possibility in the 21st century. We have to prove that it is not. And like we did with Nazi Germany, we must crush it with overwhelming, unrelenting force. We have to take it while the mass graves are still fresh, while there are still survivors to give testimony to the atrocities they've witnessed, while the murderers are still around to be put on trial. Only by destroying ISIS without mercy can we discredit the idea, and force the would-be jihadists and fellow-travelers to give up their insane dreams of a new Mecca and join the modern world.

I'm prepared to give my life in the cause of averting the disaster we are stumbling towards as a civilization. A free Kurdistan would be good enough cause for any internationalist, but we are fortunate enough to be able to risk our necks for something more important and more righteous than anything we've faced in generations. With some fortitude and guts, we can purge the sickness that's poisoning our society, and come together to defeat this ultimate evil. I've been fighting this battle in one way or another for my entire life. I hope for success. The rest is in the hands of the gods.

When I first read this essay, I was struck by the strength of the convictions expressed regarding the dangers of Islamic theocracy, but I was also concerned by the exhortation to crush ISIS with “unrelenting force” and “without mercy”, just as Hitler had been crushed. However, the comparison with Nazi Germany is actually not off the mark. Islamism is indeed a kind of fascism. Hitler himself expressed admiration for Islam (calling it a “religion of men”), and their shared hatred of Jews is undeniable. There was

a great deal of collaboration between Nazi Germany and Islamists leading up to and during WWII.⁴⁰ Where would we be today had Nazi Germany not been defeated?

I will end this chapter with a simple example, to which I believe most non-Muslims in the West can relate, of the manner in which significant parts of Islamic ideology are incompatible with Western values. Based on certain passages in Islamic scripture, dogs are considered to be ritually unclean. Muslim clerics preach that no one should keep a dog as a pet (i.e., only dogs used for hunting or for guarding livestock or crops are permitted⁴¹). This has led to several documented instances of Muslim cab-drivers in the West refusing to carry pet or guide dogs. When I consider how dogs have been (and continue to be) such an important part of my life – how much joy they have brought me through their loyalty, playfulness and unconditional love – I can only feel compassion for Muslims, especially Muslim children, who have missed out on experiencing the companionship of “man’s best friend” because Muhammad didn’t like dogs.⁴²

Fundamentalist Muslims, I believe, are largely victims of their own religion. Let’s not allow our children’s children to become victims as well.

40. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/book-review-ataturk-in-the-nazi-imagination-by-stefan-ihrig-and-islam-and-nazi-germanys-war-by-david-motadel-1421441724>.

41. <http://islamqa.info/en/69777>.

42. Muhammad was cunning. He may well have decided that dogs should not be pets because their loyalty, devotion and willingness to defend their keepers could interfere with his aims of conquest and be at loggerheads with the absolute submission to Allah and adherence to the Quran demanded by his religion.

Chapter 32 – Goodbye to Guilt

My wife and I began to make preparations for a visit to my hometown in Canada. The purpose of the trip was to celebrate my brother's milestone birthday and official retirement. However, all four of our children and their significant others would also be there, as would my two sisters and their husbands, so we were very much looking forward to a family reunion. We were planning to stay at the family cottage, where we would hopefully enjoy warm summer weather, our Finnish sauna, and daily swims.

A few days prior to our departure, I dreamed that I was alone in a strange room with my mother (who passed away several years ago). She was having a panic attack and said she couldn't breathe. She asked me to call her own mother (i.e., my grandmother, long deceased). I told my mother that there was nothing to worry about, and that she should try to relax by breathing from her abdomen. I left the room to chat with someone else. When I returned after a brief absence, I couldn't see Mom. I called for her, concerned, and then looked down and discovered her apparently "swallowed" by the floor, staring straight up, with a look of terror frozen onto her face. I was extremely distraught and cried out "Mom, Mom, I love you Mom (out loud, so that my wife heard me). At the same time, I felt great compassion for my Mom. Then I awoke. I realized right away that this was a significant dream for me. It was the first time in my memory that I really felt such love and compassion for my mother. As I have described in the first part of this book, when I first came to understand the extent to which her inability to love me unconditionally and instill in me self-love and trust in the Universe had contributed to my illness, I wanted to blame her. To me, this seemed important for my healing because otherwise I felt that I would blame myself and just perpetuate and perhaps worsen my depression. Although I later came to realize on an intellectual level that my mother had done the best she could, I still had difficulty feeling love and compassion for her. About 10 years ago I had suggested to my therapist that I should really try to love and forgive her, but he said that it was too soon for this. This dream was telling me that I do love and forgive her, and I am grateful for having been given that realization.

However, it seems that my ego was still looking for someone to blame, and that someone was me. The stress of travel and a nasty chest cold made me less able to challenge the ego's accusations. I became frightened of my own thoughts, which made me feel more and more guilty, and I couldn't sleep. There was quite a rapid downward spiral, and I and my wife became concerned that I might need to be hospitalized again. The knowledge that we had purchased insurance helped calm me a bit, but obviously I didn't want to spoil the upcoming celebration. What really helped me get through this difficult time was remembering the healing truths that I had learned during my previous bouts of

depression. I knew that what I was experiencing was an ego condition that did not reflect who I really am. What also helped was reminding myself that no one has ever died from sleep deprivation brought on by anxiety and depression – that eventually I would become so exhausted that I would simply have to sleep. Still, it was an intensely arduous few days, and I became desperate for real and lasting relief. I thought deeply about my circumstances, and I suddenly realized that I needed to really acknowledge the fact that I was not guilty, regardless of my thoughts or even my actions. Like my mother - like everyone - I have always done my best given my current state of understanding. And so I started repeating "not guilty", over and over in my mind. The effect was almost magical. My depression lifted, and I fell deeply asleep without medication. When I awoke refreshed the next morning, I was so grateful. To me, this episode was a powerful demonstration of how our thoughts can both create and heal mental illness.

The following day, while strolling through the beautiful new waterfront park in my hometown, I had a moment of deep insight in which I understood the extent to which my brother, too, had been affected by guilt. My prayer for him, and for all of you, is to experience the healing that comes from truly knowing that one is not guilty, not only in God's eyes, but in one's own.

Chapter 33 – Innocence and Goodness

My wife and I made a return visit to Canada to see our beautiful new granddaughter. Staring into her completely innocent eyes triggered something, and I became depressed again and could not sleep. Similar to my previous experiences, my depression was largely driven by obsessive negative thinking about myself. However, my previous experiences had also taught me that these "bad" thoughts had no basis in ultimate reality. I knew they were simply the product of an ego that had been deeply wounded in childhood, and that in God's eyes I was as innocent and as lovable as my dear granddaughter. I knew that I would always be as God had made me. Acknowledging the truth of my own absolute innocence, the state in which I was born and which could never be taken from me no matter what happened, lifted my depression, and I was able to enjoy the final two weeks of our stay in Canada.

Similar to what I had experienced during past depressive episodes, this particular episode also brought some unexpected gifts. In the midst of the pain, I had a profound realization of the truth of Jesus' words when he said "The kingdom of heaven is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it". I did see it, briefly, and it was magnificent. Another much appreciated benefit was that my allergies, bordering on asthma, largely abated.

Our visit came to an end, and we traveled back to our European home. Very shortly after, I became depressed once again. Thankfully, the episode did not last long (a matter of a few days), but it was very intense. I decided to spend nights in a separate upper floor bedroom so that I would not disturb my wife. As has been typical, my thoughts about myself were extremely critical. Finally, the pain became so difficult to bear that I wondered how much more I could endure. However, I desperately did not want to cause my wife any further hurt. I lay in bed and prayed fervently to Jesus to quell my angst, not for my sake, but for my wife's. Toward morning, I finally fell asleep, and dreamed that a cat told me that she was secretly pregnant, and that she was going to give me one of her kittens. When I awoke, I was relieved to find that I had slept a bit (without medication), and I was reassured by the dream (a kitten represents the playful innocence and goodness of the divine feminine). Later that morning, as I thought about the previous night, I felt very deeply the pain my wife would experience should I ever die prematurely - it was as if I were inside her mind. I realized that my desire not to hurt my wife was far stronger than any residual self-loathing. This was a very important insight. It proved to me that I was capable of true, unselfish love. It meant that I was "good". Acknowledging my innate goodness was an emotional release, and I felt so much better about myself. That evening, I found myself thinking about my little sister, who had

committed suicide in 1986. I thought I had already plumbed the depths of my grief, but I was wrong. I grieved deeply for my loss, and I also grieved deeply for how she must have suffered prior to taking her own life. Allowing oneself to grieve the loss of a loved one, especially when the circumstances are tragic, feels painful, but it is actually a healing act of self-love. That night I dreamed that I rescued a cat from falling off of a very high ledge. Afterward, the cat lay contentedly on its back in my hands, purring away - another reassuring dream

Fear not, dear reader, for you, too, remain as you were created – innocent and good. I wish you godspeed on your exciting journey to rediscover your beloved Self.

I was standing at an open doorway peering into a very dark house, trying to decide whether or not to enter. I was afraid of what might lie in wait for me. I thought about the possibility of being ambushed and maybe even killed. But then I reminded myself what my past experiences had shown me – that I was safe and loved in the Universe, and that whatever might happen to me would be based on love. So I mustered up the courage to proceed, and walked slowly into the darkness. I was relieved when nothing attacked me, and I sat down on a couch and began to watch a game show on TV. However, I was still apprehensive that someone or something might sneak up behind me. And indeed someone did come up behind me, but rather than being harmed in any way, I felt a gentle hand stroking my hair and a gentle kiss being placed on the back of my neck. I turned my head and saw my mother. Then I awoke.

POSTSCRIPT

Jesus said: “You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

Gospel of Matthew

Jesus said: “See to it that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you.”

Gospel of Luke

Jesus said: “There is light within a man of light, and it lights up the whole world. If it does not shine, it is darkness.”

Gospel of Thomas

My life has unfolded and continues to unfold as it should. But that is not to say that I would want to live it over again. It was full of pain – pain that I do not want to re-experience – pain that I wish no one else had to experience. There were times when I could not see any light at the end of the tunnel. I believe this is behind me now, and I have come into the light to stay.

In spite of all the pain, I am glad that I went through what I went through, and I wouldn't want to change a single detail of my life.

Why was there so much pain, so much confusion, so much struggle? What is all just coincidence - a product of the random circumstances of my early life? I don't believe so. When I reflect on what I have experienced, it seems clear to me that it was all part of God's perfect plan for my life.

If someone had suggested to me in the earlier stages of my journey that I would one day be grateful for having suffered, my mildest reaction would have been to scoff angrily. Why would anyone want to endure mental anguish? Why would anyone want to do battle with demons of the mind?

I have described how, as a consequence of my upbringing, I had much to learn (or relearn) regarding the nature of God and my own being. But could I not have gained this understanding in a less painful, less intense manner? Was the pain of fear and panic, the pain of chronic depression, the pain of believing that I was possessed by evil - was all of this pain necessary? I believe that in my case, the pain was necessary in order that the truth and power of God's absolute goodness and love – mirrored in the unconditional love of a psychologically-healthy mother for her children – could be revealed.

It is apparent to me that all of the pieces of my life, including my relationships with other people and my experiences, have fit together like an intricate jigsaw puzzle, and I see everywhere the guiding hand of God. God was with me, leading me into the depths of hell, and then out again. Many times, I thought I would not be able to bear it any longer. And at those crucial points when I felt hopelessly lost, God illumined me with grace.

That I had to go through what I did was the will of God. But I have earlier stated that I was in perfect accord with God's will, that God's will was also my will. I cannot conceive that a perfectly good and loving God would cause me to suffer against my will. I believe that at some very deep level of understanding, at the level at which the eternal Self is in intimate communion with God, I chose my suffering. For I had much to learn. Although I would feel terribly lost along the way, my spirit knew that the end would justify the means.

I used to despise myself. Now, I am amazed at how good it can feel to be me, and for this I am very grateful. Not only have I learned to love myself, I have learned to respect myself. And my natural empathy has been freed. I cry when I encounter stories of pain and suffering borne by the innocent, and of heroism born from love.

At long last I have come to know that I am God's' precious child, and that I love and adore God with my whole heart. I have come to understand that God loves me passionately and unconditionally. Of course, I'll never stop learning and growing. My spiritual journey will continue for at least the rest of my physical existence. I don't know where the future will take me, but I trust absolutely in God's goodness and want to do his/her will.

Sometimes, where I am now almost feels too good to be true. But it is true – this wondrous truth of the Truth.

Writing this story was a form of confession. And confession is therapy. Putting my life down on paper helped me to see myself as God sees me, which was radically different from the picture painted by my former accusing ego.

This book is my gift of love to those of you whose spirits have been badly wounded by toxic shame – who have not rediscovered the pure, innocent and beautiful child hiding within you – who are not yet aware that God loves you unconditionally and wants nothing but your absolute happiness. It is my fervent hope that it will lessen the pain of your own journey of self-discovery.

For me, there is no question that suffering has been justified by its reward. My reward is the joy that emanates from the very core of my being, the joy that comes from using what I have learned to try to ease the suffering of others, the joy of loving.

And in contemplating my joy, I realize that my prayer to love my mother has also been answered. I now understand that she always loved me to the best of her ability, and I chose her. Clearly she was the central figure in God's unfolding plan for my life. In a way I could never have imagined, she was an instrument of God's peace.

Mom, you too are a divine child of God. I love you.

One night, several years ago, my wife awakened me from a sound sleep, exclaiming that my head was bathed in light. I could neither see nor feel anything unusual, and I told her that she must have been dreaming.

Two days later, my wife asked me if I remembered her awakening me. It was only when she mentioned this that I did remember the incident. She then told me that the following night (the night previous to this conversation), she had again awakened and noticed the light. She had tried to find an external source for it, to no avail.

I initially hesitated to include this incident in my story, because I often don't feel particularly "enlightened", notwithstanding all that I have learned. I still have an ego that experiences fear even though I know that there is actually nothing to fear. In the end, I decided to include this incident because it made me feel better about myself, and I believe that it testifies to the essential truth of my message.

And so I say thank you to God for bringing me into the light of grace and truth, as revealed through Jesus. Dear reader, I hope my story helps you discover the light within yourself.

APPENDIX A: A SPOUSE'S PERSPECTIVE

by Noëlle Keith, Ph.D.

I have never cared for romance novels. They seem so unreal to me. I have, however, always enjoyed fairy tales. In these lie eternal truths about life and love.

I like to think of my adventure, my journey with Robert, as a fairy tale. It started with a chance meeting in a foreign land, quickly followed by a kiss, and we are now living “happily ever after”. In between, however, we had to do battle with some dragons. This is what Robert’s book is all about, I suppose - face the dragon, get to know the dragon, and in this way, slay the dragon. Robert, of course, has been the Dragon Slayer in this adventure, but I believe that I, too, had an important part to play in this story of our lives. Living with someone who is going through depression or other mental illness is difficult, painful, and sometimes frightening. But it can also be rewarding, as it brings many insights about oneself, and can strengthen a relationship.

I hope that, in sharing the few things that I have learned, I can be of some help to those who find themselves living with a mentally ill person. For clarity’s sake, I have divided my thoughts under two headings: “what I believe I did right”, being the first, and “what I could have done differently”, being the second.

What I believe I did right:

I stood by Robert. It is my belief that once you decide to spend your life alongside one specific person, be it your spouse, sibling or friend, you must also agree to remain loyal to that person. It doesn’t mean that you have to agree with everything that your companion will choose to believe and do. In fact, that could be quite a roller coaster ride, since during a prolonged spiritual struggle, one is likely to try and experiment with many different beliefs and healing systems. To me, it simply means never denying the authenticity of the crisis and never turning your back in the hope that s/he will “snap out of it”. When Robert thought he was possessed, for example, although I did not believe it was the case, I knew that it was his reality. It was a very sad time for me, very confusing, but I wanted to be counted among those who stood by him.

This was not really a difficult thing to do. I have discovered that people who are in the grips of depression can be very brave. For example, I remember how Robert asked me not to wake him up when he was having a nightmare (I could always tell by how agitated

he'd become in his sleep). And so he would fall asleep, knowing that he was likely to encounter terrifying situations, but knowing also that he might learn from them. I always admired him for that.

I trained for the battle and I learned too. I did not experience Robert's nightmares, his anxiety attacks, his fears, his sadness. In other words, I did not go on the battlefield with him, but I believed in what he did, and, naturally, I explored the issues with him. In order to understand what he was facing, Robert read an inordinate number of books, and for every ten that he would bring home from the library or purchase on the internet, I would read one or two. The benefits of this shared learning were enormous. Reading and talking about books that deal with psychology or spirituality is much like walking through a maze of mirrors. As a myriad of facets is reflected, one is bound to learn about oneself.

Sharing our discoveries was also beneficial for Robert, I believe. Whenever I asked him to clarify a point, or when I disagreed with what an author might have said, he too was able to gain a better understanding of the text, and, ultimately, of himself.

I let others know and asked for help... to a certain extent. As I will indicate later, I could have asked for more help, but I did what I could at the time. Letting others know about a difficult, painful situation has many positive ramifications. For one thing, it allows you to verbalize what you are experiencing and therefore makes you more able to deal with it. As you share your thoughts, people will also sometimes ask questions that, again, lead you to a greater understanding of the situation.

Sharing with others will also, as in any crisis, help reveal your support network. Some friends and relatives, maybe very few, will become pillars of strength in your shaken world. Of these, don't be afraid to ask for help. In my case, my requests for help were geared entirely towards the children. During the most difficult periods, a tense, sad atmosphere permeated our home, and I was very grateful when a good soul took them to the park for a couple of hours of undisturbed fun.

As our children were quite small through the most intense phase of Robert's illness, I found it difficult to explain to them accurately what was happening. But I did tell them in words they could understand. Pretending that all was well for "their sake" would have been, in my opinion, a deceitful and impossible endeavor.

I learned to be true to myself. This came with time. When Robert began his journey, I was rather confused by the situation. I didn't quite know where I stood when it came to matters of the psyche and the soul. However, as we both explored, I learned to trust my own discoveries, feelings and beliefs. I became stronger, more self-confident. This, in

turn, enabled me not only to survive the crisis, but also to gain from it. It was also beneficial for Robert, I think, to realize that many nuances could apply to beliefs.

What I could have done differently:

I could have paid more attention to my own feelings. I always put my children's needs first, then Robert's. At the end of the day, I hadn't paid any attention to my emotions. I very seldom allowed myself to cry, which is odd in a way, since I cry so easily in other circumstances (at the movies, for instance, or when I watch the news). I remember a friend asking me how I felt. I was surprised by her question and answered in a vague sort of way. When she repeated the question: "How do *you* feel?", I was slightly annoyed and unable to respond. I was grateful, however, when I realized, sometime later, that she had put me on the right track. It would have been helpful to all concerned if I had learned earlier on to decipher my emotions, take them into account and gather strength from that knowledge. Had I learned to verbalize my feelings, progress might have been quicker, for both Robert and me.

I could have asked for more help. When help was offered, I seldom turned it down. I was, however, uncomfortable about asking for it. I know now that it would have been okay for the children to have a babysitter come for an hour or two, while I went out for a walk, or had a nap, or did something "fun", like go to the movies. At the time though, I would have felt too guilty about doing any of the above and more so about enlisting someone else's services for such purposes. I suppose it stemmed from the fact that I was not sufficiently detached from Robert's illness. My life had become too intertwined with his, and my own self-worth had suffered in the process. Asking for help would have allowed me to distance my own being from Robert's problems, and therefore to become more supportive.

Had I known, some thirty-five years ago, what tribulations awaited me, I probably would have balked and run the other way, but now when I look back, I only feel gratitude for the meanders, the obstacles, the dragons. I have learned much on the way. My faith in life and love is stronger than ever, and no matter what happens, I know to trust the outcome. Living with a depressed or mentally ill person is difficult and painful, yes, but it is also a unique gift. Once you understand its qualities and purpose, it is easy to consider it a true blessing. I believe that through Robert's illness, I have been able to learn a great deal about myself, about my inner strengths, as well as my weaknesses, and that I have been a crucial part in the strong, spiritual relationship that has developed between us. And I have come to understand the meaning of "happily ever after": a spiritual relationship is indeed about true inner contentment, or happiness, and it is eternal.

Of all the fairy tales that I know, no doubt this one, about Robert, the dragons and me, is my favorite. May your own tale become your favorite, too.

APPENDIX B: A TRIBUTE TO DAD

(Delivered at my father's funeral)

“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life.” My maternal grandmother wrote these words of Jesus from the book of Revelation in the front of a diary that she gave me when I went overseas in 1977. I hadn't thought much about these words until one day a couple of years ago. Still dealing with bouts of depression associated with my sister's suicide, I suddenly had a vision, very real to me, of my sister, resplendent in a flowing white gown, with a golden crown on her head. She had an incredibly beautiful smile, and she was telling me, over and over again, that she loved me. This was an extremely healing vision, and I shared it with my family, including Dad.

Now Dad has his own golden crown. Of this, I am as convinced as I am of anything.

Dad didn't have an easy start to his life. Things were even tougher in the “old country” during the depression than they were here. Dad's own father wasn't around much. His mom died when he was just eight years old, and his father then emigrated to find work. During the next few years, Dad was shuffled among dirt poor foster families. At the age of 13, he crossed the ocean alone to join his father, and immediately went to work cutting pulpwood.

At the age of 24, Dad met Mom, who was teaching in a rural one-room school, and he pursued her until he won her heart. He worked hard (40 years of shift work) to provide my four siblings and me with everything we could possibly need, and more. He really loved to give.

My brother and I were reminiscing about our youth, and how fortunate we were that Dad had shared with us his love of the outdoors; how much fun we had going on berry-picking expeditions and camping and fishing trips together.

It was fifty years before Dad was able to return to his homeland. The occasion was my marriage. Upon greeting me overseas, Dad was so excited and happy for me that he lifted me right off the ground and spun me around.

Once, I had occasion to remind Dad that God loves him, and he started to cry. He told me that I should become a minister, something I didn't feel capable of at the time. Now, however, I realize that we are all called to be ministers of divine love.

I don't believe that Dad ever truly appreciated himself, the hardships he had endured, and the sacrifices he had made.

About a year ago, I dreamed that Dad was being carried in a procession on a raised platform, and a choir of men was singing beautifully in his honor. When I woke up, I was pleased and grateful. For I understood that Dad truly was a hero – that he had confronted and overcome much mental and physical hardship during his lifetime. I was happy to tell him of this dream. Although I now miss Dad very much, I know that we shall be together again.

There are many in this church who grieve. In particular, there is Mom, who sailed the oft-times stormy seas of life alongside Dad for more than 50 years. Mom has acknowledged that it was Dad who stood firm like a rock and let her cling so tightly when their daughter died, and she loved him all the more for it.

There are others who grieve – my sisters, my brother, our children – good, generous, loving people who wouldn't be here if Dad hadn't lived. These are people who make the world a better place and whose own children and children's children will make the world even better still.

As my sisters pointed out the other day, we have been blessed. Dad left us peacefully – at home and without suffering. He knew where he was going, and he wasn't afraid. There were no unresolved issues or conflicts with those he loved. There is no guilt associated with his passing. We know that Dad loved us dearly, and he knew that we all love him.

And now Dad's knowledge is complete. Now he knows what it means to be created in the image of God. He knows of what he is made, and it is love – boundless, unconditional love.

So let us celebrate together as best we are able. It's what Dad wants.



Thank you for your interest in this book. If it helped you or you received value from it in any way, please consider leaving a review on Amazon. It would be greatly appreciated!

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The following is a list of books I have read and cited in my story. It is not an exhaustive list, and I have encountered many other helpful books that could just as readily have been cited. It is a sign of a global transformation of consciousness that so many spiritually rich and life transforming books are currently available. Included among those other authors whose works I found helpful at various stages of my journey are (in alphabetical order): Lee Carroll, Wayne Dyer, Jean Houston, Dan Millman, Bernie Siegel and Marianne Williamson. I apologize to the many other excellent authors who have been omitted.

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About the Author

Robert Keith was born and raised in Canada. He obtained an undergraduate degree in biology and spent a year in medical school, but felt compelled to drop out due to social anxiety disorder. He then completed a Master of Science degree, after which he was awarded a postgraduate scholarship to study in Europe, where he met a lovely young woman who was wise beyond her years. Robert and Noëlle fell in love and were married. Soon after, they traveled back together to Canada, and Robert obtained government employment as an air pollution scientist and later worked as an environmental consultant for a major engineering firm. Meanwhile, his wife taught languages in various post-secondary institutions while also completing her Ph.D.

Robert and Noëlle have now been married for 40 years and are very pleased to be grandparents. Their four adult children are scattered across Canada. Robert and Noëlle reside in Europe, where Robert is semi-retired but continues to provide environmental consulting services on a part-time basis. In addition to his ongoing spiritual journey, he enjoys home improvement (the house dates from the 18th century), excursions to the sea-side and mountains, walking, writing, reading and model railroading. Robert also offers spiritual counseling through his website (www.thehealingtruth.org).