

The Kwan Yin Journey



Week 6 Transcript – The World of Spirit

Hi! Tim Emerson, of Kwan Yin Healing, and we're just chatting here before the call recording. Let's get started . . .

Tim: You were just saying you went back and listened to the recordings from the beginning and were taking notes. How did that go for you?

Participant 1: Good. It just kind of reinforces everything and it gives me a visual to go back to, to kind of look over and implement. Plus, you can stop it. Every time you would say something really good, I could pause it and write it down.

Tim: Cool. That would be great. I would love to, at some point, hear what everybody found as the high points as we went through all this. How did it go with the homework this week? Does anybody remember what it is?

Participant 1: Wasn't it going back over—

Tim: Actually there were two parts, so let's start there. Does anybody have any thoughts or reflections on the material as you went back over it? Any new insights, breakthroughs?

Participant 1: I was told to dig a little deeper. That was actually with week-1 stuff.

Participant 2: Hi, this is Nicole.

Tim: Hi, Nicole.

Participant 2: Hey, how are you guys?

Tim: Great. We're chatting about what we found going back through what we've done so far in the first four weeks. The other thing we talked about was looking at our meditation practice and separating our thoughts from our existence. I didn't put it quite that starkly. Being able to find that space between who we are and our thoughts. How did that go?

Participant 3: It was pretty hard.

Tim: No argument there.

Participant 4: Tim, can you ask that question again?

Tim: Sure. We were talking about recognizing that our thoughts and not our identity, and including in meditation practice too, that recognition that here are my thoughts, and here I am over here that there's a space between us and we're not the same.

Participant 5: Yes, I've had to call on that quite a bit this week. That's great.

Participant 6: We're all very chatty today.

Participant 7: I'm finding that's actually getting easier for me. It doesn't mean that it's not hard. It's still very hard, but week-to-week it's becoming easier. I started in meditation practice about a year ago, and it has been kind of sporadic, but it's been really much more consistent since we started this journey. I think that the more digging I've been doing into myself, the easier it has been to just let the thoughts be and to see myself as a separate entity than all of that baggage, I guess.

Tim: Yes.

Participant 8: Yes, I agree with that.

Participant 2: I agree with that as well. It's Nicole. I've been meditating since July and I've had a lot of revelations with my practice, which has been pretty consistent, I would say. Since July, there were probably a couple of months total that maybe over the time I wasn't practicing every day, but since we've begun this journey and definitely in reading Ram Dass' book, both you, Tim and Ram Dass giving a really clear vocabulary and definition, I keep feeling like that movie, *The Matrix*, where he sees what's really going on, and I'm able to really look at a couple of different things, but I'm really able to look at patterns, things that are my thoughts that aren't me and being able to be separate from them, and it's been really amazing.

Today, I was feeling that perhaps I'm recovered from being an over-thinker, but I won't think too much about it. But I'm really feeling in the flow a lot more, but also being able to really identify things that I want to change as being a thought that goes down this whole path, and that I can

halt it at any point and switch gears in a way that I haven't felt previously. That's awesome.

Participant 9: That's wonderful

Tim: Yes, there's an old joke that says meditation is not what you think.

Participant 2: Exactly. Now that I've said this, of course, something will completely hobble me and throw me for a loop because that always seems to be the case. Whenever I feel like, "Okay, I've got this little piece down," then it's like okay, good. You're ready for a bigger challenge.

Tim: Since you invoked *The Matrix*, did you notice that *The Matrix* is entirely about *The Hero's Journey*?

Participant 2: It is about *The Hero's Journey*. Yes, I've been seeing *The Hero's Journey* in a lot of things. I never knew that term in the deep way that I've been feeling it in the last couple of weeks, nor have I ever understood the term 'raising my vibration' in a way that I'm coming to understand it in the last couple of weeks.

Tim: Yes, yes, excellent. That's actually one of my major objectives for this course, exactly what you said. People throw that term around, but what the hell does it mean to actually do that?

Participant 2: And operating from my highest self, that's another one that you talked a little bit about. It's not necessarily highest, like you're a broken thing that needs fixing, but more like the ripple getting bigger, and that highest self is where the awareness is, where you say, "Oh, there's my brain over there, chattering away, saying this thing or that thing, and isn't that interesting? Wow, that doesn't serve me," and having that objectivity is not a higher or lower, but more encompassing.

Tim: Yes.

Participant 10: This is Selena. One thing that I really, really notice, and I was working on site with a client in an IT company last week. At the end of the day, I was driving home and I noticed something about myself was different. One thing in my life that I've really struggled with is people niching me into different boxes, like I'm this person to them or I'm that person to them, and I struggled with being a whole person and how to be that whole person, and I always got really frustrated that people wanted me to be this one view and that was it.

Then I discovered that I did that to myself all the time. I was the professional person, I was the healing person, and on site with this client last week, for that whole day I was my whole, complete person. It was phenomenal. All of my different parts of me, I brought all of those parts into the coaching that I'm doing.

I'm coaching a team of people and helping them to work better together, and all of my interest areas are crossed; physical fitness, gardening. You name it; I've talked about it with people to help form relationships with them, and it all just kind of fell into place. I left the office that day just kind of scratching my head and saying, "Wow." This journey has been a lot of ups and downs, but it's really working. It's phenomenal.

Tim: Very, very, very awesome.

Participant 11: It's like you're coaching your own inner team.

Participant 10: Yes, it's kind of what it feels like. Yes.

Participant 11: There are a number of meditations around that. I use Yoga Glow a lot. I'm going to post that on our Facebook page because I really like some of the guided meditations there, but there are several I've done that really have to do with this idea of letting go of roles. I am more than my role of this and it's all the things that we're saying of that backing up, backing up, and seeing the parts, and we're more than the sum of our parts.

Tim: Yes, perfect. Absolutely. This is awesome. What else? Or was that it? One of the key things to look at, and there are a couple of things I'm going to talk about today. One is another way to look at *The Hero's Journey*, and that is another archetype. It's similar to *The Hero's Journey* and called *The Virgin's Promise*. We have a little bit more to talk about in *The Hero's Journey*, but in short, the Hero lives in an ordinary world until one day he receives a call to adventure.

Here's an alternative structure to The Hero's Journey, called The Virgin's Promise. The Hero goes out to a magical world to challenge himself and comes back with a gift to benefit the village; the Virgin goes within to a secret world, is caught shining, and thereby challenges her village by growing outside the role they envision for her. Here are author Kim Hudson's notes summarizing her book of the same title (intended for writers):

The Virgin's Promise - A New Archetypal Structure

By [Kim Hudson](#)

The title *The Virgin's Promise* has two meanings and in a nutshell, it describes the journey of the Virgin. The first meaning is the community's belief that the Virgin has agreed to live up to their expectations. She has made a promise to them. The second speaks to the Virgin's unproven potential that lies dormant within her, longing to come to life. The Virgin begins by conforming to the wishes of others and eventually learns to hear her inner voice and bring it to life. It is the journey to creative, spiritual and sexual awakening.

Movies such as *Bend It Like Beckham*, *Ever After*, *The Other Boleyn Girl*, *Brokeback Mountain*, *Billy Elliot*, *Tootsie*, *Better than Chocolate*, *Virgin Suicides* and *Wedding Crashers*, to name just a few, all follow this archetypal journey. And when you think about it, none of these protagonists are selflessly saving the community because none of them are Heroes. They are self-fulfilling Virgins.

I hope you noticed that the examples I gave of Virgin journeys include both females and males. Just as females can be Heroes, males can be Virgins, whether or not they are gay. As in yin and yang theory, we all have a Virgin and a Hero archetype in our unconscious. I refer to the Virgin as she and the Hero as he to avoid the clumsiness of s/he, but ask the reader to remember we all have feminine and masculine sides.

This distinction between two archetypes opens up a whole world of storytelling that includes strong feminine plots. I set out to describe the beats of this journey of transformation similar to the work on the Hero by Joseph Campbell and Christopher Vogler, and found there are thirteen repeated and pivotal moments or beats in a Virgin's journey:

The Virgin begins her story in a Dependent World. She carries her kingdom's hopes for its continuation, which are contrary to her dream for herself. At first, she is afraid to go against her community and realize her own dream, but then she has a small opportunity to follow her dream in secret. She acknowledges her dream by dressing the part she was meant to play, if only temporarily. Enlivened by this first experience, the Virgin goes back and forth, juggling the two worlds, enhancing her dream in the Secret World, while appeasing her Dependent World. Eventually she no longer fits in either world and she gets caught shining. In this crisis the Virgin has a moment of clarity and gives up what has been keeping her stuck and recognizes she has the ability to realize her dream. The kingdom goes into chaos. Now, she wanders in the wilderness trying to decide whether she will make herself small again to make people happy or choose to live her dream. She chooses to be true to herself! She loses her protection and it is grim, but the kingdom re-orders itself to accommodate the blossoming Virgin, and the kingdom becomes a brighter place to live.

So when writing a story of being true to yourself, you want to include these thirteen beats:

1. Dependent World
2. Price of Conformity
3. Opportunity to Shine
4. Dress the Part

5. Secret World
6. No Longer Fits Her World
7. Caught Shining
8. Gives Up What Kept Her Stuck
9. Kingdom in Chaos
10. Wanders in the Wilderness
11. Chooses Her Light
12. The Re-ordering
13. The Kingdom is Brighter

The order can be re-arranged and some beats can be explored more deeply or repeatedly while others may be represented by a single line of dialogue, a look, or even implied. The range of ways these beats can be represented is infinite.

Looking at the Hero's journey, it is quite different from the Virgin's journey described above. The Hero lives in an **Ordinary World** until one day he receives a **Call to Adventure**. At first he **Refuses the Call**, because of the great danger, but after **Meeting with the Guide**, the Hero **Crosses the First Threshold** to a foreign land. Suddenly away from everything familiar, the Hero is **tested** in his ability to survive. Clear in his purpose, he meets **Allies** who can help him and learns about his **Enemy**. The Allies make **Preparations** to enter the Enemy's lair and increase their chances of success. The Hero faces near-death in a **Crisis** in the lair, escapes with his life, and is **Rewarded** with an advantage when next he faces the Enemy. He takes the **Road Back** and meets the Enemy in a **Final Battle**. The Hero defeats the Enemy, sometimes at the cost of his life, and **Returns the Elixir** that will keep the village safe.

Taking a closer look at the key differences between these two archetypes creates a powerful tool for writing gripping stories. Each of the archetypes becomes more vibrant and compelling when the contrasts are portrayed. The classic example of this is when the self-fulfillment drive of the Virgin is played against the self-neglect drive of her shadow side, the Whore. We see this in Cinderella stories where the protagonist is spending her life serving others at the cost of her self as in *Working Girl*, *The Other Boleyn Girl*, *Pretty Woman*, and *Ever After*.

The first difference between the Virgin and the Hero is in their relationship to their community. The Hero comes from a village that is basically good. He seeks to preserve the village and it remains relatively unchanged from beginning to end. The Hero leaves the village to ward off danger before it arrives and creates havoc in a foreign land. The antagonist is the personification of this foreign land and is basically evil and rightly destroyed.

The Virgin lives in a Kingdom that is in need of change. The kingdom is stagnating and needs to allow more individual freedom. Growth of the Virgin forces growth of the Kingdom. The antagonist is again the personification of the kingdom and may have

benevolent feelings towards the Virgin despite being the obstacle to her archetypal transformation. Their love for each other is sometimes the inspiration for the transformation of the kingdom.

The Hero ensures stability and the Virgin brings chaos to the community; the Hero goes to a foreign land and the Virgin stays home.

Another key difference is the motivation of the protagonist. The Hero is learning to be self-sacrificing. His highest purpose is to overcome his Mother Complex and learn to live without the comfort, ease, and security he feels living at home. He must face his fear of death and expand the limits within which he understands he can survive. He is about being rugged, strong, and brave as he challenges the boundary between humans and immortals.

The Virgin is learning to be self-fulfilling. Her highest purpose is to overcome her Father Complex and make choices in her life based on her own values. She must follow her passion and know joy and love. She is about awakening her sexuality, spirituality and creativity and making her dreams come true.

The Hero is learning to do and the Virgin is learning to be.

The Hero and the Virgin both face the challenge of knowing oneself as an individual. The Hero is challenged to physically know he can survive. Without this self-knowledge he cannot live with others without feeling the need to appease or control them as seen in the behaviors of the Hero's shadow side, the Coward or the Bully. The risk to the Hero is death.

The Virgin is growing to stand as an individual psychologically and emotionally. That is why a Virgin story is set among the people who have a history of emotional and psychological attachment to her. Her challenge is to hold her own counsel among strong psychological forces. Without this self-knowledge the Virgin is in danger of becoming a Victim or occupies her shadow side of the Whore. She may become depressed or suicidal if her true self never comes to life.

The Virgin journey includes a friend while the Hero is aided by allies. The Virgin's friend sees her potential and supports her in her quest to be true to herself out of love rather than personal gain. The Hero meets allies along the way who share a common goal. They don't have to like each other; they simply have to share a common purpose.

The Hero and the Virgin are not only unique from each other, they are polar opposites of each other. When you recognize a feature in one archetype you can identify a feature of its counterpart by recognizing its opposite. Just as black is seen most sharply against white, the Virgin is most clearly understood in contrast to the Hero.

Knowing this you can write really strong characters by grounding them in the fundamental aspects of the Virgin and the Hero. You can also surround the protagonist with characters of

highly contrasting archetypal natures to increase the impact. Put the Coward next to your Hero or place a Virgin opposite a Hero and notice the feeling of resonance it brings. Think of Lord Farquaad played off against Shrek in *Shrek*, or Cypher compared to Neo in *The Matrix*. Shrek and Neo look very heroic compared to their cowardly counterparts. Notice how feminine Vivian is in contrast to Edward in *Pretty Woman*. Playing with the points of balance between opposite archetypes is a very powerful way to strengthen a story and draw people in.

So next time you create a Virgin protagonist, try these writing techniques:

- Set the story among the people she is emotionally attached to;
- Show how the community needs to change;
- Give her a secret world in which to grow and have her afraid her two worlds are going to collide as she moves back and forth between them;
- Give her friends rather than allies;
- Include the shadow side and masculine counterpart
- Focus on the Virgin's creative, sexual or spiritual awakening rather than a drive to find love or save someone.

Enjoy the journey!

Finding Spirituality

I took a very long road getting where I am today, and a very curving road at that.

My first spiritual experience, at least I thought it was, came at age two. I and my friend Michael, who lived upstairs, got into all sorts of things before I was carted off to Kindergarten--he was one month younger, which put him one year behind me at school. December/November line. We even became Blood Brothers, pricking our fingers and mingling our blood. Never underestimate children.

Michael introduced me to Fairies. We would walk along, and wherever the dew glistened on the leaves and grass, there were the Fairies, Michael told me. Only he could see them, of course. These fairies took the form of cartoon characters. Michael housed them in his bottle collection, and would go through it now and then telling me which cartoon character Fairy lived in each one. He was so gifted!

Hmmm. Well, I got older.

I was raised Catholic, a religion my family took seriously. My dad had been raised Lutheran and converted when he married my mom. My mom taught Sunday School at our small parish in Fleming, NY. My dad helped build the church there. I attended Mass, learned about the sacraments, went to Confession, and generally did everything good Catholic boys do. But out of ignorance.

There were problems with this scenario. First, I had sexuality. Religion and the reality of my body were telling me different things. And such things didn't really get discussed. In fact, when I was 12, my "talk" consisted of a small booklet, *A Doctor Talks to Ten to Twelve Year Olds*, or something like that. "When you finish it, let me know if you have any questions," my dad said. "A few moments of pleasure can lead to a lifetime of trouble."

I didn't know what he meant. I read the book, and could have told you all you wanted to know about sperm and eggs and conception. What I didn't know was how the sperm happened to get to the egg. "God blessed us with a child," people said. Apparently, once you were married, if it was God's will, he took some sperm and matched it up with a spousal egg. Good system. So that mystery was solved.

As for sex? I learned about it--or for a while, mis-learned about it--on the streets from my friends, like everyone else. Interesting system.

My point is that this spiritual center to my life wasn't doing its job.

In high school, another problem arose, *Ex Cathedra*, the doctrine introduced in 1870 declaring the Pope is infallible when acting in his official capacity. I asked my dad about this once, and he angrily and defensively repeated the Vatican line. I couldn't accept this so readily. A number of Church positions just made no sense to me in the modern world. Why the stance against birth control, for example, in the face of population explosion, especially in impoverished areas? And I had heard a few sermons (called the Homily in the Catholic Mass) that really didn't jive with social sense as I saw it. They condemned music that they clearly didn't understand, and dismissed too readily quite a few members of society.

I started reading. Well, I had always read. There were books in the house and a library a short bike ride away. But I started reading non-fiction books. In particular, and I've no idea why, I bought a copy of Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics*. I had wanted to take physics, and I think I was just curious about the Taoism--of which I knew nothing at the time. It was a difficult read at that age, but I was intrigued by both the fantastic world of quantum mechanics and the introduction to Eastern mysticism. The world wasn't as we saw it.

At SUNY Fredonia, I dutifully shuffled off to Mass each Sunday. The college chaplain was a nice guy. But I remember little else. My Sophomore year I transferred to Ithaca College and, while I attended mass for a while, fell away from the practice. The Church just wasn't doing it for me.

But at the same time, on several occasions, at 3 a.m. when I was restless and couldn't sleep, I'd get dressed and walk downtown to the cathedral, walk inside, and just sit. Not pray, or read, or anything "religious" -- just sit. In those days, you could find a side door unlocked.

Walks had always been solace and balance for me, right from childhood. I'd go for a few

hours at a time, far into the as yet undeveloped fields into the woods. And nature would always be a balancing space for me.

I was a music major, and a performance major at that. All the classical music profession expects is perfection, delivered on the spot while a few thousand people watch in silence. The pressure is intense--and often debilitating. Drug use is common. But there were other approaches, falling into two camps.

The first was Transcendental Meditation. Quite a few of the string players were into this on campus. At the time...it was a little strange to me. The talk of levitation didn't help that. I could respect it...but I wasn't following it.

My best friends and later housemates, though, two trombonists, came home with a slim book recommended to them by a retired bass trombonist from the New York classical scene--we were enthralled with the stories he told of playing for Toscanini. The book, *Zen in the Art of Archery*, had a major impact on me. The idea of the artless art, of letting "It" hit the target, whether in archery, swordsmanship, flower arranging or the tea ceremony, introduced me to "no mind" and letting go.

It was spiritual without religion *per se*, and with rituals I could understand. Pay attention to small things, and you'll pay attention to larger things. I even approached my bassoon and guitar with reverence, partners in my music making, not mere tools.

Later, from my private teachers, I would learn, after years of struggling, the power of the breath, just as in the book and as all the martial arts and meditation teachers taught. Let go and breath. When I learned to do this, I could always sink into a deeper power and effortlessly perform passages that previously had been beyond my skill. A sense of peace and relaxation would wash over me, even when on stage. I wasn't calling it God. But there was certainly something more than most people knew or acknowledged, something seemingly mystical but very real in a practical, useful, even predictable sense.

The world was not as it appeared.

I met Lynn while working at a bank in the mall; she was a hair dresser three years my senior. Lynn introduced me to a world of New Age ideas and people. She and her mother were friends with June Burke, who channeled the Seraphim Julian (I had never heard of channeling), and had been with Isabel Hickey (she died in 1980), the quirky but down to earth astrologer. Lynn was also good friends with a local astrologer, Dennis, and a couple into guided meditations. I was in for an education.

I learned to draw up and read astrology charts. I studied the tarot. My shelves became lined with reference books for both. Lynn and I practiced channeling. I didn't know what to think. Lynn introduced me to the concept of spirit guides. I meditated, and came up with a tall Native American guide, named Soaring Eagle. I liked him, and hoped he wasn't just my

imagination.

Lynn took me downstate to meet June Burke, who invited us in turn to have a session with Julian. When I walked into the room for my session, immediately things seemed strange. The energy in the room was askew, as if the floor was in the way somehow. Something was different, anyway. I was told I would never lose track of music (I was worried about my career), that it would always be part of my work (and it has been), but also that I would write (I had no intention of doing so, but later wrote extensively).

I was asked whether I had any questions, and I asked about my guides. Julian identified three main ones--an Egyptian priest, an Atlantean, and a Native American. As these were described, sudden Julian asked, "But do you know your Indian's name?" I was taken aback--how would Julian suspect that? Later, I'd wonder whether Lynn had mentioned it to June at some point. I don't know.

I also had a session with Elizabeth Stratton, the spiritual healer in New York. I was working on vision improvement, and went to her as part of that. I was surprised to get an overall counseling session, and that she so readily honed in on aspects of my childhood, including things I hadn't told anyone. I was also using the Bates Method for vision improvement, and I was able to discard my eyeglasses and drive legally.

Lynn had introduced me the Seven Rays Book Store, then in its first location on Genesee Street in Syracuse. The store was dedicated to a wealth of books about parapsychology, world religions, mysticism, the occult, astrology, tarot, numerology, magic, wicca, theosophy, NLP, and a host of related New Age books and products, from incense to crystals to music to futons. The used book section was especially rich in affordable reads, and quite a few of these found their way home with me.

A few years later, Seven Rays moved to Westcott Street, a residential neighborhood just outside of the University district. I was looking for more interesting work, and following my intuition one day, walked up to the owner and asked for a job, explaining I was already well versed in his product. Two months later I was the manager. Lynn had moved on, but my education was continuing--when business is slow, there's lots of opportunity to read, and read I did. A lot. About everything.

I studied T'ai Chi. At first, I did my best to learn from books, but later I studied at the T'ai Chi Farm with T. T. Liang. I taught T'ai Chi and Chi Gung at the Delphi Healing Arts Center and collected a shelf full of translations of rare Chinese classics on T'ai Chi history and Chinese medicine. It's difficult stuff. On the one hand, I'd seen the power of directed chi and felt the benefits of smoothly flowing energy. On the other hand, much of the details are beyond a Western understanding of physiology. Is this ancient wisdom, or a cultural myth? I didn't know.

And that happened a lot. Fascinating stories and factual studies would be mixed with

fantastic and unsupported speculation, from Ancient Greece, India, Tibet, to tales of Lemuria and Atlantis. Psychics made spectacular claims--and were often wrong. Yet I knew many of these people personally, and they were certainly sincere. This was a problem with many of the books as well. Things that I could accept were mixed with romantic but sometimes bizarre claims. What to think? What to believe? Certainly not everything I read.

Some other experiences contradicted my reality. Once, while slicing bread, not paying attention (I was watching TV over my shoulder), I sliced halfway through my finger. I could hear someone screaming...I only realized after a moment that it was me, while I just calmly watched, going about what needed to be done. Another time, two cars collided in front of me, in slow motion, as I skidded through where they bounced apart while a graceful shower of glass rose like a fountain, time almost at a standstill.

Yet another time, I slipped in the shower, bashing my head into the edge of the towel rack. I slipped to the floor in pain and found myself on my back with a throbbing head in the middle of a forest. Soaring Eagle was bent over me, crumbling leaves into a basin of water, applying it to my forehead, saying "You'll be fine as soon as you can accept it." I felt a warm, gentle wind blowing. And then I was sitting in the tub, a blood soaked towel pressed against my forehead. I actually went to work, where they took one look and sent me back home. But I was fine in a few days.

Years later, during a severely emotional time, my deceased grandfather showed up to let me know all was well and to turn the situation around.

Sometimes I had prophetic dreams--something I'd dream would happen three days later. What to make of all these experiences?

What about the evidence for things like reincarnation? Stories of young children remembering events far from their place and time?

Could all this be coincidence?

I gradually recognized that it could. Who knows what happens in the mind? We are complex electro-chemical reactions, and who knows how those things might be interpreted. And of all the events that happen, sure, we could dream something that coincidentally happens. All those ancient cultural beliefs? People predisposed to see what they thought was real.

James Randi, the stage magician and psychic exposé, once passed out horoscopes by astrological sign to everyone in the audience, and asked if they were accurate. The audience felt they were. Then he had them look at each others--they were all the same.

"The problem with reincarnation," read a logic text, "is that it conflicts with what we know about biology. That's a problem." Hmm. Good point.

I would later teach philosophy, ethics, and world religions at the college level. But I had come to see all these as the human mind grasping to forge connections where there were none, and despite the sincerity and well-meaning devotion of some (amid the downright charlatans), I could only conclude that God was a myth, that life after death was wishful thinking, that we were tissue and cells carrying out our electro-chemical functions, and that all else was just things we had not yet come to understand, perhaps never would.

I was not agnostic--I was an atheist. I could see no other logical position.

Thing is, in clinging to logic, I wasn't truly being thorough and balanced. Things that didn't fit my world view were just dismissed or forgotten.

For example, one night, when I had first moved out to the country, my friend John called, asking me to come over. We were both musicians, and while he was 20 years my senior, we became good chess buddies, and I knew he was lonely, not much company around in the middle of our rural area. Snow was falling heavily, and I really didn't want to go that night, but I went anyway, to keep him company. We had a nice chat, played a few chess matches, discussed literature, and finally it was time to call it a night.

Now, he had this long driveway, and with the snow falling, driveway and yard were indistinguishable. In fact, where the road started was pretty iffy. And I was driving a Chevette in those days. I made my best guess, made a few wrong guesses, backed up and tried again, and eventually made it to the road, more or less, one more backup and...whomp! I was looking at the sky. I opened the door and climbed out to look...my back wheels were both in the ditch, a good three foot drop. No way was I going to be able to drive out of that.

"Great," I thought to myself in self-pity. "So this is my reward for coming out and being nice on a night with bad weather." And just as I was thinking this...the car rolled forward, out of the ditch, and stopped at the top, wheels just out and back on pavement. I just looked in amazement. I got in and drove home, without incident. I didn't know what to say. It should have been "Thank you!"

See, I thought people clinging to their religious view of the world were simply interpreting everything according to their thought system, and through that biased lens, naturally everything they saw would confirm their world view. After all, isn't this what cultural and religious upbringing did? People were the faith they were because their parents chose it for them, and not because they had decided Christianity had it over Hindu or Shinto beliefs. I couldn't see that I was doing the same thing with my supposedly unbiased logical approach.

I will say that I was never one of those obnoxious Christian-baiting atheists, who indeed are just as bad as some overly enthusiastic evangelicals intent on shoving the dove. Even if I saw belief in God as a simplistic crutch for dealing with life, it was a healthy belief to hold,

all in all. Christianity bothered me only when Christians got obnoxious and heavy handed. Or silly. If “Happy Holidays” means “someone is stealing my Christmas,” then your faith and your understanding of Christmas is pretty fragile. People being polite doesn’t undo the Prince of Peace coming to humankind. Get a grip.

To be fair, both extremes have just claims. Even considering the supernatural did not exist in any form, coming together in community for the common good is, at its heart, a healthy belief to have. True, such ideals often fall to pettiness, but worthy ideals they remain. And atheist moral systems are composed not by divine decree, but by reason and choice. As such, they tend to held in higher regard--and compliance. After all, “That’s how I was raised” and “I always obeyed my parents” aren’t often heard together.

Nor do I have any interest in the artificial Science vs. Religion divide. The faux fear some extremists have of science is based entirely upon misrepresentation. And the judgment of religion as antithetical to science is equally willfully blind. True, science cannot account for many things, but these are not “just theory,” as a theory is a well-tested hypothesis that seems to work. Nor does science ever “prove” anything, as more evidence overturns previous conclusions with each new breakthrough. But this doesn’t mean we don’t know anything--we know plenty of things that are well-established as working well. And that knowledge grows. That’s science. Equally so, to pretend science presents a complete view of the world, the universe, our nature, our existence, simply ignores much about our lives.

I came by that realization slowly. Only after a series of discussions and debates did a friend finally corner me on this point--that much of what we sought to know and understand were not only beyond the reach of science, but also likely to remain so, being different in kind, not merely in evolution. Like *The Tao of Physics* presents, mysticism and science pervade each other, despite our many misunderstandings and the mysteries that remain in reconciling the quantum world with its manifestations, the local with the universal, the material with the ethereal.

Being more open made me more tolerant of views I’d normally have dismissed as error or ignorance. At first, I figured the problem was a misconception of the divine as a personal entity, rather than as a force or unifying principle underlying and unifying the natural world. The *Tao* worked nicely for this purpose. As the *Tao Te Ching* notes, Taoists don’t know what it is, and don’t try to define it. “Those who know do not tell; those who tell do not know.” A flow to the universe. No wonder nature so inspired peace.

The Kabbalah describes the divine as exploding into infinite bits comprising the universe, that each of us is a part of the divine. Hinduism adds seven layers of existence, the higher ones joined in a single being.

In ancient China, a musical tone, the Kung, was said to resonate to harmonize creation, and in the cities, noise drowned out the Kung and the harmony. Sufi mystic Hazrat Inyat Kyan explains that each of us vibrates at a given sound, and that some sounds harmonize well,

others do not, sometimes changing back to harmony when still more sounds are added.

The problem is as Eckhart Tolle explains--we are trying to define the indefinable, and in so doing, limit the divine to what it is not by the act of attempted definition.

For a time, this worked for me. I figured people who believed in God were just misinterpreting the natural basis for our universe, whatever that was--Tao for me. I had no problem with prana for yoga or chi for T'ai Chi or Chi Gung, but somehow grace or personification of deities was too much. Could all those people from all those ages and places be mistaken? Sure they could. It was a cultural myth, predisposing believers to unwittingly seek out coincidence and take it as proof of their perceived truth. Seek and ye shall find, because you get where your attention is focused.

When I needed retuning, I headed into nature. Through designing online courses, I had reduced my classroom teaching time to just two days a week, giving me considerable flexibility over my schedule. I ran or skied cross-country with my dog every day for an hour or two in the nearby state forest trails. I took one day a week as "Tim Day" and headed to the Adirondacks for day long hikes into the wilderness, hearing only the balance of nature and the detached disconcert Mother Nature has when we venture into her strong holds, the Kung sounding clearly. The first two hours I would slowly relax. The second two hours my mind would slowly cease spinning. By the sixth hour, things that had seemed confusing became clear and focused. (By the eighth hour, I was tired and focused on getting back safely before dark.) Many complex problems were solved here.

But things were about to change.

I had meet and dated Beth for a few months, and we had broken up. I was on my way to have lunch and return a few things I had of hers and pick up a few of mine. One of the items was a CD she lent me from *The Vortex*, by Jerry and Ester Hicks, two authors she adored. I had never listened to it, and just in case it was any good, burned a copy on my way there (it was a 75 minute drive) and just for the heck of it, popped it in.

The CD was a session with Abraham, the group of beings Ester channeled. I had heard of Abraham back in my Seven Rays days, but had never really given the material much attention then. This time--it changed my perspective on that trip. The discussion was of the importance of contrast in our lives, and of the people that show us that contrast. The Law of Attraction, something I had always taken as wishful thinking, was presented as a focus on the positive aspects to focus our energy on building what we want, not what we don't want (by negative focus). Instead of seeking closure, I laid the groundwork for a friendship. She forgot my stuff, I just let it go, and as a few weeks went by, we started talking again. But I had opened the door to the realization that my thoughts were creating my experience, and that this happened in conjunction with the spiritual reality of our existence.

A month later, we were back together again--only to break up again (and later become

friends again). But while we were together, Beth got the idea to get a Reconnection. I had never heard of this, and she explained a bunch of stuff I had trouble accepting literally, about 12 strands of DNA connection and so forth. But she went to her friend and psychic, Cindy Staffin, who performed the two day session (one hour each day).

The whole thing sounded kind of strange to me. She had to wear gloves and extra socks and a sweater because people sometimes got very cold during the sessions? She looked for a copy of Eric Pearl's book, *The Reconnection*, but had loaned it out to someone. I didn't really mind--I had plenty to read, and was really only marginally interested. Until I heard about the sessions. "I felt wonderful!" she shared, recounting the various sensations. I was intrigued, and ordered my own copy of the book.

When we broke up again, a lot of other things in my life were unsettled...not bad, but just not where I wanted them to feel. I was looking for a direction I couldn't quite find. Somehow, I got it in my head that I should get a Reconnection done. Problem was, I wasn't really sure where I was going--Beth had pointed out Cindy's place in passing once, as in "It's down that street over there," in a city I didn't know well at all. But I headed down to check it out just the same--a 75 minute drive one way.

Have you ever experienced a chain of events in which doors just seem to open effortlessly? That's what happened. My loose guess about how to get back to that neighborhood proved spot on. I walked down that street and immediately saw what must be Cindy's store. I walked in and was immediately greeted by a very friendly woman who had just hung up the phone.

"Can I help you?" she asked.

"Hi. I'm looking for Cindy."

"I'm Cindy," she replied.

Well that was easy. I explained what I was doing there, that I was a friend of Beth's (I left out the break-up part) and interested in a Reconnection.

"Have you ever had any Reconnective Healing?" she asked.

"Well, I've read Eric Pearl's book," I responded. Well, I sort of had skimmed it. I read it carefully later.

"OK, good. I'm all booked up for a couple of months--unless you could come in the morning? We could do Wednesday and Thursday."

So it was that easy. Because I had no experience with Reconnective Healing, she advised me I should have a healing session first, but that we could do a distance healing for that. She would call me Tuesday evening to be sure we were set up, then hang up and do the session, and then call back in 30 minutes to follow up. OK. Done.

I had experienced my share of New Age energy treatments and techniques, and while I respected them, it had been mainly subtle changes in sensation at best, readily dismissed as

imagination or glorified as the universe at work. I was expecting something like that. I was wrong.

Immediately upon hanging up the phone and lying back Tuesday evening, I felt an intense energy around my head, like a cross between increased pressure and heat. Instantly. I was impressed. I felt basketball sized swirls of energy under my feet--nothing subtle here at all. My hands and legs jerked involuntarily at times--I would later learn these are common reactions to the Reconnective frequencies. And then my stomach was HOT. I mean, REALLY hot. One of my cats was curled up there, and I moved her to check whether that was simply the reason; it wasn't.

Then the phone rang. It seemed like only five minutes, but it had been 30 minutes. "I felt guided to work on your stomach," Cindy told me. I didn't know what, but something was clearly going on, something real.

The next morning I had my gloves, my extra socks, my sweater, and an extra dose of curiosity and anticipation ready to go. I lay back on Cindy's massage table, closed my eyes—and again, instantly, I felt intense heat and energy around my head. Again I felt basketball swirls of energy under my feet and palms.

But I felt much, much more. At times, my fingers would twitch, even my whole hand. My feet and legs twitched at times too. I felt huge—what...clouds I guess, of energy, sometimes warm and bright, sometimes cool. My feet were freezing by the end. I could feel one of my arms as if I had lifted it at the elbow, but knew it was still lying flat on the table. I felt incredibly, very relaxed, very peaceful. Then for the longest time, I "saw" (my eyes still closed) a large cross of white light floating over me, as if I were in a huge cathedral at my funeral, though it wasn't a funeral feeling at all. Just this intense peace. And then Cindy touched my shoulder, signifying the end of the session.

It had been almost 45 minutes—it felt like only 5-10 minutes. Cindy said she had looked at my feet and thought "Are they vibrating?" I think they were. We relaxed for a bit while I gathered myself together, she to open her store, me to get on with my day.

I couldn't yet. My car was across from a park, and I went to sit on a bench. I felt strange, in a wonderful way. The energy of the tree I was watching seemed to flow through me. A squirrel ran across the grass to the tree, and I could feel that too. "Maybe just my imagination," I thought. But there was no denying the feeling. I started the long drive to work.

Strong winds and heavy rain brought flooding the next morning, and I had to detour around some closed roads. I was concerned I would be late. I did alright all in all, quickly parking my car up the street ten minutes after the appointment was to start. I jumped out and ran about 20 feet when a very clear voice in my head screamed, "Your gloves!" Oh yeah. I ran back, grabbed the bag with my gloves, hat, sweater, and water bottle, and ran to Cindy's

door.

She was nonplused. “I was just getting ready,” she explained about her day, an hour earlier, “And I looked up and said ‘He’s going to be late.’” So we just got right to it. Like the day before, she had a pillow ready to go under my knees for my back, to relieve the pain.

My doctor had caught the cause of my chronic back pain two years earlier, before I had thought to mention it, at an annual physical. One knee showed a normal reflex, but the second one returned only a slight reaction. “See that?” he asked. I nodded. “Degenerative disc disease. L4. Does it bother you?” I nodded. “Well, there’s nothing we can do for it. When it gets worse, I can give you something for it.” And it was getting worse, starting to interfere with my activities. When I injured my knees a year later, treatment started with a prescription anti-inflammatory, which thankfully helped my back pain a little. Physical therapy eventually cleared up my knee problem, but beyond some exercises to help strength the back muscles, there wasn’t much to do about the back pain.

The pillow in place, and me gloved, socked, and sweated, I was ready for Day Two.

Again, I felt heat and energy around my head instantly. Again, I felt clouds of energy, bright and warm, sometimes cool. And again, with swirls of energy beneath them, my fingers, hands, feet and legs jerked involuntarily, and I could feel my hands in places other than I knew I had left them. That’s what was the same.

What was different was that the large white cross of light came much sooner (at first I wondered if the session had ended so soon), and then came back twice more, each time filling me with peace, feeling like I was in a great cathedral. My hands and feet, especially my feet, were FREEZING.

But nothing prepared me for what came next.

I felt a gentle but firm hand on my stomach, steadying me. Then there was a golden cord going through my body to my spine. A large hand wrapped around the base of my spine, and another grasped the cord. “Ready?” a voice asked in my head. I nodded (not really...the sensation of nodding), and the hands pulled down on my spine and up on the cord, hard, very hard, while the hand steadying me held me down. My back arched sharply (for real) and my head flew back (again, for real), the treatment mildly painful but mainly a rush of good feeling and a sudden release of my lower back pain. There was a brief period of rest, a second of two. “Again!” cried the voice, and again my head flew back, my back arched, as the hands pulled hard on my spine and on the cord. It was wonderful. A brief rest, a few seconds longer than before. “OK...one more time!” coaxed the voice. I nodded (or the sensation of nodding), and one last time the hands pulled, MUCH harder and MUCH longer than before, as my entire body responded to the treatment and the flood of good feeling as the pain was released and my spine and body settled comfortably back to the table.

A few months later, incidentally, at my annual physical, my doctor again tested my reflexes, doing it when I wasn't expecting it, by telling a joke before I even knew what he was doing. Both reflexes were completely normal. My back pain is all but gone.

The cross of white light came back again, and the session returned to the more familiar patterns, with the exception of FREEZING feet and fingers. I felt incredibly wonderful.

When Cindy touched my shoulder to signify the end of the session, she looked at me and asked "Are you back yet?" I wasn't, and shook my head no. Again, it felt like all of this was only 5 minutes or so...it had been 35 minutes. "I felt like I was flying through this, just guided," Cindy told me. "I checked my notes to make sure I had done everything. I just floated through the whole thing." I nodded, and we discussed the session. It would take me another 20-30 minutes to regain enough mental composure to stand up and function.

She had to open her store, but there was NO way I was in any shape to drive. I walked a few blocks downtown for coffee and a sandwich, and just hung out for an hour before I even dared drive. When I did return to my car, I just felt wonderful. Lighter. Floating. That feeling not only stayed with me all day, but also grew continually throughout the day, like I was rising and rising gently in mood and lightness.

I took a leisurely, scenic drive to work, stretching out the two hours and taking in the changed scenery from the storms, the downed limbs, the flooded areas. When I was almost there, in town, an angry driver cut me off, then jumped out of the car at a light to yell before driving off. I just took it in, as if watching a sunset, unperturbed. And I still just felt better and better and better. This is, I believe, the closest I have ever been to Enlightenment.

While this one was the most dramatic, it was not the only interesting experience I had that spring and summer. And all of them were surprises, none of my doing.

A friend and I were driving down to Peekskill to see a Gandalf Murphy (aka, The Grand Slambovians) concert. "We can stay at my friend's house," my friend explained, "and then visit the Buddhist monastery. Want to?"

I did. Chuang Yen Monastery, in Lake Carmel, NY, contains the largest Buddha sculpture in North America--five stories high. The path to the Temple is lined with sculpture of Enlightened devotees/teachers, an impressive array. Then past the giant ceremonial drum and bell. At the entrance to the Temple, a cloud of incense burns. I purchased some, said my prayers, and added mine to the devotions.

Inside the Temple is a table piled high with free (donations accepted) literature, more than you could ever want to know about Buddhism. But the Buddha! Oh my. It is impressive, humbling, inspiring reverence, quiet, calm, peace, prayer, and devotion. I was awestruck, standing for the longest time just gazing. Around the Buddha is a painting of several bodhisattvas. "I want to be a bodhisattva," I told my friend, who laughed and then saw I

was serious. Across from the bodhisattas are all manner of musicians and devas, and around the outer drum, a continuous Chinese painting of Buddhist saints.

Next door is Kwan Yin Hall, equally inspiring, if not quite so imposing in size. But even more powerful was Seven Jewels Lake, featuring a deck over the water where a beautifully organic Kwan Yin greets visitors. I stood awestruck again, in silent communion with the powerful goddess. When I ventured to the railing, I saw the lake was teeming with Koi--you could almost walk across them. Then a white one came swimming across the lake right to my feet. A few minutes later, a gold one did the same. I just took it in. A powerful experience.

On another trip, I travelled to the Bearsville Theater, outside Woodstock, to see Amma Sri Karunamayi, considered to be an incarnation of the Divine Mother. Beth had been told by a psychic a few years ago (the same one who told her she would meet me) that she would see Amma, and here she was, touring the U.S. I felt compelled to go as well, to hear her speak, and to receive a blessing. We bought white clothes for the event, as these were to repel negative vibrations, Amma's request. She spoke of Hindu astrology--a complicated subject, and the lecture was hard to follow.

Then followed a long wait as we each took turns with Amma. This began with a long period of chanting, then looking at a projected image of a Hindu god (I'm not sure which one) sitting in lotus position against the universe and lightning bolts. After staring at this for several hours, I had a mini-revelation. Hinduism is a complex religion, one I always respected, but never really understood well. But here, I realized what I was seeing was not a depiction of god-like powers, but of universal energy, of a continuum, a field that connected us all. I mean not that I had an intellectual understanding, but a really feeling of connection.

When my turn came with Amma, I forgot the suggestion we not speak (as it "wastes Amma's precious gift") and said "Hello Amma," very softly. So I'm not a saint. Amma said nothing, and held the index card I had given her with my prayers on it. She gently stroked my forehead, something she had not done with the people who went before me. I received her blessing; we looked around the Theater and, starving after the long day, went out to eat.

I would like to explain why this was a significant event. I find I cannot. But it remains something I consider extremely significant, despite my inability to verbalize the rationale. I hope you understand.

During this same period, I had a number of dreams.

OK, I just wrote that, and I'm looking at it thinking, "No, really, they were not all dreams." Then I started looking at my list of things to write about, and I realize NONE of them were dreams. Isn't that interesting. But they *seem* dreamlike. I'll try to explain.

The first was one night when I was trying to get to sleep. Not often, but from time to time,

I have trouble with insomnia. It's a very frustrating experience--being tired, wanting to sleep, but being unable to do so.

This night was different though. I lay there three hours before I finally slept, but I didn't mind at all. The entire time, I felt embraced by an incredible love. Behind my closed eyes, I saw myself surrounded by flowers, red and pink roses and lotuses. The entire time was blissful beyond description. I was deeply, truly, unconditionally loved. Tired--but incredibly at peace.

Another night I woke, half woke really, somewhere in mid-night, 2-ish, I think, but I didn't see a clock, so who knows. I felt wonderful, and heard a voice say "Now, try this in your home environment," like I was in a class given a project to try. I understood that I was to continue this feeling of wonderfulness in the context of my home. And I did, never opening my eyes, for five minutes (I believe), until I drifted back to sleep--and presumably, back to class!

One morning I woke full of the concerns of that week. Not so unusual--but this morning, I was suddenly aware of them as a dark swarm around, or perhaps just near, my head. I recognized that I could choose whether to enter that swarm, and for five minutes, simply chose not to, enjoying waking into my new day without the disturbance of my thoughts, until I finally relented and entered them. From that moment I knew--we are not our thoughts! Another time, when my friend Louise was troubled by a number of things going on at the time, I could see her lovely energy, and around her head, swarming back and forth, a bluish-dark cloud of thoughts, distinctly separate from who she really was. Anytime you're disturbed by thoughts, remember this--they are not you, and you don't have to enter them.

One afternoon I was making a fresh pot of coffee, and just out of nowhere, I felt an incredible blessing descend upon me, filling me with the most wonderful feeling of love. I have no idea what this was about, other than the sudden and distinct feeling that someone or something had bestowed a blessing for whatever reason (or perhaps for no reason whatsoever, just because, a random act of blessing).

And writing these experiences, I'm reminded of another, long ago. I was awakened abruptly, with the distinct feeling I'd been slammed hard into my mattress, hearing a voice shout, "GO!" I looked at the clock--I was late for work, and had to hustle.

As I was writing all these, I started to think, "Geez! I sound like some flakey weirdo," or perhaps someone trying to convince another in a game of who's the most spiritual. But looking at this now that it's recorded, I think we all have a wide range of spiritual experiences that we simply forget or discard.

When I mentioned this chapter to Louise, she shared a time she and her daughter stopped to get gas, when out of nowhere, a giant of a man driving a tractor trailer cab pulled up

suddenly behind them. “Hey!” he warned, “You’ve got gas leaking all over--don’t start the car, or it might blow up.” She looked, and indeed, gas was leaking everywhere. When she looked back to thank him, he was gone. “Where did he go?” her daughter asked. Gone.

My friend Dennis tells of a time when his friend was going through a very hard time--divorce, work, personal doubts and fears, and was just sitting on the beach, trying to sort things out, when a very nice stranger walked by and said hello. He was the kind of person easy to talk to, and ended up sitting down and listening, for a couple of hours. He gave some calm advice, and listened some more, gave a few more calm words, listened again. Dennis’ friend started feeling a lot better, and began to see things in clearer perspective. “Well, I should get going,” the stranger said finally, and with a friendly goodbye, took his leave. When Dennis’ friend turned around to thank him--he was gone.

Frankly, I’d have doubted these stories. But later events brought reality home.

I got it into my head that I’d like to learn how to do a Reconnection, and I saw on the Reconnection website that a Level I/II session, for reconnective healing, was coming up in a month on Cape Cod. I read the description, and got very interested. After some thought, I signed up. A few weeks later, I realized Level III training, for the Reconnection, was immediately after, same location. I signed up. And I finally read Eric Pearl’s book, all of it.

As you might imagine, what I learned was incredible. That I could feel this energy in my hands was awesome. That I could impact what was happening to a person on the massage table without touching them was beyond interesting. That this could readily be done at a distance was challenging; that I could do it already left me speechless.

Learning the Reconnection was equally interesting. “I’ve been watching you,” offered one experienced volunteer from the side of the room during a break. “You just seem to know where to go next; your hands move there before the instructions.” She was right. I could feel the lines and the progression. It was almost obvious. We are energetic beings.

“By the way, your work is very good,” the instructor told me after scrutinizing my drawings of the lines and points, handing it back to me. Whew. I had completed my training, and earned my certificates (which are not awarded automatically for attending). Intense as this experience was, though, once I got home the real stuff started happening.

Louise’s step-mom took a bad fall. She had hit her head, and was in the ICU. The doctors warned, examining her X-ray, that with this kind of injury, in that part of the brain, she would just get worse. At best, she’d be in a nursing home, essentially a vegetable. More likely, she wouldn’t live long.

I felt helpless. I wanted to do something for Louise and for her step-mom. Not knowing what else to do, I decided to practice my new healing skills. In particular, since we did Reconnections much more quickly than in real time (or we’d never get through everything), I

wanted to practice in real time. Reconnections aren't taught as distance healing at the official seminars, but I figured no harm in trying. After all, perhaps Intention would benefit her, at least some, or help her make peace with her world before passing.

So, I found a nice spot outside, in the shade of some maple trees, and imagined her on my massage table. I was about to start the Reconnection sequence, when a voice in my head said, "No," meaning to do a healing instead. So--I did a distance healing. When I was finished, several minutes later, I segued into my Reconnection practice. I was quite engaged in my task, counting out time, referring with a glance to my notes at times, when I looked up from the head of the table and saw Jesus, Kwan Yin, and a circle of Angels surrounding me and the table.

I didn't even believe in Jesus anymore; I hadn't for years. Perhaps an amazing figure in history, who knows. But here I was. And here He was.

The first thought in my head was "If Jesus is here, why am I doing this?" After all, what greater healer could one want than Jesus! But the immediate answer, from Jesus, clearly heard in my head, was "Continue doing what you are doing." This is one of the six phrases Eric Pearl had been told, over and over, when he first started practicing. This were repeated to us during the training seminar. So, I continued doing what I was doing. What else would I do?

I hadn't believed in Angels either. But here I was, with the Sacred Heart, the Goddess of Compassion, and an angelic host. What can I tell you. I was wrong. Today, when people talk about finding God, I tell them I didn't find God--he came to get me. But He did so when I needed Him, when Louise's step-mom needed Him.

And Louise had told me. First, years ago, she shared how she had seen Jesus when she was a child. At the time, I believed she believed what she saw, but she had been a child at the time. And after my Reconnection, when I was explaining what happened, I described the white cross of light and how wonderful and peaceful it had made me feel.

"I don't know what that was about," I said.
 "Hello!" she answered. "Reconnection?"

She was right.

Louise was my first healing. "You're playing with my hair," she said. I wasn't. In fact, I was standing at her feet. But Norm, her step-mom's deceased love, used to play with people's hair at the top of their heads, just as Louise felt during her session.

Rita wanted help with her shoulder. But on the second session, I had the continual sense that we were not alone, and I keep seeing a man's face superimposed over hers, and a presence above her head. The third session, there was no doubt. Pearl's book talks about

his clients seeing people who aren't there, but I hadn't counted on seeing them myself.

Something was out of balance. What to do? I remembered Jesus, Kwan Yin, and the Angels. I figured they couldn't be far. "Look," I thought, directing my "speech" to the man, "It's time for you to go. Whatever happened, all is forgiven. One of these angels will show you the way. Go with them." Peace and balance returned.

After the session, Rita said, "He's gone," and told me the story of how she had been abused by a man as a child. "I feel lighter."

"Are you *sure* you didn't touch me?" asked Molly. I hadn't.

"Strange...it was like someone was holding my hand," said Doug.

Gradually, I would have to admit something else I had been reluctant to acknowledge--we are not alone. There are always spirits about us, and death is hardly an end, just a change of state.

I really wanted to embrace a rational, logical view of the world. But there'd be nothing rational or logical about ignoring evidence and experiences directly in front of me.

We live in a spiritual world. That's reality. However long it took me to accept it.

And I'm not alone. I frequently hear from people struggling with "the God thing," as they call it. As Tolle said, trying to make the infinite definite creates a problem. So how can people make that jump? Surely there's an easier path.

One interesting approach comes from a man, a very devout Christian, who offered this advice during one group discussion about faith. It surprised me--but has real wisdom, and may help.

"I grew up with a punishing, vengeful God," he explained. Like many kids he hated church and religion, though forced to go, and as an adult, fell away from his childhood faith.

"So I had to fire his ass," he said. "'Thank you for all your years of service, you got me through childhood, I appreciate that, but now it's time for you to go.' Then, I sat down and sketched out the qualities of a God with whom I could do business."

It's not as crazy as it sounds. Consider it from another approach.

Sit down and figure out what you believe--however little. Even almost nothing. But no faking, no forcing beliefs, no pretending, no making the best of it all--what is there that you *can* accept? That's not only a start, but also plenty. As Jesus' parable relates in Matthew 17, faith the size of a mustard seed can move a mountain. But real faith, not settling.

That's the hardest part for most people, and you don't need a vision, the cooperation of the universe, a guru, a comprehensive knowledge of religious texts, psychic powers or a really colorful aura. You just have to take a good, hard, thorough, honest look at yourself and what you truly believe. No reaction to what others are doing or saying or thinking or teaching or preaching. What do YOU, bottom line, believe? Even if you're coming from a place of complete rejection of religion, what do you believe? If we just are, what is it that animates us? Even if it's just managing your electrochemical/hormonal balance/perceptual experience--that's something.

But forget about your list of what you DON'T believe. So you don't believe aliens seeded the planet. OK. You don't believe a loving Creator would create good and evil. OK. You don't believe you go to heaven or hell when you die. Also fine. Doesn't matter. Forgot all that, because those things are about what other people believe. All too often, our discussions about what we believe are really just criticisms of other beliefs. What. Do. YOU. Believe. However minimal. That's good enough. In fact, it's plenty.

Or maybe you've got plenty! That's also fine. All this applies to you too--forget those parts that people usually argue about. Forget about "The Others." This is about you and your beliefs, the ones you honestly, thoroughly, hold day to day.

Ok, good. Now--you need a daily spiritual program. Relax, it isn't going to take much of your day (unless you decide otherwise). But you need one. Here's why.

Every notice that during a period of tension, each day starts more and more tense? Or each week? Or month? Soon you're a ball of tension, unable to relax. This is quite understandable, and you're building on the wrong material--your reaction to outside things. This is always about ego (sorry)--these are all the things that are happening to You! Yes, I understand these things are real (conceding that point for the moment). I'm talking here about the buildup.

Instead of building tension, start each day fresh. Build a morning ritual--it can be very short if you like. It's more important that you actually do it every day than that it be elaborate. Keep it simple. Perhaps a book of daily readings. Perhaps a prayer or chant. Perhaps meditation. Forget about the parts that don't work for you, but take those that do and construct at least a minimal daily spiritual practice--15 minutes. Something that is truly meaningful to you. Something you will actually like to do each morning. Something you find helpful.

Then do it. Instead of building tension each day, you will start each day at your Touchstone. So Monday goes haywire...but Tuesday starts *Here* at your morning ritual. Then new conflicts arise, but Wednesday starts *Here* at your morning ritual. The afternoon and evening bring some surprises, but Thursday morning, you're back *Here* at your morning ritual. No exceptions. No matter what is going on, you start again at your focal point. Each

day becomes a fresh beginning.

Instead of collecting tension, you'll start building a spiritual core. After a time, during the day, you'll find your spiritual core there as tensions and conflicts arise. You'll start to learn that you can start your day over at any time, back to your spiritual core. As you start doing that, you'll find the practice becomes habitual.

And as you practice just this little bit of spirituality, as minimally as you define it for yourself, you will find your spirituality growing in ways you could not have imagined. I promise you.

A wonderful journey awaits.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

I would like to talk about the importance of prayer, *even if you don't believe* in any particular religion. Bear with me...I will explain.

I would also like to stress the importance of prayer to believers who have found themselves saying at some point, "All you can do is pray." It's not that it's *all* you can do, but rather, precisely what you should be doing, and be glad for the doing of it.

The *Upanishads* (*Kena Upanishad*) contain a wonderful story that touches on where I'm going with this.

One day, the devas were proudly celebrating a great victory, when a *Yaksha* (ethereal spirit) appeared before them. They did not recognize it, so they sent Agni, the god of fire, to find out. When Agni approached the Yaksha, it asked him "What can you do?"

Agni answered "I am fire; I can burn all that is on the earth."

The Yaksha held out a straw. "Burn this!" And Agni exerted all his power, but could not burn it. Agni returned, still without the identity of this spirit.

The devas then sent Vayu, the god of wind, to inquire. As he approached, the Yaksha asked him "What can you do?"

Vayu answered, "I am wind; I can blow all that is on the earth."

The Yaksha held out a straw. "Blow this!" And Vayu tried mightily, but could not move it. He returned, also without the identity of this mysterious spirit.

Finally the devas sent Indra, Chief of the gods, but as he approached, the Yaksha disappeared, and in its place appeared Uma Haimavati (daughter of the Himalayas). When

Indra asked her who the great Yaksha had been, she replied, “Indeed, It was Brahman. Though Him alone you all achieved victory.”

As the Upanishads begin: “Filled with Brahman are all things that are; filled with Brahman are all things that are not.”

Without Brahman, even the gods are powerless.

Prayer reminds us of this. There’s a higher power, whatever you believe that to be--and it’s not you. That’s the point.

For a religious person, say your prayer, and turn it over to God. Let go of the outcome; whatever happens is as it should be.

For those who don’t subscribe to any religion, pray just the same. To whom? Who cares. Just pray. It will remind you that you are not the powers that be. And when you align yourself with what is instead of what isn’t, you too will grow to recognize you are “filled with Brahman.” Even if you’re convinced you’re talking to nothing, do it anyway. What have you got to lose? Try it. In time, you will be amazed. And even if nothing else, it will help you out of your egoic self, which is holding you back.

For that reason, I really like this prayer: “Please put in my path the people who can help me.” This beautifully both appeals to a power greater than yourself while simultaneously reminding you not to try to do everything by yourself. This prayer also has you looking outside yourself and your thinking for fresh perspectives and new approaches. Before long, you’ll experience so many wonderful “coincidences” that you’ll find yourself embracing prayer as the powerful tool it is.

Use it well.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

In *The Cosmic Prison*, Loren Eiseley points out that the moment we name something, we limit it to less than what it is, and in the image of our own limited understanding. We define and classify to understand, but in so doing we create an artificial structure of reality, believing our creation in place of the truth. Mayflies pretending to be Masters of the Universe.

But we aren’t. Eiseley compares our situation to that of a white blood cell traveling through the circulatory system of a cat. What could we know of the world, let alone the universe! We would never see the sun. We would never even know we are part of a cat, or that there were other organic systems besides ourselves. Reality for us would be the circulatory system alone--and a limited understanding of even that.

Trying to use our minds to comprehend our natural state and our connection to what's around us is then beyond our capacity, beyond our perception, beyond our understanding in the usual sense as we use that term. We just aren't capable. We must turn instead to our experience, and to what flows through and unties us, beyond the abilities of our minds. This is not a matter of turning mystic; it's a matter of using the right tool for the job. Nor is this a matter of embracing religion necessarily--it's a matter of facing reality. We simply cannot function well while insisting we are separate.

K. C. Cole's *The Arrow of Time* adds the dimension of purpose. Left to themselves, the molecules in the refrigerator might stay grouped as cold ones inside and warm ones outside, but it's more likely that without any organizing purpose, they will co-mingle and turn lukewarm. The purpose of the refrigerator is to continually cool the molecules inside, thereby maintaining a refrigerator's viability as a reliable appliance.

Our lives, too, need this direction and purpose, or our energies become entropic. Relationships, careers, nations--all need continual attention in consistent directions to maintain their viability as reliable vehicles. The same is true of our personal lives. Without a direction and purpose, without a spiritual focus, we have no compass, and are easily thrown not off our path, as it might seem, but rather thrown because we have no path.

Wayne Dyer describes it well:

“Nikos Kazantzakis reinforces this idea by giving these words to his fanciful character Zorba (in his book *Zorba the Greek*), who always lived his life to the fullest: ‘By believing passionately in something that does not yet exist we create it. The nonexistent is whatever we have not sufficiently desired.’ This is the power of your imagination when what you desire is imagined sufficiently to make it your reality.

“Perhaps the most common misuse of imagination is stressing what you don't want for yourself. This is the largest category of misusing imagination. Start paying attention to general conversation, and you will be astounded at how incredibly prevalent it is.”

Dan Zadra says it even more pointedly: “Worrying is a misuse of the imagination.”

We need that spiritual core, that connection to What Is, whatever we want to call that What Is, even if we don't know what that is--and not to worry, because we can't know. It's beyond our minds. But we can experience the connection to whole, the flow of the spirit, and we can direct our purpose and proceed in accordance with our spiritual path. This is living.

IN SEARCH OF ENLIGHTENMENT

What does it mean to find Enlightenment? All the texts say the same--we already are

Enlightened, that we are just unaware. Awakening would be a more accurate term.

“How can I live in the moment?” It’s got to be an ironic question--we *are* in the present moment. But as Eckhart Tolle says, when we make the present moment an obstacle, life become the problem. He goes on to advise, “Don’t treat the present as no more than a means to an end--make it your friend.” This is the dysfunction, the ego.

Just be. We all have moments when we get it right--that deeply peaceful time in nature, the incredible love-making glow with someone so very dear, the playful laughter of a child, playing fetch with the dog, absorption in work we find meaningful, all these make time collapse, worry vanish, and for a time, we just live. In these moments, we are Awakened. We know how to do it. The problem is, we feel these are fleeting adventures; we’re unaware it’s how we’re supposed to feel all the time. All the time.

What gets in the way? Ego. We want to run the show, but in doing so, we separate ourselves from it, and are no longer Enlightened, and no longer see ourselves as connected to All in the Moment--we’ve become Unaware, and ironically, by choice, even as we deny that choice. “I want to be Enlightened” already puts the Ego as separate and ourselves as distant from something that we already are.

The Buddha’s last obstacle to Enlightenment was his own ego. “Architect, I have met you at last.” It’s the ego that constructs the imaginary world of our Unenlightenment. And when his Ego challenged him, asking if he did this great thing, who would be there to see it, if not even his own Ego? That’s the genius of The Buddha’s final realization: “The Earth is my witness,” and touching the ground, entered Nirvana.

To get out of self, be of service to others. At first, I found this hard to do. I had many tasks, and if I didn’t do them, then who? I had no time. But in time, looking for opportunities to truly help when the need arose, I found more and more opportunities--and I found these opportunities detracted from my other tasks very little. In fact, things ran much better when I focused on being of service than when I was just out for my own endeavors. I also found life far more enjoyable and rewarding.

So get up in the morning and ask to be guided to where you can best be of service. This accomplishes several things. You’ll be more open to opportunities and new experiences. You’ll have greater opportunities to express your unique talents, and enjoy life all the more because of it. Notice that all those transcendently happy moments above involve getting outside of ourselves and our own minds? You’ll start experiencing more of these moments, closer and closer, sacred moments, until naturally, easily, as it was meant to be, you’ll find these moments coming continually, each moment of each day a sacred event, rich with profound enjoyment, unattached for the outcomes, letting them unfold, peaceful in the process.

And when that happens--it will happen prior to you becoming aware of it--you will realize

what The Buddha meant. You are Awakened. You are Enlightened.

Share it freely.