

A Dangerous Book

–Roger Stephens

Preface -- What's This Book About?

There is a story, probably apocryphal, in which a handful of French policemen were in hot pursuit of a thief, who eluded them by ducking into a large building. They soon realized that there were more exits from this building than there were policemen to cover them, and that without more help, the thief could be expected to escape through an unguarded door. Next to this large building there was a smaller one with only a few exits, so the police converged on this building instead, confident that the thief would not be able to evade them ... after all, they had all the exits covered. So they confidently assured the public that they had the situation well in hand.

This story is a parable about the official solutions to the problems we humans face today. In our case, the thief might represent the solutions to our global, environmental, social, and personal problems, the building the thief escaped into might be the unapprehended situation, and the policemen the experts of all stripes who would fix our problems for us, and whose occasionally clever but ultimately detrimental advice has had the effect of compounding the severity of the problems they have not really addressed (the thief got away and did more mischief). This parable is about why the state of the civilized world is moving swiftly to a new arrangement radically different from what we are all used to.

Civilization is reaching a turning point. The technological successes of the past few dozen centuries, culminating in this most stupendous twentieth century, have not only empowered humans beyond their wisdom, but also severely changed forever, and in unknown and perhaps unknowable ways, the very biosphere in which all life as we know it exists.

Doomsday scenarios are numbing, but viewed from a higher perspective, Life is very generous, providing each and all of us the perfect laboratory for carrying out our human experiments. Ironically, the very conditions which threaten the status of life on the planet are also those which we living humans now require in order to learn what we each need to learn; otherwise, our life situations would be other than they are.

The availability of information and alternative perspectives on life and the living of it has never been greater in history. The electronics revolution is bringing more people within reach of more information than ever before. With all these choices, and with more people promising us salvation or heaven or Nirvana, who should we believe? Whose views of life are the most correct, and therefore the most useful? Theologians? Business experts? Politicians?

The uncertainty arising from the popularity of all these alternatives reaches into the deepest corners of our lives, leading more and more of us to begin to question the root assumptions of

our modern modes of life and the things we take for granted--continuous growth, annual crops of new electro-mechanical toys, more powerful wonder drugs, more and more of everything.

All this comes at a cost far higher than the initial purchase price; it is a cost which has never been factored into the selling price, but a cost which "the nature" of the world nevertheless assesses. And mankind's bills are coming due with crushing insistence.

For generations, until the habit has thoroughly permeated the fabric of our culture, we have been taught to expect more and more. Of course, we've usually gotten something other than we bargained for, but that's quickly forgotten with every new wave of flowery promises. The staggering costs of our consumptive lifestyles are coming due, and are expressed in the rapid social and environmental change we find occurring all around us today. The foundations of modern life (meaning the family, the community, and the state) are not nearly as stout as we have been led to believe and expect. Drastic change, unforeseeable and uncontrollable by any human agency, is touching every area of our lives, and when our pillars crumble, we begin searching for something we sense that we should have looked for much earlier.

The growth of the self-discovery industry over the past several decades loudly proclaims the need for more than just more. As usual, however, when a good idea gets organized, it ceases to be alive, so these too have begun to grow into institutions and become pillars of their own sort, begging us to rely on them, when in fact they themselves are operating by the same old rules: growth as an indicator of worth, and as a source of ever-increasing income for those on the inside. These new pillars are only props, and quickly crumble when stressed. The Earth quakes in many ways when stresses get out of bounds.

This is a dangerous book because it calls into question some of the root assumptions which we westerners have held for centuries, if not millennia, about the nature of human existence and our place on the planet. Calling these assumptions into question isn't dangerous in and of itself, but when a lot of people do so, the underpinnings of any artificially erected social arrangement are seriously compromised. The truth about the Emperor's new clothes is no longer a secret.

The way society is organized today (presuming we can call overpopulation, political corruption, economic instability, and religious intolerance "organized"), those who presently benefit the most from the existing structures are those who are least likely to make the changes which need to be made. The ideas in this book are dangerous to such interests, because the ideas contained herein empower individuals to seek the truth for themselves.

Whenever a power base is threatened, particularly one which fails the test of moral legitimacy, those in charge will take whatever steps necessary to minimize, or marginalize, that threat. Today, those organizations and agencies who are best empowered to catalyze meaningful change are also those least likely to initiate and support such change. Be they federal, state, or local governmental bodies, corporate helmsmen, professionals, religious leaders, or (most debilitating

of all) educational systems, our leaders seem unable to present any fundamentally meaningful solutions to the mounting problems facing society. The various overt and covert goals of government, business, religion, and education are necessarily limited to the purview of those in charge.

This book is dangerous because it declares, as openly and clearly as possible, that people--and that means you, me, and everybody else--are not on this earth to wave a flag, or kill for God, or flip burgers, or convert the riches of the planet into scribbles on a ledger. Just how far out of touch with reality the public world is will become apparent in stages . . . the problems resulting from our traditionally skewed world views are surging down upon the race in these times, and only those who have sought more deeply than dogmas or intellectual arguments will find themselves equipped to deal with life in the 21st century. I want to be one of those, and you are reading this because you do too.

Humanity is entering a new era, a departure perhaps as profound as the first kindled fire or the first turns of the first wheel . Right now, new revelations and developments are modifying all areas and all levels of our earthly human experience, bringing changes that are far more profound and sweeping than anyone can imagine or foresee.

Isn't it possible that the long-building woes presently inundating all spheres of human activity might be related to some mistaken understanding of who we really are and why we are here? As with the saber-tooth tiger attaining extinction because its strength became a liability, isn't it possible that overpopulation, loss of individual sovereignty, physical and psychic pollution, and a multitude of other maladies might be signaling a necessarily drastic course change for our proverbial yet mightily foundering ships of state?

Societies all over the globe are being severely challenged by the consequences of their very existence. It is becoming clear to a growing number of philosophically unattached people that happiness, prosperity and meaning in life are the results of personal wisdom and action; they are not delivered by institutions like the state, the church, the economy, or the schools, all of which are based on untenable tenets, and administered by untenable tenants.

This book isn't intended to be a gentle pastel of how things ought to be, nor is it a diagram for enlightened self-interest--a term which is curiously oxymoronic. What is needed is not a new religion, or system, or technique, because we've already had to endure too many of those. What is needed is a major re-thinking of our relationships with ourselves, each other, and the planet. It's an inside job all the way.

The phrase "the world is a mirror" no longer strikes us as irresponsible or trite, as it might once have. What we see in the world is what we think in our heads. It's a very simple concept, but it is also a two edged sword, and faultily wielded, it is cutting us severely. Hence the blinding pain so common in modern life.

Neither is this book a new set of instructions, a new roster of definitions, or a step-by-step manual about building your own personal kingdom of heaven for fun and profit. It is more of a mirror--not perfectly clear perhaps, but lucid enough that if you are really interested in finding out who you are and what this world is all about, you will find within and between its words what you need to see at the time. What you find will, of course, change as you change, and as the world changes, but that's as it must be.

Because of all the transformations that are occurring in every conceivable corner of modern life, new systems and new arrangements will have to emerge to deal with the consequences of these changes. Increasingly, it will take conscious people in positions of responsibility to know what to do in a situation which has never arisen before, it will take people who have freed themselves from the misleading and often barbarous programming most of us have received since we were infants. Clarity of action requires clarity of being. If we would do justice to the promise of the future, then we have to learn about ourselves, who we might really be, and how to live in harmony, both inwardly and outwardly. This book, to borrow from Zen imagery, is like a finger pointing at the moon. It contains no ultimate answers . . . it only points in as many ways as possible to the reality of being, the reality of your true being and mine, who we really are and what we might really be here for.

The Earth and its family of life forms are entering a new age. Right now, right where you are, is where to look for the next clue. Learning to be in the present, learning to be and hear and know is what this book is about. For when a person learns this, then it doesn't matter so much how lost in illusion the rest of the world is, for all the things that make life wonderful and inspiring now come forth as if by magic. We were meant to live joyously and prosperously; anything which prevents this is wrong. Or at least incorrect.

Chapter 1 -- Who Are You, and Why Are You Here?

Is a zebra a black animal with white stripes, or a white animal with black stripes? --Jerry Colonna

Well, here you are, a resident of planet Earth, a human being with a name and a history and a social security number, a mysterious "something which is aware of itself," occupying a physical body, dealing with an often confusing personality, learning how to navigate the choppy waters of modern life, and wondering what it is all about.

As an adult, you are no longer allowed to bask in the pristine simplicity you knew in childhood. Throughout your entire life, your body has changed in strange, wondrous, and often confusing ways. Your awareness of the world, with all its quirks and wrinkles, has constantly grown and changed, and you are moving, perhaps hesitantly, perhaps boldly, into some of Life's countless corridors, finding things you like and things you don't like. You are wondering how you fit into

this strange place called the world, perhaps wondering how to re-arrange yourself so that things feel better. You might be wondering what went wrong that your life is no longer as joyful as you have heard that it should be.

And, as if your own personal changes aren't challenging enough, the world itself is changing faster than it ever has before in history. Social institutions that haven't worked very well in the past aren't working very well today either:

Schools, with precious few exceptions and after a centuries of professionally endorsed improvement, have become little more than modified detention centers in which kids are ground under the heel of conformity and don't learn much that's useful in the meantime. An endless parade of school reform measures invariably results in a glitzier form of the same old panaceas which haven't worked before. The people in charge, being themselves well-behaved and conforming products of the system, can see no further.

Churches and religions have become businesses that promise heaven but never get around to delivering the goods (heard of any saints or saviors coming out of the churches lately?) The business of religion has grown into a sacred cow, and while the ministers and bishops drive Cadillacs, the average believer is left to breathe and try to enjoy the exhaust of centuries of hot air.

Governments at all levels are morally, if not legally, corrupt and bloated. They wave the flag of democracies that aren't democratic while sinking the piers of consumerism ever deeper into the hearts of their populations. A well-funded police state is taking shape behind increasingly shrill calls for law and order, prisons are a Wall Street growth industry, and the news media, with precious few exceptions, are as selective and narrow-minded as the people who control them.

Economic systems exist increasingly for the benefits of the share-holders. The actual costs of doing business include bankrupted global resources and obliterated ecosystems, not to mention human suffering on an unprecedented scale. The refusal on the part of politics and business alike to even consider a steady-state economy belies the fundamental and as yet unrecognized weakness of the system: unlimited growth is impossible in a finite arena, and fatal if vigorously pursued.

The hidden, off-budget costs of what our leaders proudly call economic progress have escalated beyond all reason, and beyond all comprehension as well. The energy required to maintain wasteful and inefficient systems has become a built-in drain on the bodies, minds, and spirits of people everywhere. The costly labor-saving machines that were created to serve us have grown into monsters which are now threatening our very existence.

The new century will dawn on a world much different than the one we live in today. The "bigger is better" mentality that has characterized and dominated human activity for the past several

millennia has overdrawn its accounts with the planet and is rapidly going bankrupt. Business and government have become ends in themselves, more important in their own eyes than life itself. The day-to-day welfare of the average person has been subjugated to the economic health of Wall Street. Lawyers have a virtual strangle hold on all aspects of modern life, and the impersonal, money-driven marketplace has succeeded in reducing human beings to the subhuman status of percentiles, statistics, interest groups, constituencies, and market segments. The effects of this systematic emasculation are degrading to real people, and this is a big reason why people are as unhappy as they are today.

Whatever you may have been told, you are a valid human being, but the chances are excellent that you are also bewildered as to how you fit into this sometimes frightening, sometimes wondrous, but always changing world, and what you can do about it. You have left behind the toys of childhood and are still figuring out how to use those of adulthood. No matter your age, you are wondering what you are going to be doing for what remains of your earthly life (let alone afterward), and hoping you are right.

The world is highly confused, and highly confusing, for normal people. Far more than a faster car, a colder refrigerator, or a sneakier sneaker, people need the little things, the unmarketable and untaxable things like love, family and community, and something meaningful to do with our lives.

For the vast majority of human time on the planet, our families and local communities were the ultimate realities in our lives. For all but a handful of adventurous souls, there was only mystery beyond the boundaries of our local territories. Family and community were the world. But in recent years the family and the community, in lockstep pursuit of some fleeting materialistic ideals, have surrendered their autonomy to an abstraction called society; the family and sense of community have ultimately withered as a result. The public debate over family values conveniently overlooks the fact that public, majoritarian, popularized values have actually replaced family values, which ought rightly to be different for each family.

The fragmentation of the family institution, aided by a market-driven "stay ahead of the Jones's" mentality, is what the so-called generation gap is all about: the most practical and usable knowledge changes so rapidly these days that parents and grandparents become little more than repositories of sometimes interesting but largely useless trivia. They used to be able to show the way, but now they are just in the way.

Like you, every human being who ever lived has experienced life from the perspective of being at the center of the local universe. For an entire lifetime, we are each the main character in the most important drama on Earth: our own lives. But knowing this intellectually doesn't seem to help when we are trying to make sense of what's going on around us, and it is especially difficult when all the forces of society are marshaled against this feeling of being in the center. Society, the church, and the state have replaced humans--family and the local community--as the official centers of gravity. This conflict--between inside- and outside-centeredness--is perceived as

tension in our lives, so the baffling question of the real nature of one's very being usually gets sluffed off as too troublesome to pursue. That is, until circumstances force us to address it.

Of all the people we know, the genuine ones, the ones who are really worth knowing and listening to, are those who have experienced times of profound self-doubt and soul searching, those who have had to dig within themselves when they couldn't get by on just talent or good looks. These special people have experienced what is often called the dark night of the soul, which is how we experience the final death throes of our crushed illusions.

It is always darkest just before the dawn, but the dawn always comes eventually. The dawning of real (which is to say, divine) human consciousness comes from a yearning deep inside each one of us that requires us to integrate, to unify, to become one with, to understand, to be who we really are, and to discard the cumbersome baggage of what we aren't. Perhaps this yearning is prompted by a personal tragedy, a sudden shift in career prospects, or any of countless other possibilities. The important thing to note is that, for a rapidly growing segment of Earth's populations, this is a time of great change, a great prompting for us to move in new directions.

We know by way of some inner reckoning that things should be, can be, and ought to be better. We sense that there is something within that is trying to get out, something that will make a difference. We can free our innate creative capacities only by finding out who we are, which is not as simple as it sounds. It's not as hard as it sounds, either, yet to do so is vitally important today, because world peace is impossible unless the people comprising that world are at peace.

It has never been, and never will be, that a peaceful world will make people peaceful. People will never be peaceful unless they know who they are. Discovering who we are and why we are here, even in settled times, can try the patience of the best of us, and yet today, we must all deal with vast and sweeping changes which nobody can foretell.

To be happy, each of us has to be doing what we came here to do. How are we to know what that is? Can we take an aptitude test that will tell us who we are? Is there anybody whom we can go to and get this kind of wisdom? Many otherwise sensible people still believe so.

You probably have many life questions for which you haven't found adequate answers, answers based not on some external authority which at some point must be taken on faith, but on your own innate and super-human feel for what is right and proper for your life. Somewhere deep inside you know that unless you are at peace with yourself, you will never find peace and fulfillment in the world.

That's why I have written this book, for I too have searched for most of my life for the truth about who I am and why I am here. I have been what the world would call modestly successful in several widely varying occupations, but none of them was "IT", none of them was what I am really here to do, so none of them brought me the happiness I sought.

So I scoured the dusty archives of philosophy and religion for something that boiled down to more than just narrow-minded dogma and blind faith. I have asked tough questions whenever I could. I have taken chances; I have sat on mountain tops and shivered, in deserts and watched rattlesnakes crawl across my legs. I have turned my back on the world of money and popularity. I have thrown my fate to the winds looking for wisdom, and for those special answers that resonate with something deep inside me. This book exists to help me share some of what I have discovered.

While I did find a few vague clues about the real essence of life in the more traditional places like religion and philosophy, I found the most in unexpected and unofficial regions, like the occasional lyrics to a popular song, casual words or glances from a stranger, a cold, babbling stream at dawn, the laughter of a child, the stench of a road-kill possum rotting in the sun, a passage in some little known book. That's why this book is sprinkled with quotes . . . they are windows which can open to new panoramas for those who are tired of the same old wallpaper.

What I discovered in my own way is what all the masters and seers throughout history have been saying all along, but which has been effectively buried beneath the dogma of every organized religion. Reality is here, and if from time to time someone breaks through the illusions and gets a good look at it, then comes back and tells his friends about it, chances are pretty good that when you filter out all of the cultural flavorings (figures of speech, idioms, local slang, etc.), that having seen the same reality, each such seer would be describing pretty much the same reality. Beneath the rhetoric, what they have all been saying is this:

What you are looking for is who you already are.

Now, I know that sounds simple, but when you investigate, and I mean really dig within and ask yourself "Who am I?," and when you don't settle for the usual labels that you've been conditioned to regurgitate on cue, then you will begin to perceive the limitless depths available through the portal of that simple statement.

You will discover that happiness, purpose, and meaning in life are never the results of the right beliefs or techniques, they do not depend on social connections, money, reputation, education, circumstances of birth, or any of the other surface things we humans are taught to worship. If you persist, you will discover that you've always had what you needed, and that your only problem has been that you were taught, and convinced, that you needed something you didn't already have.

This book, therefore, is a modest restatement of the same truths which have been known by the wise since the dawn of human existence, potent and vital perspectives which have somehow survived the spiritually withering process called civilization.

He who knows others is wise. He who knows himself is enlightened.

--Lao Tzu

Synonyms: enlightened, Self-realized, saved, reborn, awakened, anointed, ascended. These are simply different labels for the natural, the intended, and the nowadays thoroughly misunderstood status of human beings on the planet we call Earth. These are just different ways of referring to the goal which is always at hand, the main message of all the masters, the inalienable birthright of all human beings. These are what we came here to be, and these are what most of us have traded away in pursuit of God, country, and a larger share of that big apple pie in the sky.

More synonyms: Heaven, Nirvana, Moksha, the Elysian Fields, the Happy Hunting Grounds, the real world. These are different labels for what a realized being realizes. It's the same world, but how you see it depends on how you see you; and how you see you depends on who you think you are.

This simple question--Who am I?--is really the most profound question a person can ask. It may sound too simplistic, too obvious to lead to any real insight into the practical problems of life, but unless you can answer it, unless you even begin to ask it, then the glowing promise which lighted your infancy goes dim, and life soon degenerates into a badly written and poorly played soap opera, a futile struggle for survival against overwhelming odds.

Consisting of only three simple words, just six letters, "Who Am I?" is in fact a huge question, the ultimate inquiry. Unlike most of the bland, factual questions we are used to, this one cannot be answered in any number of words. Yet once it occurs to you what it really means, this question will lead you to the discovery of why you are here and what this life is really all about.

It is impossible for anyone to learn that which he thinks he already knows. --Plutarch

This is about YOU. It is not about your name, your education or reputation or job prospects, your social or cultural background, your blood line, your personal history, or anything else so superficial. It is about that mysterious sense of consciousness that resides at and as the very center of who you take yourself to be.

Yet the best that can be expected of all the words in this or any other book is that they might have the effect of holding a mirror up to that consciousness within you in order that you might catch a glimpse of the profound mystery which you really are.

Chapter 2 -- Some Words About Words

The truth which can be spoken is not the true truth.

--Lao Tzu

Beware of language, because it is often a great cheat.

--Peter Mere Latham

Words cannot express what words cannot express.

--Anon

Like other books, this one makes use of what we call language. Language is a system of conventional symbols which, when arranged in a consistent manner, tend to convey meaning beyond themselves. Language is cultural; the meanings of words depend on the prevailing social values, and knowing what words mean can often be helpful.

But the major problem with this or any language is that our ponderous reliance on it makes it deceptively easy to forget that the world doesn't exist according to the rules of sentence structure, the manner in which we are forced, by convention, to discuss it. When this is forgotten, then language becomes an invisible, and therefore all the more powerful modifier of how we perceive the world around us. It is as though we have been wearing colored glasses over our eyes for longer than we can remember, glasses that allow us to see only certain colors. Eventually it becomes a matter of common sense that only those colors exist in the world, which, when we take them off again, is obviously untrue. Any language, taken at face value, will ultimately give us a false, or at best misleading understanding of everything we describe in that language, including who we are.

To cite a simple but potentially shocking example, consider the sentence "The lightning flashed". Its meaning is clear, if not thunderously electrifying.

If one looks no further, then it will be presumed that lightning is a thing which does the verb flashing. According to the rules of sentence structure, "The lightning flashed" is quite proper and correct . . . it contains a noun and a verb. That's why we can understand the sentence, if not its referent.

What is hidden, what is made invisible by the convention of our linguistic structure, is that lightning isn't a thing which sort of hangs around in a cumulo-nimbus trench coat and occasionally does the verb flashing. In the case of real lightning, there is no such separation of its reality into the categories of noun and verb, because flashing isn't something that lightning just does: it's what lightning is.

Additionally, a dependence on language usually lulls us into the presumption that, having once given something a name, a superficial label, we actually know and understand what it is. We all know the label "lightning"; we all use it casually. Yet even scientists whose careers are spent studying lightning are not so bold as to claim to know what it is-- that's why they are studying it.

But in the spirit of over-simplification which has characterized the last few thousand years of law, religion, politics, and media, we humans and the world around us have been reduced to discrete adjective-laden nouns which spend our lives doing verbs adverbially, if not ad nauseously. When everyone around us unquestioningly does something all the time, we eventually cease to have questions about it, we accept it, it becomes a norm. Over-simplification is appealing to the spiritually drowsy because labels are far easier to grasp than the realities to which they pretend. After a while, we just assume that the labels are true.

This is conventional thinking, wherein people convene (come together) and agree to call this "this" and that "that". When somebody asks you who you are, for example, don't you usually answer with your main label? Most people aren't really interested in anything but your labels, and they might even get seriously irritated at you if you present anything but the right one. But that's just your name, a tag which someone stuck onto you before you knew what had happened. Your name isn't who you are. Who are you?

In the same way, you are not your body, which changes from moment to moment with every breath and twitch of muscle. Neither are you your mind, your ego, your personality, because those too change with every experience you have. Who are the YOU who has been there unchanged all along? Who is your life happening to? Unless you can discover this, then you will have no choice but to live in the painfully ineffective and maddeningly insubstantial illusion of who you think you are.

In the reality of your being, you are not a noun or a verb; you are as far beyond a label or some grammatical form as a bolt of lightning is beyond the little words used to indicate it. So is God, Truth, Life, or whatever you may choose to call IT.

But this is a book, and to be intelligible it must make use of the available language, whatever its inherent limitations. So, if we would transcend those limitations, then you must listen within yourself for that silent but--but once you learn to recognize its feel--unmistakable ring of recognition when you hear something that in your bones you know to be so. It may even give you something of a charge, like lightning, but without the revolting side effects.

Chapter 3 -- So, who are you, anyway?

To know that you do not know is best. To pretend to know when you do not is a disease.

--Lao Tzu

To know anything well involves a profound sense of ignorance.

--John Ruskin

It is simply the belief that we know who we are that keeps us from discovering who we really are. We have all spent our formative years developing and refining our egos. Egos are the personalized roles we learn to play, the convenient identifiers of who we are supposed to be.

Like a job description, these life description labels are tiny enough to be grasped by our understanding, and once we get a handle on "who I guess I am", it crystallizes into what is called an ego, a responsible and duty-bound member, first of the family and later of the society. Our loyal performance of these roles is thereafter required, and over the centuries we have elaborated all sorts of social, religious, and legal structures to hold ourselves and each other to their dutiful execution.

The label called you is knowable (it has fingerprints, a certain physical appearance, certain personality traits, and so on), but what the label is affixed to remains a mystery. Understanding the label while ignoring the reality may give us a momentary sense of security that we know what it is, but the realization that we "don't really know" is what begins the search called self-inquiry.

Since we take our own egos so seriously, we take everyone else's seriously as well. We have become convinced that these egos are real and are who and what we really are. We learn to take things personally: we get angry whenever our egos are questioned or misunderstood, and we get disappointed when other egos turn out to be something other than what our egos thought they were. Based on a false understanding of the players, the dynamics of human interaction quickly become bewildering and frustrating, giving rise to whole generations of psychologists, counselors, and advisors to provide our egos with excuses for why things are not right in our lives.

The problem, of course, is that we have forgotten who we are; we only know who we think we are, something that turns out to be very insubstantial. When who we think we are fails, we are naturally at a loss as to where to turn or what to do about it. If the disrupting event is a biggie, then we might even lose it and have to go spend time with the nice man at the funny farm.

To see this point more clearly, to see how bewildering these multiple images of ourselves and of each other can become, and to get a perspective on the extent to which we all engage in this game of unintended interpersonal deception, let's pretend that you and I are talking face to face to each other. It will seem to a third person that two people are having a conversation.

If we look a little more closely however, we soon discover that, even though there are only two bodies present, there are a great many of us involved. The dynamics of this phenomenon are active in every personal relationship you have.

First, there is who we will call You #1. This is who you really are, the you who you have been since before you became who you think you are, the eternal and unchanging consciousness which knows that it exists, the innermost witness to your life.

This part of you is the ultimate mystery in the cosmos. It is the doorway to Truth. Religions have called this mystery by such diverse names as the Atman (the presence of the infinite Brahma in individual form), the Holy Spirit, the Buddha nature, and countless others, but these terms are

really just metaphors which all refer to the mystery which exists at the very center of all your ideas about yourself.

To the extent that we haven't yet recognized it, to the extent that we still believe in something outside of ourselves, a god or something, then the inward search is still just an inverted outward search. You #1 is the innermost witness of all this.

By contrast, You #2 is who you think you are. This is the you with whom you are most familiar. It is your idea of who you are, including your body, your mind, your personality, everything that makes you a temporally continuous member of the human species.

But You #2 is actually a highly subjective selection of everything that everybody has ever told you about yourself: you have retained what you believed and agreed with, and discarded what you didn't. This personalized mental/emotional construct, this character-in-the-play-of-your-life, is called the ego (Latin for I am). It is the feeling of selfhood, the identification of You #1 (consciousness) with a name, a body, a personality, and a personal history.

In a way, our lives are like a necklace strung of our personal experiences, and the continuity that we feel in our lives, the so-called stream of consciousness (I am the same one who last night went to sleep) runs like a thread through the beads of those experiences.

However, in the glitter of the beads, this unifying thread is largely overlooked. The beads may be luxurious or tragic, stunningly brilliant or as dull as ditch water, but it's that mysterious stream of consciousness that holds everything together, including your personal perspective of it. The beads, which taken together are known as You #2, come and go, but the string running through them is essential and eternal; this is who you really are: You #1.

So, when our parents told us that we were angels or idiots, the minister that we were as dumb and helpless as sheep, the neighbor kids that we were dweebs, our big sister that we were a pain in the butt, and so on, we were learning who we are, and how we rank in society. We were learning You #2.

When we were small children and weren't yet interested in learning how to work the earthly ropes, we didn't know who we were, and what's more we didn't much care . . . we just were. Experiences were neither good nor bad: they just were, and Life always replaced one with the next.

But soon enough, as a necessary (for the aims of society's managers) part of the process of socializing us into the family and community, we were taught to accept as gospel the information and opinions which came from our "olders and betters". To a tiny infant, that effectively means everyone else on the planet. We were told by everybody and every condition around us who we were expected to be, and it was our sacred duty to make sure we measured up. A major irony in

this is that probably none of these people had even the slightest idea who they really were, yet we were brow-beaten into believing in their assessments of who we were and what the world is.

Now, as adults, having learned well our early lessons in political correctness, we dutifully put on different and appropriate faces for different people. None of us presents quite the same persona to our parents as we do to our friends, or to our bosses or teachers or siblings. In fact, if we look closely and honestly, we will see that we have a slightly different face, a slightly different act for everybody we know, because we have had different experiences with each of them.

If our acting is self-consistent, then things run more or less smoothly; but if inconsistencies should creep in, our relationships become cumbersome and unwieldy. As a result of trying to cater to each different personality we know, each of us effectively becomes a whole congregation of egos (ministers usually have altered egos). You #2 is really You #2A, 2B, 2C, and so on. There are many, and which one is really you?

Finally, there is You #3, which is who I think you are. While you have an inside view of you, I have an outside, and therefore much different view of you, a view that is heavily influenced by the contents of my mind, my world views, etc.

Have you noticed that people never see us the way we see us? And we can be sure that we never see them the way they see themselves. So in effect, everyone sees everyone else differently. There is a different You #3 for everyone you know. And no two are alike. Ultimately, there are as many You #3's as there are people on the planet, and as many for each of them, and every single one is different.

As we sit there and talk, I eventually develop my own personal You #3, the way(s) I see you, the attributes I note and ignore. It is a view of you which changes slightly with every word and gesture I receive from you, or even just think I receive from you, a view of you which you will never understand for the simple reason that you would have to see my world through my eyes to understand it. You cannot see my world while living in yours, and vice versa.

Of course, there are many of me as well: Me #1, who I really am, Me #2A, 2B, etc., who I think I am, and your personal Me #3, who you think I am.

So while we sit there and interact with each other, who I think I am (Me #2) talks to who I think you are (You #3), both of which are just ideas in my head. And who you think you are (You #2) talks to who you think I am (Me #3), both of which are just ideas in your head. Two separate pairs of illusions are carrying on two mutually exclusive conversations between themselves, passing vague words and indistinct body language back and forth, all of which mean different things to both of us. Is it any wonder that we so often fail to understand each other and end up frustrated and fighting?

We have identified ourselves so completely with these various Me #2's that we have confined and limited our experience of the vastness of Life to those small, isolated enclaves. We have cut ourselves off from more than 99.999% of our being by accepting the tightly defined roles we are playing as the actual limit of who we really are. And when we are playing so many different (and often contradictory) roles with so many different people, it is very easy to become lost.

In a way, we humans are like waves in the ocean of life. Each wave starts small and grows to some extent as it crosses the ocean, picking up shape and definition, and also picking up whatever flotsam and jetsam it may encounter. Waves learn to believe that they are real and independent, so it's better to be big, because then you can be influential and throw your weight around, you will amount to something, you can make a real splash in life, and be looked up to by lesser waves.

Sometimes waves travel unimpeded for thousands of miles, sometimes they hit a shallow reef and are momentarily tripped, but eventually they all impact and die on a beach somewhere (their reflected echoes are called ghost waves). In the course of their odysseys, these waves have learned to think of themselves as unquestionably and quite obviously separate and independent, as things in and of themselves. Some of them believe that there is some great god called the Ocean out there somewhere which it is their duty to seek and serve. They are firmly convicted in their beliefs about death. In truth, of course, no wave is ever apart from the Ocean it exists in and which is ultimately responsible for its very existence. Their anguish is the result of their having totally accepted the illusion that a wave can and should and does exist as an independent thing.

This is what Jesus probably meant when he said "I am the vine and you are the branches" (it is not recorded that he also said "I am the ocean and you are the waves", but he might have). The "I" from which he was speaking is the same "I" that each of us experiences as pure consciousness, our awareness, the central-most feature of our existence, our US #1. Impersonal and beyond the comprehension of the petty ego, that "I" is the vine, it is Life Itself in all its forms, and our egos, our self-imposed definitions and limitations, these are the branches which think of themselves as independent agents. If we are centered in the branch, then we will miss the fact that a branch is just a branch.

A branch that thinks it's independent is a cutting, and in the extreme, a dead one. The branch will not thrive if severed from the vine, and though we may continue to exist for a while, we can never thrive severed from the truth of our being. If you cut yourself off from food and water because you believe you are separate from these, you get dead.

Likewise, if you cut yourself off from the larger part of your real Self by believing that you are just a name, an ego, a separate and fragile personality struggling against injustice and weakness, then you will wither. Why would anybody choose to harm another human being, whatever the excuse, unless they were a dis-eased branch that thinks it's a whole vine?

There is only one whole vine, and it's called "the universe and everything in it". When you hurt another person, when you callously step on a flower or kick a dog or shout at a child, you are ultimately hurting yourself, because we're all connected, the separations between us are strictly a matter of convention. This is a truth which society and its managers don't want to learn, which is one of the reasons why so many social institutions are falling apart.

The ego is a servant which has been elevated to the rank of master, a part claiming to be the whole, which is why the ego will always lead us astray, whatever its announced motives. The ego is a function, a direct consequence, of the presumption that we are separate beings. Since it is simply not true that we are separate, anything based on that presumption will necessarily be wrong, and will necessarily lead to imbalance. That doesn't mean that the ego ought to be scorned, improved, repaired, or discarded, although there are many people who firmly believe this, too. Because of the general stress levels in society today, and because these stresses, by their very nature, will easily upset a normally sane person's equilibrium, there is ample room in the system for a lot of professionals and charlatans making a lot of money by claiming to have access to a cure, regimen, vitamin, or talisman which will totally perfect your ego. These remedies don't work because they are all founded on a false presumption: the belief that the ego is real. The purpose of self-discovery is not to discard the ego or to somehow perfect it; the purpose is to recognize the ego for whatever it is, but to do so from an awakened perspective which is behind or beyond the ego. Who is having the dream called you?

That perspective is called being: the experience of consciousness, pure and simple. This was the place from which Jesus, Buddha, and all the rest were speaking when they shared their parables and metaphors. Since you are conscious, you are already connected, so there is nothing further to be done to real-ize (make real) that connection. Once you see it, then you understand how you can still play your ego like a role, forming and reforming it as needed.

But you will no longer take that role too seriously, you will no longer be impeded by the old habits and personal fears in which that role may have believed in the past. It is your right, and your responsibility, to reshape your role into whatever feels right, so long as you allow others the same freedom.

Chapter 4 -- Don't Take It Personally

Here's another group of related words which have something to teach us. We are considered, by ourselves and everyone else, to be persons; we take things personally, we have personalities.

These words all come from the Latin word *persona*, which was originally the mask that was held up to an actor's face while playing a dramatic role (from *per*, meaning "through", and *sona*, meaning "sound" . . . it was the mask through which the sound came). It you go to a copy of a

play, you will find listed in the front the *Dramatis Personae*, the persons, or personalities, taking part in the drama.

We use many other theatrical idioms when referring to our lives and activities: we act out certain roles, life is but a stage on which we must play our parts, we must develop our character, enjoy our time in the lime light, get our act together, and not make too much of a scene before the final curtain comes down. The metaphor of theatre, when not taken too literally, points directly into the experiences of living our lives. We are taught by the world of our early years to doubt our own natural, inherent character and reshape it so it might more closely reflect the role assignments we get from other people, and then we wonder why we are having so much trouble playing them. Incidentally, most people don't even play the roles they have: they work them, all the way to death.

As children we were taught, by adults and institutions everywhere, that as we were, we were not good enough for life, for society ... we must first be improved, educated, taught, instructed, and molded in such a way as to become docile, well-behaved citizens, reliable consumers, and net assets to the economy. Few of us can recall the early day when this process began; it's all we've ever known. There is something innately wrong with us that needs to be fixed. Religions sometimes call this condition original sin, meaning that we are damned for the simple reason that we exist. To me that kind of treatment hardly seems likely from a loving God.

But as a result of having been muffled, muzzled, and stifled, we have become like actors who have forgotten that we are playing in a play. We have, perhaps quite willingly but probably unwittingly, agreed to forget that we are just playing roles. This quite naturally leads us to consider our roles as being ultimately real, as who we really are.

Because these roles are not who we really are, we are not very comfortable with them--they are like shoes that no longer fit us comfortably, but we don't dare break a cosmic taboo and take them off. As a last resort (and this usually happens at a relatively young age), we resign ourselves to what everybody else is doing: we learn by example to take everything personally.

The good actor, when he recalls that he's just playing a part, won't just quit the play; he will continue to play his part, but he will do so with an inner confidence and a barely detectable detachment which will make his contribution notable, whatever his role. He will never lose sight of the fact that the whole drama is a performance, that he is not really about to be killed, maimed, or slandered.

And the actor can play the role all the more effectively only if he maintains the awareness that at root it's a pretense, just a play. Taking the role too seriously and trying too hard to conform to the standards of so-called normalcy lead to confusion, frustration, unhappiness, and usually a dreary botching of the play.

Society highly values its normal man. It educates children to lose themselves and become absurd, and thus normal. Normal men have killed perhaps 100,000,000 of their fellow normal men in the last 50 years.

--R. D. Laing

Consider Shakespeare's Hamlet, with Lawrence Olivier playing the lead. If we were to interrupt the play in the last act and ask Hamlet how he is doing, he would tell us in a nervously heroic voice that he just got cut on the arm with a poisoned sword, he has about a dozen lines left, and he is about to die on that "X" over there. At this point in the play, death is imminent for him, and every other detail in the plot clearly supports his impending demise.

But if we were to ask Sir Lawrence how he is doing, he would have a totally different response; it would have nothing at all to do with the drama and pretense on the stage and, within the context of the play, his comments would probably sound ludicrous. He might say that he had done better Hamlets, that the crowd tonight was limp, or that after the curtain comes down, everyone--good guys and bad guys alike--would get out of their costumes and go out for a late dinner. This response certainly doesn't resonate with the plot or the characters in the play, and yet which view is the more realistic, the more truthful, the more ultimately real of the two?

We have all been brainwashed into believing that our roles are real, that who we really are is a fragile, mortal personality encased in a porous, vulnerable bag of skin, plopped down in the midst of this enormous and impersonal universe to do the best we can against overwhelming odds. We are taught to become egocentric (as though that illusory ego were the real center of who we are), trying to match that fragile individuality against the whole rest of the cosmos, while at the same time subjugating that ego to the "higher" interests of the society we happen to live in. It sets up a contradiction which frighteningly few people ever see through.

This is the sort of English up with which I will not put.

--Winston Churchill

But it is this perception of relative helplessness that allows all the experts--the ministers, lawyers, doctors, and politicians--to keep us down and maintain their social and economic dominance. Since they are lost in the same dream of isolated consciousness that we are lost in, their livelihoods and self-images depend directly on their ability to keep themselves, and us, ignorant of who we really are. It just wouldn't do, for instance, for the churches to admit that we needn't consult them, that God (or Truth, or whatever you choose to call IT) is eternally and immediately accessible to everyone.

That's why saviors are never popular with church authorities until they have been killed--saviors can't be manipulated while they are still alive, but when they are gone, their words can be molded to just about any ambitious pursuit.

We have been coerced into allowing others to define for us who we are and what roles we ought to be playing. We have turned our backs on the reality of why each of us is here as who we are here as. We have learned to suppress our own inner directions and listen instead to experts whose business depends on our continued ignorance and reliance on them. We have let them tell us who we are when they don't know who they really are. Then again, as long as we can be fooled, perhaps we deserve to be.

You got some great dreams, baby, but in order to dream you gotta be asleep. When you gonna wake up?

--Bob Dylan

The critical time in life for each of us comes when we begin to honestly ask ourselves, "Who the heck am I, anyway?" If we have identified ourselves with some passing attribute like youthful beauty or political advantage, then there will inevitably come a time when that special attribute will have faded again, for nothing which exists in time and space--the ground rules of this earthly drama--is permanent.

As a result of our attachment to a temporary condition, to an ill-defined and psychologically dependent role, we will eventually have what is called an identity crisis, which is the often sudden, but sometimes only creeping shock of realizing that "I am not who I thought I was!" This can be a highly magical moment if you are intent on understanding who you really are, and a highly disquieting one if not.

What about You #1 and Me #1? Therein lies the mystery, and it is a mystery which can never be squeezed between the pages of a book. Who you really are is cosmic, eternal, and boundless, which is the nature of consciousness. You are the Actor.

The best that any words can do is to point in the general direction of truth. This is the intent of the Zen story about a disciple who came to the master and asked, "Master, what is the moon?" Instead of providing a factual, verbal, informational answer, the master simply pointed his finger at the moon, as if to say, "There it is . . . my words are not the moon . . . if you want to know what the moon is, look and see."

There, all around you and within you, is Life. Look and see what it is, look and see that beneath and beyond that small package of human fears and desires called you--the--person there lurks the splendor and magnificence of the cosmos itself, by whatever name you prefer to call IT. Each of these human lives that we so fearfully protect are simply another novel variation of the game of finding one's Self over and over in countless disguises.

Remember: we're all in this alone.

--Lily Tomlin

Chapter 5 -- The One Thing Everybody Knows

Right now you are reading these words. Maybe in your mind's eye you even watch yourself taking them in. Who is it who is reading? If you say, "It is me," then I must ask, "Who (is it who) knows that it is you?" That knower is consciousness, the baffling awareness of awareness which we have labeled as You #1 or Me #1.

To be conscious that we are perceiving or thinking is to be conscious of our own existence.

--Aristotle

I think, therefore, I am.

--Rene Descartes

When asked in a coffee house if he would like another cup, Descartes replied, "I think not," whereupon he disappeared.

--Anon.

The one thing that everybody knows without a doubt is "I exist." But who am I? What is this I which I perceive to exist?

Try this one: With my index finger, I can touch lots of things--the keys on my computer, my nose, and so on. I can do this only because these things are not the tip of my finger. The one thing I cannot touch with the tip of my finger is the tip of my finger.

In the same way, I can touch, look at, or perceive many things with my consciousness: I can objectify my surroundings, my fingertip, my thoughts, even who I think I am (my ego). I can do all this because these things are not my consciousness. I cannot, however, objectify that same consciousness which is aware of these things. It is, as Alan Watts once remarked, like trying to bite your own teeth or sniff your own nose.

We can't be aware of consciousness in the same way we are aware of the objects of consciousness, just like we can't be aware of our fingertips in the same way as we are aware of the things we touch with our fingertips. Consciousness can never be made the object of its own inquiry because it is beyond the polarity of objectivity and subjectivity.

That is the clue. You #1 is that which is aware of all the rest, including who you think you are. You #1 is like a microphone which picks up all the sounds in a concert but is unaffected by and makes no judgments about any of them. You don't hear the microphone, even though you couldn't hear anything without it. Consciousness is the infamous still small voice, the one that doesn't use words.

Unlike You #2, You #1 cannot die because it was never born. It is eternity masquerading as a human being, it is the kingdom within, it is both the ultimate reality and the consciousness thereof.

Now, the implications of these ideas probably hurtle headlong into the face of most everything you have ever been told about who you are and what this world is all about. Religions and philosophies, where most of us got the low-down on life, insist that we think of them as ultimates, as literal revelation, but their own self-importance blinds them to the possibility that their so-called truths might have been intended to be metaphors.

Your first impulse in pondering these ideas might be to dismiss them as heretical hogwash. They aren't, and that's one reason I have included quotes by other thoughtful, if not profound thinkers and seers. But if you are really concerned about your life, about experiencing a happiness which is not dependent on the stock market or the government or the whims of some other person, then enough of what you read here will stick. The important thing is: Don't believe a word you read here! Find out for yourself what is true, for if it is true, then Life (call It God, Reality, Atman, Brahma, whatever) will ultimately find countless other ways of getting the word to you.

The next message you need is always right where you are.

--Ram Dass

Chapter 6 -- What's So Great About Consciousness?

Compared to the glorious attributes of the human mind, its capacity for imagining and creating magnificent and sublime thoughts, the silent microphone of consciousness seems almost bland, hardly worthy of mention. It has no age, no sex, no color, mood, or morality; it has no attributes whatsoever. One reason we overlook it is because it isn't exciting, its nature is beyond the bounds of conceptual thinking.

Since consciousness has no attributes in the same way our bodies or intellects have attributes, it is neutral, unattractive, it doesn't attract our attention. As far as the concert is concerned, the microphone which picks it up is perfectly transparent. The projector which projects the movie onto the screen is likewise most effective when it remains in the background.

And yet this mysterious something called consciousness is the whole secret of wisdom and sagacity, this is the pearl of great price, this is what life really is. Where better to hide the truth from an eager, clever, and intelligent seeker than right out in the open? Each one of us knows one thing for sure, and that is "I am". That's the basis on which everything else is built, and if this

basis remains unconscious, well, look around at the misery and suffering in the world, and you will see what rampant unconsciousness can accomplish.

The most profound insights about life rarely permit themselves to be lassoed by words and reduced to bare and coarse facts as we call them. The more exacting our words, the further from the Truth we stray, which is why poetry is generally more precise about human experience than is prose, and why music can be said to be even more exact. We'll stick to words here, though, and in the realm of words, the analogy, the parable, the story of what something is "like" is likely our best bet.

Though analogy is often misleading, it is the least misleading thing we have.

--Samuel Butler

Jesus, Buddha, Lao Tzu, and the other great teachers told stories and parables because they knew not only that facts and tedious details would be lost on the people they hung out with, but also that what they were describing--a relationship, a process--could not be reduced to mere facts and figures. So they told parables.

The word parable comes from the Greek word *parabole*, which literally means comparison. In mathematics, a parabola is a plotted line representing the range of solutions to a given formula; every point on the parabola satisfies the formula. But since a formula represents a relationship between unfixed variables, no single solution, no particular set of values, is considered to be final and ultimate.

Likewise, a parable is a wisdom story which can be solved at any point along its curve, and while all interpretations are relatively correct, none are final, ultimate, or conclusive. The great teachers used parables because they knew that their disciples were all coming from different places in their understanding and experience, that they could relate to a story much more comfortably than to a theory, and that they would learn the parable's highest lessons by learning to listen to their own being.

Theories based on precise facts are easy to botch. If you forget part of a theory, or get just one of the facts or numbers wrong, then the final results will be meaningless, if not misleading, and you may not even know it. But you can paraphrase a story and it will still retain its meaning. Each person who hears a parable will come away with something appropriate to their level of understanding, a meaning which resonates with their experience, even though it might be slightly different for everyone.

Here's a parable, an analogy, which comes from India, from the Upanishads, and is thousands of years old. It presents a parabolic answer to the root question of all religion and philosophy (Who am I and what is this?), and does so in a way which everyone can relate to.

In the beginning of the world (and though it probably had no ultimate "beginning" as we think of them, you have to start somewhere), there was only Brahma. Being all there was, and therefore totally known to himself, Brahma soon realized that this totality of awareness would eventually become extremely boring . . . after all, when you know everything there is to know, then there's no surprise, nothing to keep you interested. It's like reading the same book for the seventy-eight millionth time. Anyway, since he was omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnipresent (all-everywhere), Brahma decided to create a diversion for himself, a way of introducing the elements of surprise, intrigue and drama into his experience. He thought, "What would it be like to forget who I really am?"

So, he invented the game of cosmic hide-and-seek. According to the rules of this game, Brahma would pretend to break pieces of himself off from the whole so that to all appearances they would seem separate. That's the "hide" part. Then, as the apparently separate consciousness at the center of each of those apparently separate pieces, and through their apparently separate and unique perspectives, he would "seek" to rediscover who he really was, which was, of course, everything.

Imagine seeing yourself from an infinite number of different perspectives, each one initially ignorant of its relationship to all the rest. Imagine going to sleep and dreaming a different lifetime each night, each lasting for more or less years, each complete with the full range and variety of emotional life and death details. Imagine having the same dream but playing a different role in it each night, seeing it through different eyes each time.

Well, guess who those apparently separate pieces are? Since there is only one I Am in the universe, one consciousness, it's all a game of hide-and-seek, and each one of us is in the same state: I'm IT AND You're IT!

Chapter 7 -- What Are Children?

We were all children once, we have all had the experience of entering into humanhood from some other orientation, and of then learning about ourselves from those around us. The word "child" is, of course, simply a label, a phonic sound, a literal tag, a categorical concept. The tag is easy to understand, but the reality is quite another matter.

In truth, children are mysteries; their bodies apparently come from or through the body of their mother with a token contribution from a father, but their spirits, their consciousness, the mystery of their being, where do these come from? Do they emerge full blown, or do they develop gradually over time, or some mysterious mixture of both? If a child is a novel and original seed planted by the divine into the earthly soil, then what is the meaning and purpose of that seed? What fruit will it ultimately bear? A mystery!

Each child is like a plant which has never before existed, a plant with its own set of likes and dislikes, its own unique mix of talents and abilities, some pronounced, others latent. The best way to raise a child is to pay attention to it, to see what it is here for, and to assist it in being that.

Unfortunately, our societies have for centuries believed that children are innately inferior, and that adults, by virtue of chronological seniority, can and should pull rank on children whenever it seems fitting or convenient to do so.

'Til society is very differently constituted, parents, I fear, will still insist on being obeyed because they will be obeyed, and will constantly endeavor to settle that power on a divine right which will not bear the investigation of reason.

--Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin

This is not a manual on how to raise children, but sometimes if we can see how we got into a certain mess, we have a better chance of getting ourselves out of it again. Our parents all meant well when they raised us as they did, regardless of what they thought they were doing, but their methods were primarily centered, either pro or con, on how their parents raised them, and on how the society at large viewed children. Our parents misled us to the extent that they tried to change us into something that we weren't.

Now, we must live our own lives and try to sort truth from fiction about who we really are. By examining from a different perspective some of the things that all of us have been through, we can discover a deeper appreciation and understanding of just what it means to be a human being. This is what world and local events are increasingly pressuring us to do.

Each of us is the cosmos reborn as each of us. We don't come into being, we come out of it. Even the idea of some connection between us and the cosmos is too distant. In those early months before we got talked out of ourselves and learned who everyone else thought we ought to be, we were still cosmic beings, we hadn't yet developed a personality, an ego.

This is one reason why we can remember events from our fourth, third, perhaps even second years of life, but not much further back than that. Before we had learned how to construct and identify with our egos, our points of reference were cosmic, not personal. We had not yet learned of any socially defined boundaries. This cosmic orientation is the one we experience in sleep, but we don't remember the time as spent consciously because we are tightly bound to our human egos, which exist only while we are awake. A little child hasn't yet drawn the lines of demarcation which will later tell him that the rug he is crawling around on is separate from him. To a little child, everything is everything--there is just IT.

Since we developed our egos, however, our memories have become personal, like our present self-images. We think of ourselves as persons having personalities, so this is the context within

which we view our experience. We have personal memories dating from the time when we first became persons. By contrast, our cosmically oriented memories are timeless and eternal, however buried, and once you learn to recall them, they are a whole lot more reliable.

But even though we now consider ourselves to be persons, we still retain a dim, almost visceral memory of what life was like before it was chopped into pieces for us. The tension between this memory, and our now truncated perceptions of reality, is what we interpret as discontent. We remember what things ought to be like--living in peace and harmony with the world and with each other--but when we look around our worlds, we see very little of this.

Our parents themselves were a product of this error of identity, so it is not surprising that they raised us accordingly. It has become a vicious circle which must be broken somewhere if there is to be any real peace in the world or in our personal lives. That's why the direction of your life must be up to you; it cannot be left to your parents, or worse, to some impersonal organization.

We can't form our children on our own concepts; we must take them and love them as God gives them to us.

--Johann von Goethe

This requires real trust and awareness--trust that Life knows what it is doing, that each person is who they're supposed to be, and the awareness to see that, with our minds, we can only guess at what is best for ourselves or those around us. Parents want their children to be happy, and yet parents are rarely happy themselves. You must be allowed to be who you are, and you must likewise allow those around you to be who they are.

If there is anything that we wish to change in the child, we should first examine it and see whether it is not something that could better be changed in ourselves.

--Carl Jung

We see in the world around us what we are; or, more precisely, we think we see what we think we are. If we have no sense of the mysterious within us, then we won't notice it in other people. Neither will we notice weakness, or faults, or anything else that we ourselves do not already have traces of within us. When you have reached into your own depths to the point of realizing how mysterious and magical you really are, then you will gratefully and thankfully extend the same sense of awe and wonder to everyone else around you, whether or not they are aware of it. You will have recognized that who you really are is, at its very root, also who they really are. Life is not a competition, though competition is very popular among egos.

Furthermore, before they become brainwashed by the conflicting value judgments of their society, children are naturally sensitive to the vibrations, the "feel" of others in their surroundings. Just as you can't fool an animal by acting out something that you are not, you can't fool a little child. Children are not impressed with politics or rational argument, they don't feel the need to project

an ego into the world around them, so they are still clear enough to see what is. This is, no doubt, the reason behind those stories you sometimes hear of children being temporarily adopted by some wild animal which, had they been adulterated like the rest of us, would have killed them. Children are relatively clean and clear mirrors in which we can see ourselves.

Better to be driven out from among men than to be disliked of children.

--Richard Henry Dana

Some of my best friends are children. In fact, all of my best friends are children.

--J. D. Salinger

There is a lot of interest being paid today to the "inner child", as though this perspective was a recent discovery. Of course, most of the excitement is marketing hype, but beneath it, people are coming to recognize that perhaps we were never intended to become adults, particularly if being an adult is to be miserable and frustrated.

Healing the inner child really means bringing the frustrated adult back to his or her realities, because the child within each of us is eternal, even though the bodily costume may grow old and wrinkled. Healing the inner child means giving up the illusion that we are separate, that our egos are real, or that life is intended to be deadly serious. It isn't.

Healing the inner child means learning to live in the moment, not being continually obsessed by the past and the future, learning to give your whole being to whatever is happening in the Now, in whatever Now happens to be. Since they aren't born with the attachments that they will later make, children enjoy a happiness which is pure and natural, it is not conditional on such outer things as purposes and goals.

In the little world where children have their existence, whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt as injustice.

--Charles Dickens

Healing the inner child means being honest rather than political about your feelings. When a child is angry, he doesn't suppress it just because it might not be politically correct not to: he screams!. It is an honest scream, which is why he can scream at the top of his lungs all day if he wants to, and never get hoarse. How many of us can say that? But once he is done with his tantrum, it is almost as though nothing had happened, he is once again playing happily.

Healing the inner child means being able to let go of the past to accept a new present, for the present is always new and novel. The squeals of delight and surprise which accompany the play of children spring from their unadulterated joy at not just seeing, but experiencing from the depths of their being, the wonder and mystery of creation without making the fatal attempt to try to figure it out. They haven't been around long enough to see through habituated eyes. Whatever is

simply is. Even outwardly familiar activities are always new and exciting ("Tell it again, Daddy!"), and children delight in them because that's the way they still see the world.

Everything's incredible, if you can skin off the crust of obviousness our habits put on it. Every object and event contains within itself an infinity of depths within depths. Nothing's in the least like what it seems--or rather, it'selves do not already have traces of within us. When you have reached into your own depths to the point of realizing how mysterious and magical you really are, then you will gratefully and thankfully extend the same sense of awe and wonder to everyone else around you, whether or not they are aware of it. You will have recognized that who you really are is, at its very root, also who they really are. Life is not a competition, though competition is very popular among egos.

Furthermore, before they become brainwashed by the conflicting value judgments of their society, children are naturally sensitive to the vibrations, the "feel" of others in their surroundings. Just as you can't fool an animal by acting out something that you are not, you can't fool a little child. Children are not impressed with politics or rational argument, they don't feel the need to project an ego into the world around them, so they are still clear enough to see what is. This is, no doubt, the reason behind those stories you sometimes hear of children being temporarily adopted by some wild animal which, had they been adulterated like the rest of us, would have killed them. Children are relatively clean and clear mirrors in which we can see ourselves.

Better to be driven out from among men than to be disliked of children.

--Richard Henry Dana

Some of my best friends are children. In fact, all of my best friends are children.

--J. D. Salinger

There is a lot of interest being paid today to the "inner child", as though this perspective was a recent discovery. Of course, most of the excitement is marketing hype, but beneath it, people are coming to recognize that perhaps we were never intended to become adults, particularly if being an adult is to be miserable and frustrated.

Healing the inner child really will make it a tent. Instruction comes from the outside, it is cerebral and specialized, its goals are conditional. The process is not organic, however, and is therefore an artifice; it is artificial.

There is a meaningful place in the world for instruction, but instruction is not education. Education comes from the Latin verb educere, which means "to draw out from". Education, at least as a category of learning, is "inside outward"; it is not a process of installing something from the outside, but a process of drawing out that which is already there, to build the clothes to fit the child instead of down-sizing the child to fit standardized clothes. The purpose of education ought to be to show how to build one's own clothes.

Each child is born with an internal agenda for its life, sort of a pre-programmed schedule of experiments to be run. This agenda is not ordered or organized in any linear fashion, but it is there just as surely as our DNA is there to guide the maintenance and health of our physical bodies. The very mix of talents, abilities, and inclinations in each child, if we could but see it rightly, is a clear indication of the life purposes with which that soul incarnated.

When a great athlete or scholar or musician emerges, everyone can readily recall clear harbingers of that greatness which were there from the start. Each and every child is a unique, once-in-forever expression (a pressing out) of the infinite, each is an essential ingredient. If that ingredient is to benefit the whole, then it has to be allowed its expression. When we taint those ingredients as soon as they arrive (by sending them through the meat-grinder of public schools and dogmatic religions), can there be any doubt about the results? Look at any newspaper.

The fact that our so-called educational systems are failing is ample evidence that the way we have been doing schools, and childhood itself, is wrong. In traditional school systems, the child is effectively the least important element in the arrangement. The child must conform to the system, instead of the system accommodating the needs of the child.

Our institutional obsessions with power, prestige, and static stability, and the structures society has fabricated to ensure their continuation, have made real people secondary to abstract systems and ideals. Looking through a wide-angle lens, this is precisely why modern world cultures are in so much trouble.

Education is the process of driving a set of prejudices down your throat.

--Martin H. Fischer

Fortunately, the educational system in this country is no longer entirely monolithic, for thoughtful and perceptive people are coming to understand that children can lead happy and successful lives without being subjected at a young and tender age to years of institutionalized boredom and regimentation, that education, in the true sense of the word, needn't be expensive or homogenized, and that universal education works only when it is voluntary.

Only a few children will learn when they have to; all will learn when they want to. More and more parents are home-schooling their children, and even a few widely scattered public schools, at the local level, are working to right a system which has become so top-heavy that it is now upside down. Our children are the future of the planet; there is no human resource more precious to the happiness, let alone the continued existence, of the human race. Power, prestige, and fame fall pitifully short of meaning when compared to the happiness of our grandchildren.

Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be such arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinions in good men is but knowledge in the making. --John Milton

There is no best school system, just like there is no single correct shoe size. People are gradually being forced by conditions to realize this. Many different approaches are emerging, some better than others, but the theme seems to be greater local autonomy for parents and communities, and greater freedom and choice for children.

Education . . . is hanging around until you've caught on.

--John Ruskin

The children entering the world today must be allowed to be who they really are in order to properly change the systems which have created the turmoil we see around us. We will not save the world by turning out more of the kinds of people who messed it up in the first place; we can improve the world only by letting succeeding generations move freely enough to live their lives by their own lights.

If we can realize and recall how we began our experience in this time and place, then we might have the clarity to understand what the system did to knock us off course, because only then will we know how to get back on our tracks again.

Chapter 9 -- How We Got Lost

There is a Hindu story of the child in the womb who sang, "Let me remember who I am." And his first cry after birth was, "Oh, I have forgotten."

--Anon.

The Judeo-Christian story of the garden of Eden is really a parable. It isn't about some historical event that was supposed to have happened in a certain country on a certain date, though it still seems important to some religious sects to take it literally. It is a story about you and me when we first entered this physical dimension and put on these physical/emotional/intellectual disguises.

When we were babies, Life was a paradise. Our real needs were small and easily met, our nakedness didn't matter a whit because we hadn't yet learned how to feel guilt or shame, and we were never worried about making the wrong impression. Our experience was a continual banquet of surprise and discovery. We were fresh and unsullied arrivals, still unified with wherever it is that we came from. We saw Life as a whole-- undifferentiated and all of a piece with us.

Not having learned to break the world up into nouns and verbs, right and wrong, us and them, everything was for us quite naturally and peacefully part of everything else. We were fully

integrated with the cosmos, we hadn't yet discovered the game of fractionating everything in order to control it, so existence was one.

God made integers; all else is the work of man.

--Leopold Kronecker

But we can't stay in the cradle forever, so according to the rules of the earthly game, according to this parable, the time would have to come when we got symbolically kicked out of the garden. This happened to us when we began to understand our local language and, by extension, to understand and accept as our own the world views of those around us (initially, parents, siblings, and in-laws . . . soon enough, hundreds of total strangers, many of them outlaws). We learned how to reach out into the world and select very specific and tightly defined aspects of it, then mentally categorize them. We learned how to define reality as that which can be reduced to mental and linguistic terms and symbols, and we learned how to ignore everything that couldn't be so reduced. Finally, we learned how to manipulate the symbols to get the things we had been taught were important.

You shall have joy, or you shall have power, said God; you shall not have both.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Small children are powerful in an unconscious (that is to say, in a self-un-important) way. Their power radiates from them as joy, innocence, spontaneity, and a magic which is powerful enough to bring monarchs to their knees. Imagine the President picking up a two year-old. Who do you suppose will play by whose rules?

It won't be the child who says, "Oh, this is the President! I'd better behave." It will be the President who says "Goo-goo gaga". There is a tacit recognition on the part of both the President and the child as to who is really the more powerful, and the less powerful has no choice but to acquiesce.

The reason this power exists in a small child is because that child is still honestly what it is, it hasn't yet learned to try to be something or someone else, it is still consciously one with the entire cosmos, or, if you wish, with God, for "of such is the kingdom . . .". Children are god-like in that, like God, children are not impressed with persons.

A small child is like a pure solution which is strong because of its innate and undiluted purity. Each child is different, each has not only a different DNA complement, but in much the same way a different agenda for its life.

Each one of us came into this world outfitted with a unique assortment of physical, mental, emotional, and psychic equipment. Despite the ideals which are constantly held up to us as standards for our personal development, there is no better or worse equipment for successful

human being . . . a short-handled trowel might pale beside a steam shovel in physical power and mass, but the steam shovel cannot do the work of a trowel.

Each of us has a singular combination of talents and abilities, a completely novel balance of attributes and inclinations, because each of us came into this earthly theatre to play a completely novel and unique role in life, to contribute our special ingredients to the human banquet. We came here to learn the things that our equipment alone can help us learn, to see the truth of who we really are from an entirely new perspective, to boldly do what no one has done before. Each of us was born to be what we already are.

What happens in the course of growing up, however--and this has happened to all of us to one degree or another--is that the pure child becomes polluted. That formerly untainted, unique and powerful solution called a child is corrupted by the addition of things that don't belong there, things intended to make that child behave in a more standard and predictable, and therefore controllable way, things like attitudes, prejudices, judgments, biases, fears, guilts, and so on.

Well, here's an interesting observation: When children are no longer children, they are called adults. The term adult is a shortened form, sort of a catch phrase, for "adulterated child". The state of adulterated childhood--called adulthood--is routinely glorified to impress the children; chronological majority is elevated to make it envied, striven for, cherished, and protected at all costs. This tells children that there is something inferior about being who they are, but there's nothing they can do about it but wait for the day when they can begin their pay-backs. They are told, "When you grow up, then you can be adulterated like we are." Missouri loves company.

Every one of us is a completely novel, never-before-tried version of those pure solutions. Each of us was born perfect, perhaps not by society's standards, but certainly by Life's. Each one of us is different, and those differences are mighty strong evidence that we came here to be different people and do different things.

Society gives endless rewards to people who "play the game", but society has never been particularly fond or tolerant of diversity. On the surface, society righteously proclaims that all people are presumed to be created equal, as though all people can and should be reduced to some lowest common denominator, a statistical norm, a complete list of acceptable attributes. Beneath the surface, however, this allows society to treat us, and for each of us to treat each other and to some extent ourselves, as things. In this view, children are categorically viewed as imperfect . . . immature raw material which, only if properly molded and shaped by morality and social forces, might one day qualify as acceptable. Hence, we dutifully followed everybody else's lead and got lost.

Here's another indication of the problem, another one of those sly twists in the language. We have the same word for the place where we send small plants and the place where we send small people. It's called a nursery and, according to the derivation of the word, is ideally a place where

nursing, in the mammary sense of the word, takes place. Nursing, cuddling, cooing, caressing, and those other loving and gentle human interactions are vitally important in the early months and years of human life. The fact that many kids today don't get them may just be related to some of the social problems we find around us.

In the interests of efficiency and economy, each plant in a nursery is reared under the same strictly controlled conditions: the same size pots, and the same amounts of water and light and food, as though all plants ought by nature to prosper and flourish under precisely the same conditions.

If any plant should show a desire to grow in unacceptable (i.e., non-standard) ways, that plant is quickly nipped in the bud (by the authorities, of course, and on the excuse of something which is generally dressed up as "the greater social good"). If such a plant should remain strong in its insistence to be what it is, then it is eventually tossed out onto the rubbish heap to fend for itself.

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.

--Henry David Thoreau

Most adults suffer a dull, indistinct unhappiness which is so habitual that it has become inseparable from their daily lives, however they may smile to mask it. They have been talked out of themselves. From the earliest age they have been brainwashed into the belief that as they were born, and as who they were born, they aren't good enough, that they must continually prove their worth, that their bodies are fallible and liable to disease, that their passions are unnaturally sinful and must be harnessed and suppressed, that their duty is to serve the aims of the majority. Down deep, they are convinced that they aren't good enough.

Their consciousness started out cosmic, attuned to the oneness of all existence, but has since been pared down to a strictly utilitarian fraction of its totality. That naturally universal attunement has been filtered and reduced to a trickle, which is then called normal or ordinary consciousness.

With ordinary consciousness you can't even begin to know what's happening.

--Saul Bellow

After decades of propaganda and worldly and/or other worldly teachings, the vast majority of adults have resigned themselves to trying endlessly to be what they are not, and the frustration they quite naturally feel is expressed as fear, hatred, intolerance, greed, and all of the other social maladies we see around us. Look at almost anyone when they don't know they are being watched, when they are not performing . . . what sort of a face are they wearing, what does their expression convey about their prevailing thoughts? Their faces cannot help but mirror how they feel about themselves. Even professional actors cannot maintain a false persona indefinitely, and habitual worry lines are telling.

Most adults are ill-at-ease (another way of saying dis-eased) because they know something is wrong in their lives. They faintly remember their own person gardens of Eden, but the rewards of social conformance haven't even come close to replicating it, and more of a non-solution is never enough. Their mental habits and belief systems won't allow them to face up to what has happened to them, and to what they are doing by perpetuating institutions that don't really work. Though they often mean well, they continue playing the charade seriously and often fearfully because they don't know what else to do.

Grown-ups never understand anything for themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them.

--Antoine de Saint-Exupery

Young people have always retained a stronger memory of what things should be like, which may be why modern life always seems to include some degree of unrest in its younger citizens. And today especially, young people seem to have a stronger grip on the edenic memory than generations past. Yet because of the subordinate role assigned to children and minors in general, their wisdom is universally dismissed as uninformed, childish, and impractical.

Who is more foolish: the child afraid of the dark, or the man afraid of the light?

--Maurice Freehill

We have all had our feet set for us into the steel-reinforced concrete of conformity, but we are also fortunate that it hasn't had time to set completely. We can always change, but it becomes more and more difficult the longer we wait.

The beauty of our human situation is that what we are looking for doesn't have to be brought into being from the outside; it is already full and complete, and we have no further to look for it than our own beingness.

We are not here to be clones of Michael Jordan or Madonna orish under precisely the same conditions.

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The beauty of our human situation is that whanet and serious overpopulation, include societies which consist of people who have been systematically prevented from being who they really are, people who have forgotten what they are here on this earth to be.

Whoso would be a man must be a non-conformist.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Non-conformity is not simply doing the opposite of what everyone else does; that's called being contrary and is just as conformal as conformity. Non-conformity has rather to do with being what you are, whether or not it accords with what others are doing. Sometimes you will do like others do . . . that's okay when it's appropriate; sometimes you will do what others don't do. That's okay too. If you are going to be true to yourself, then conformity is the last thing you want to be concerned about. Conformity means doing something the same way every time, without having to think, doing it automatically, and doing it exactly the same as everyone else is doing it.

Fashion is the rush to conform more quickly than everyone else.

--Alan Watts

Being what you already are is deceptively confusing, because it is both the hardest thing in the world to do and the easiest . . . hard because of the common sense you have accumulated thus far in your life, and easy because it's already the case.

How easy is it for a rose to become a daisy? How hard is it for a rose to be a rose?

Earlier I mentioned our natural DNA complement (yes, DNA is complementary). DNA is short for deoxyribonucleic acid, which is the basic chemical form of the body's operating manual on how to be a body, how to make hair and skin and bones, how to digest food, how to record and recall memories, basically, how to be biophysically who you are. You can't live without this acid.

In the same way as we were born with DNA, each of us was born with what we call purpose, with a vital agenda, with something of a reference guide about what we are here to be and do. It, like our DNA complement, isn't something that we can develop or acquire . . . we are born with it. There is no exercise you can do to acquire what you already have. Science hasn't found it because it doesn't exist in terms of science.

To take what there is, and use it, without waiting forever in vain for the preconceived--to dig deep into the actual and get something out of that--this doubtless is the right way to live.

--Henry James

You #1 are actual. Who you really are is already the case; nothing is necessary to bring it into being. All that is necessary is for you to remove your attention from the illusion of who you have been told you are.

In a way, our lives in the world are like a movie projected on a screen. There is adventure, intrigue, personal challenges, conflict, fires and storms, high drama, birth and death. When you are entwined in the plot of a movie, you forget for the moment that it isn't real. You believe in the pretense of the movie so strongly that you will laugh or cry, your body will become tense, your heart will pound, but all the while you are sitting comfortably in a darkened room watching light images which are substantially unreal dancing across a white screen.

This is how we have become: watcher/participants in a movie over which we have been told that we have little directorial control. We want to be able to tell the difference between fact and fiction, but the only choices the directors give us are the scenes projected onto the screen. When we are given a choice between one scene and another, it's isn't much of a choice. It is hard to remember that everything on the screen is part of the illusion; it is temporary, one moment it is there, the next moment it is gone . . . one moment we are happy, the next we are sad.

If it is really our intent to find reality, then we must at least temporarily remove ourselves from the pretense of the movie . . . we need to learn to tell the difference between the witness who is watching the movie and the roles we are playing, the difference between the flashing, evanescent light images projected onto the screen, and the screen itself.

Our consciousness is like light, and the contents of our minds--our thoughts-- are like the film we run through the projector of our imaginations. We project into the world who we think we are and what we have been taught the world is. But these projections, like the movie, are artificial, merely illusory. When you want to see reality instead of the illusion, when you want to see the screen instead of the movie, you turn off the projector.

What is artificial needs artificial support, but what is real needs no such support. When you turn off the projector, only what is real will remain. The screen has always been there, you are not creating it by turning off the projector; you are simply removing energy from the illusion. This is what meditation and prayer are really all about, though these, too, have been convoluted in the interests of philosophy and religion.

And this is why the path of self-discovery is so threatening to the establishment. When it is discovered that peace is not the result of the existence or actions of any government, police force, or religion, that health is not the result of any medicine, that happiness is not the result of any personal power or possessions, then people who are fed up with congenital civilized frustration

will turn back to reality, and the artificial distractions of life, for which we all pay dearly, will wither. This is part of what is happening in the world today.

The trick is to be who you decided to be when you decided to be who you are.

--Me

Chapter 11 -- Making Sense of Reality

Most of what we think we know about the world comes through our senses, those mysterious windows between what's inside and what's outside our bodies. Whether we assume that there are at our disposal the five traditional senses (touch, taste, smell, hearing, and sight) or the expanded modern lists which include such as the senses of time and of motion, we can all agree that our worldly experience would be fractional without the input provided through these various windows.

What we are inclined to forget, however, is that the tools available to us for our investigations into life are also the limits of what we can perceive. Our eyes, for instance, avail us of a visual awareness of form and spatial relationship, but our eyes do not show us everything that is there, they are sensitive to only a tiny portion of the electromagnetic spectrum. When we humans look at a patch of blue sky, we see simply blue. A bee can look at the same patch of sky and, because of the structure of its polarizing and compound eyes, can tell precisely in which direction the sun is. Obviously, the same sky is there for both us and the bee, so it must be that the bee sees a different world and can make distinctions that we can't, although t

We see with our eyes only a tiny sliver of the spectrum. We hear with our ears only a tiny fraction of the vibrations there to be sensed. Our senses of taste, touch, and smell are likewise narrowly focused. We cannot be sensually aware of anything we don't have the facility to be aware of; you can't taste a turkey dinner on an AM radio.

Can a bird somehow see wind currents? Can a fish somehow feel an impending earthquake? There is growing evidence that they can, which ought to indicate to us that there is infinitely more to life than we humans have the sense to perceive. And because we don't have in our human arsenal any analog equivalents, we cannot conceive in what manner that fish becomes aware of the coming earthquake, or how birds can land lightly in the midst of swirling and, to us, invisible winds. The scientifically acceptable windows show us only a fraction of what's there, yet we have been convinced that that's all there is, and that our assumptions based on that fraction are correct. But they aren't.

And yet, we and our hallowed institutions have the audacity to claim that we understand life well enough to direct it. Again, check out the news. It is widely acknowledged, by open-minded

parents at least, that young children can often see things which we adults cannot see (or have forgotten how to see): imaginary playmates, auras, and other physical or spiritual essences for which we adults have no concepts. Just because we grown-ups can't see them is no evidence that they aren't there.

But we have fallen for the illusion that, if something can't be put into words or some other symbolic representation like mathematics, then it isn't real. We have accepted as reality the severe limitations of language and sensation, and have incorporated them into our mentative processes, so whatever comes through our senses is either immediately and automatically translated into terms we are comfortable with, or it is discarded as being unreal, imaginary.

We call this making sense of the world, putting our sensory input about the world through the filters of our beliefs and attitudes, and arranging the mental pieces we have chopped it into in such a way that we can feel like we understand them. Rather than really making sense of the world, however, it is perhaps more accurate to say that reducing the infinite world to our finite abilities to make sense out of sensory input is like trying to intelligently analyze a football game using a thermometer. Hence, poetry, which alludes to images which are not specifically expressible, is generally dismissed as being non-factual, as hyperbolic, and therefore something less than the meat-and-potatoes reality of facts.

Do all humans see the world the same way? Even though we all have eyes, do we see the same things? What are we hearing when we hear? What do we feel when we feel? Can't say. But the sky in Mona Lisa was no more or less real to Da Vinci than the sky in van Gough's Starry Night was to Vincent.

Science tells us that what we call matter is mostly space. If the average atom were enlarged to the size of the solar system, with the electrons out near the orbits of Uranus and Neptune, that atom would be far emptier than the solar system. If all the space in and between the atoms of your body were removed, so that the nuclei and electrons were packed up against each other, you would be a barely visible speck that still weighed what you weigh. What we call matter is mostly space, and what little matter there is may not matter quite the way we think.

And yet, when we come to a wall, our senses tell us it is solid. Despite there being so much space in matter, we can't walk through it. This isn't because of the matter which is there, but because of the electrical fields surrounding the atoms and molecules both in the wall and in our bodies.. Our senses don't tell us this, because they can't; all they can say is "thou shalt go no further in this direction".

In short, senses neither lie nor tell the truth; they simply pass to our awareness a very narrow selection of the available information. Making sense of the world, that is, making the world into sensual information, is to make nonsense of the world, because our senses are partial, selective, and therefore exclusive, while the real world is complete and inclusive. Even though our senses

have been trained to tell us otherwise, the truth is not a matter of common sense. Great discoveries are usually made by people who have sought beyond the bounds of what is popular or comfortable, and this means questioning everything.

Common sense is the collection of prejudices acquired by age eighteen.

--Albert Einstein

Chapter 12 -- Mind over Matter?

We are consciousness, but we live in a world which happens to express itself in terms of something we call matter. This matter undergoes change under the influence of what we call energy. What is matter, what is energy, and what is this far stranger thing called consciousness which seems to be neither matter nor energy, but is nevertheless aware of both?

The apparent distinction between matter and energy on the one hand, and what is loosely called spirit on the other, has puzzled thinkers throughout the ages. Matter is roughly considered to be anything that can be perceived through either the senses or their technological extensions (microscopes, telescopes, computer imaging, etc.). Spirit, about which science has nothing to say, is everything else. Philosophies and religions, those institutions which have placed themselves in charge of spiritual matters, have become hopelessly complex in their efforts to explain life, not because life is hopelessly complex, because it isn't, but because philosophies and religions have begun from a false premise. The false premise is: The universe is assumed to be a collection of mutually discrete and independent things, and therefore not a unity.

Since the unsensed is more mysterious than the sensed, we have traditionally assigned the superior position to spirit, a practice which has been supported by both science and religion, though not in the same ways. In science, intellect (a quasi-measurable function of consciousness) is seen to be superior to inert matter, and it is assumed that intellect's purpose is to control matter. In religion, the functioning of inert matter is seen to be the result of the intervention of spirit, with the same intent to control.

The schism between the physical and the spiritual is what gives strength to the idea that one can, or ought to be able to, control one's body with one's mind, although there is just as strong a case to be made that for the likelihood that one's body (its chemistry, shape, and neurological capacities, etc.) can also control one's mind (perceptions, attitudes, etc.). There is a growing body of evidence which indicates that body chemistry may be more significant to human happiness than was ever before imagined, by the experts anyway, because mystics and psychedelic explorers have known it for thousands of years.

The final reasoned assault on this artificial separation of matter and spirit began in 1905 when Einstein turned the rather staid and confident scientific community on its staid and confident ear when he published his Special Theory of Relativity. This theory put forward the astounding idea that matter and energy were equivalents, that each was an alternative form of the other. His formula for this equivalence is the most famous formula in the world . . . $E = mc^2$, which means that energy is equal to mass times the speed of light squared.

We know that mass (matter) can be converted to a wall, our senses tell us it is solid. Despite there being so much space in matter, we can't walk through it. This isn't because of the matter which is there, but because of the electrical fields surrounding the atoms and molecules both in the wall and in our bodies.. Our senses don't tell us this, because they can't; all they can say is "thou shalt go no further in this direction".

In short, senses neither lie nor tell the truth; they simply pass to our awareness a very narrow selection of the available information. Making sense of the world, that is, making the world into sensual information, is to make nonsense of the world, because our senses are partial, selective, and therefore exclusive, while the real world is complete and inclusive. Even though our senses have been trained to tell us otherwise, the truth is not a matter of common sense. Great discoveries are usually made by people who have sought beyond the bounds of what is popular or comfortable, and this means questioning everything.

Common sense is the collection of prejudices acquired by age eighteen.

--Albert Einstein

Chapter 13 -- What is Resonance?

Do you remember the tv commercial in which Ella Fitzgerald broke the wine glass with her voice (maybe it was the tape)? Have you ever turned up the volume on your stereo and heard the windows clatter? Have you ever ridden in an old car and when you reached a certain speed, the fender or something would begin to rattle?

All of these phenomena are the result of what is called resonance, from a Latin word meaning, literally, "to sound again". In fact, it is resonance in the electronic circuits of the receiver which allows you to "tune in" to a radio or tv station.

Resonance isn't strictly a physical or electrical phenomenon. When we hang out with favorite people and we are all getting into a certain rhythm of conversation, or music, or whatever, there is a resonance, a like-feeling-ness enfolding all of us. This is why musical concerts and ethnic

religious gatherings can be so energizing . . . all those people in the same groove . . . the resonance goes far beyond just the physical. Angry mobs work the same way.

When a certain critical mass of people is assembled who are in the same groove, the energy so generated and focused is infectious, even to those who are not physically involved. This is a fact which has not been missed by the shapers of public opinion: fear, hatred, and animosity can be skillfully focused in support of cures` which are materially far more damaging than the alleged illnesses (e.g., the arms race, the drug wars, religious fundamentalism).

Each of us is like a radio transmitter which is on twenty-four hours a day. This transmitter broadcasts what we are thinking, how we feel, our moods and emotions, all of the moment-to-moment contents of our consciousness. Many psychic abilities amount to little more than the ability to pick up on these vibrations in much the same way that a radio can pick up the electrical noise generated by an approaching car. The phenomenon of entrainment is when many people "lock into" the same ideas or activities. The flavor of humanity at any given moment is the sum total of the transmissions of each person alive.

Every thought you have affects your body and the way it works; it also affects the world around you. That's because your mind and your body are part of You #2, while You #1 is the consciousness which is both aware of all the rest and the fundamental reality of all the rest. When you spend time in the space of You #2, doing thinking, pondering, worrying, fearing, plotting, and carrying on all of the internal conversations that we do, you are automatically including not only your own body and your environment, but also the world at large in the discussion, you are actually broadcasting yourself to the world at every moment of your existence.

Almost nobody today will argue that stress has no effect on physiology. And when you unconsciously buy into the feelings of fear or uncertainty which presently entertain large segments of the earthly population, then you will be swept right along with the masses. Your body will respond to fear and anxiety with outpourings of chemicals which,

if there is no immediate action to spend them on, will ultimately turn around and bite you instead of your imagined attackers. Worrying is like sitting in your car in your garage with the engine running, thinking about being chased down the road by the bad guys. You will gun your engine as though it were really happening, but all you are really accomplishing is burning gas, filling the air with smoke, and wearing out your engine, all to no purpose.

In the 1970's, Normal Cousins made headlines by audaciously announcing that he had healed himself of cancer by watching old comedies, by laughing a lot. The medical profession, their power and expertise threatened by these revelations, nervously discounted the results, but thousands of people around the world found the same things to be true: by changing the contents of their conscious awareness, by changing their belief systems and common sense world views, they also changed the level of health of their bodies.

This is the principle of resonance in action. To make a little clearer how it works, let us consider the lowly tuning fork. A tuning fork is usually a brightly polished little two-pronged piece of metal roughly shaped like a pickle fork, which, when struck, emits a pure and exact musical tone. They are used for tuning musical instruments, but not usually fish . . . did you every try to tuna fish?

Suppose we had a tuning fork in the key of "A". If we were to strike that fork, making it hum, and then set it next to another "A" tuning fork, the second fork will begin to vibrate as well. We don't even have to strike it; it will pick up the vibrations of the first fork through the air, and will do so because the natural resonant frequency of both forks is the same. A "B" tuning fork would just sit there quietly and refuse to hum along.

If we were to strike an "A" tuning fork, then set it down in an array of many different tuning forks, only those whose natural resonance corresponds will begin to vibrate; the rest will remain unmoved.

This is just an analogy, but it is indicative of how Normal Cousins was able to heal his cancer, and how every thought you think has an effect on you and your world. Here's the connection:

First, the energy you use to strike the tuning fork is analogous to the degree of consciousness you bring to your thoughts, the amount of energy and attention you pour into them. Most people are only partly conscious, and therefore poorly focused, which is why their impact on the world is minimal. They spend most of their time dreaming, sending out conflicting thoughts which never accomplish much because the messages are so jumbled that they end up being self-canceling. Whereas we all know people who seem to be super-charged; the energy they bring to their affairs is palpable, you can almost feel it when they walk into a room. These people resonate strongly. The more conscious you are, the more energetically you are ringing your fork.

Second, the tone of your personal tuning fork is the nature, mood, and quality of the thoughts you carry around in your head. Your world view, how you see yourself, the quality and tone of the constantly running internal conversations we all have with ourselves, all of the attitudes, biases, prejudices, and presumptions you carry around with you about life, the universe, and everything. Self-doubt and self-confidence are tones, as are self-respect, fear, anxiety, happiness, joy, and all other human emotions. These are the instructions you are broadcasting to Life, and they are also the limitations of what Life can show you of its infinitude.

Finally, the array of tuning forks is the world around you. The world around you is in fact a potentia, and unlimited repository of untried possibilities. The opportunities for success and failure, for happiness and misery are all right there, but they don't manifest until someone comes along and calls them forth, just like a seed won't sprout until it is watered.

When you are vibrating with self-doubt, then your experience in the world will show you the reflections of those thoughts, thereby reinforcing your belief that your self-doubt is justified.

Nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so.
--William Shakespeare

When a carpenter walks into a room, what he sees is the woodwork. That's not to say that woodwork is all that's there, but his mind-set will show him what he is used to looking for; he will see in the world what his thoughts are. Likewise, an interior decorator will notice the decor and largely ignore the woodwork. Whose vision, whose version of the world is the most accurate? Are any such versions all-inclusive and therefore valid?

The principle of resonance is what motivational seminars are really all about . . . changing the tones in your head so that you can have more preferable experiences, whether the goal is selling watches or watching cellars, whether it is seeing more being, or being more seeing.

The world as it is is neither good nor bad: it simply is. Its goodness or badness, what it is, depends on who's looking at it. This is why the mass communication of the past several decades has been so profitable for governments, merchants, and other people with an agenda, "Create a need and fill it" is the cornerstone of modern market economies. For most of this century, mass communication has been used to create fear in people, then offering the most profitable antidote: Communism led to larger and more powerful killing machines. Satan led to more (900) numbers at the bottom of the tv screen. Cancer led to a multi-billion dollar health care industry. Crime led to overcrowded jails and an inhumanely brutal justice system.

Speak in the affirmative; emphasize your choice by utter ignoring of all that you reject.
--Ralph Waldo Emerson

The only portal available to any of us to escape this vicious circle is consciousness, finding that place within which is who and what we really are, and learning how to tell the difference between our thoughts and who it is that's thinking them. It means taking back the responsibility for our being from those who have usurped it. It means standing up and being who we are, refusing any longer to try to be someone we are not. It means reclaiming our natural birthrights of freedom of thought, action, and expression.

Chapter 14 -- How To Be Who You Are

If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.

--Henry David Thoreau

As you grow older, keep your discontent alive with the vitality of joy and great affection. Then the flame of discontent will have an extraordinary significance because it will build, create, and bring new things into being.

--J. Krishnamurti

Young people, particularly in modern times, have always been at least mildly discontented with what they found when they left the cloistered security of the cradle. Something deep within shouts that injustice is never right, that freedom and liberty are man's natural and normal condition, and that anything which prevents this liberty is morally wrong.

This was the great message of the Sixties in this country. It was a frontal assault on the institutionalized injustices like racial segregation, suppression of free speech, and the official promotion of a lifestyle which allowed no room for alternatives. In the Sixties, there was still enough energy in the status quo to suppress the revolution which began back then. There is no longer enough such energy, so society is changing faster than ever before, despite the best efforts of anyone to control its directions.

Society can be thought of as the average of its parts, just as a cheering section at a football game will take on the predominant color of the cards being held up by the people sitting there. When fear and mistrust dominate a society, when people feel themselves to be at the mercy of forces beyond their control, beyond even their comprehension, when victimization is proudly worn as a badge of identity, then the participants in that society are guaranteed to be miserable, and none of the official programs for improvement will work.

Top-down solutions for society's problems don't work because society is an abstraction, an illusion, a statistical generalization. None of us has ever met society, none of us has ever shaken its hand, or looked into its eyes, because it doesn't have any. Society is not a fact: it is a perception, a convention. Society is a way of averaging the complexities and individual differences present in the people who comprise that society, like the color of the cheering section. When people are reduced to statistics, they become static and mean.

There is no division, no separation, between the society and ourselves; we are the world and the world is us, and to bring about a radical revolution in society--which is absolutely essential--there must first be a radical revolution in ourselves.

--J. Krishnamurti

With the demotion of the importance of family and the loss of tolerance for diversity, modern society has grown to depend almost exclusively on punishment to control social behavior. The myriad of rules, regulations, and sanctions in modern life are like large sheets of properly colored cellophane stretched over the crowd, and you can be arrested for breaking out and tearing that social fabric.

We are highly suspect if we try to break out because our social roles have been defined for us, and when we start being someone different, we are likely to hear complaints that we are not being ourselves. If we persist, we will be labeled as "threats to the social order", because that's easier than accepting the fact of human diversity. The only way to change the color of society is for us individual people to change our own cards. You already are who you are supposed to be. Be that.

First keep the peace within yourself, then you can also bring peace to others.

--Thomas a'Kempis

Even to resent those in our past who led us astray from our real being, to resent anything, introduces another impurity into our properly pure solutions, it rings an undesirable tuning fork out there in the world. Peace, without which real success is unattainable, is impossible until we begin the personal process of separating all of society's controlling influences out of our systems, until we begin to find out who and what we really are.

There is only one success: to be able to spend your life in your own way.

--Christopher Morley

To be what we are, and to become what we are capable of becoming, is the only end of life.

--Robert Louis Stevenson

My life changed forever the day I realized that I was not responsible for the way I have an extraordinary significance because it will build, create, and bring new things into being.

--J. Krishnamurti

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--J. Krishnamurti

Young people, particularly in modern times, have always been at least mildly discontented with what they found when they left the cloistered security of the those seekers back to their reality, back out of the illusions which have become so deadening to their vitality.

The third stage, after the master has moved on to wherever masters move on to, is the death of that religion, when it becomes organized. The master, while he was alive, was never organized . . . he had no system, no dogma, no limits on the depth and breadth of what he chose to say of how he chose to say it. His life was a revolution, unplanned, and spontaneous. Like Life itself, he could honestly be no other way.

While the master is alive, even the people constantly in his company are never quite sure where he is coming from. But once he has left, the followers must reconstruct what they understood his teaching to have been. These often conflicting records will, of course, be limited and modified by the limited understandings of the chroniclers. The result: instead of a living, vital truth, there will be a raft built of beliefs which must be believed in because they are no longer self-evident like they were when the master was still alive.

Religion, in becoming organized, becomes dead. The vitality and spontaneity which marked it while the master was alive have gone out of it. The message of the master was not an organization, not a dogma set in concrete, but a vital, flowing, ever-self-renewing river of life, and quite apparently often self-contradictory, because Life calls for opposites now and then. The great masters all realized this is how it must be, which is why none of them ever sought to form a new religion. They understood that real truth could never be catalogued or systematized, that it was as big and all-inclusive as Life itself, and the only way for people to see it was to find it within.

Organized religions are like dams which seek to capture the flowing river of truth and understanding which the master embodied, then dispense it with indulgent caution to the faithful. But that flow is cut off, dammed, (or damned) as soon as a creed is created, and the fresh, vital flow of life is turned into a stagnant and silt-choked, but well-controlled swamp.

Organized religions are not interested in producing self-realized people, or in helping people find the truth according to their own strengths; they are primarily interested in their own perpetuation, and their efforts are largely directed along the lines of proselytizing and fund-raising. In doing religion, they have become businesses. If the purpose of religion is to get us into the kingdom, religions are like revolving doors, and the priests get very angry at people who go through on the first spin.

If religion is the opiate of the masses, then the Hindus have the inside dope.

--Alan Watts

Nevertheless, religions exist, and you have probably had some exposure to one or another. But at this stage of your life, you are asking questions, and many of these questions involve the relevance and believability of religious creeds, the chaffing seams and constricting bulk of religious habits.

Old religion factions are volcanoes burnt out.

--Voltaire

Chapter 16 -- Which is the Right Religion?

Just as the world "as it is" is neither democratic nor socialist, neither good nor bad, positive nor negative, so it is neither religious nor scientific. It is simply as it is. Religion, like science, is just another way of trying to figure out what the world is, just a different set of filters through which we sift our experience to try to explain things which, according to all the other filters we use, are difficult to explain.

In truth, Life is the ultimate in simplicity--it doesn't get complex until we try to explain it. Consider a plant . . . how smart is it in terms of knowledge? It knows nothing of vitamins and minerals and cellular structure and regeneration the way a botanist understands them, yet the plant grows wonderfully, usually better than botanists.

That religion is best which makes us vulnerable and open to Life, like we were when we were little children, and doesn't close us into a tightly defined box composed of creeds and dogmas, or a box of knowledge and superstition. That religion is best which allows us to be who we are, who we came here to be.

Music is the only religion that delivers the goods.

--Frank Zappa

All religions are both right and wrong. They are right in that all have ultimately sprung from the consciousness of someone who successfully parted the veils of worldly illusion and saw through to the truth which supports this world; they saw through the movie and perceived the screen on which that movie is being projected. Despite the glittering pomp and somber circumstance which organized religion has draped over these living, vital insights, they are still there . . . well-hidden, but still there.

Frank Zappa's comment alludes to the fact that at its heart, religion's true function is not some future-oriented emotional gush: choirs, golden staircases, offering plates, hero worship, (800)

numbers, or lavish, consoling promises, but is instead a present, real-time celebration of what already is, what always is: the timeless eternity of isness. Any religion can be helpful now and then, but none are ultimate, for the infinite and infinitely dimensioned cosmos itself is the only Ultimate.

This, however, is generally forgotten by the organized religion which seeks to throw a dogmatic lariat around the cosmos while piously ignoring the fact that the vast remainder of reality has been left out of the corral.

History bears the same relation to truth as religion does to reality, i.e., none to speak of.

--Robert Heinlein

Religions are like the spokes of a wheel, and the purpose is to get to the center, where there is peace and stability. Any spoke you want to choose will lead in two directions: inward, toward the center, or outward toward the periphery. Religions vie amongst each other for paying customers, each claiming to be the "one true spoke."

Spokes are easy to distinguish out near the rim, where they are separate and seemingly independent, which is why most religions are concerned primarily with making sure everyone knows how they differ from other religions, and pointing their judgmental fingers at all the infidels who believe otherwise. It's the good-guy bad-guy game performed religiously.

Out on the circumference, activity is furious, so it looks like something meaningful is happening there . . . all the fancy robes and golden candlesticks and crowds of faithful followers swooning in each others arms. Sometimes one particular spoke is up, in its heyday, and its spiritual pride will not go unadvertised. Sometimes it is down in which case the crowds flock elsewhere.

Each spoke points in two directions: toward the center, and also directly away from that same center. You can move in either direction, but the religious authorities would prefer, if not insist, that you go outward. The more outward you go, the more frantically you will have to cling to that spoke to keep from being thrown off. In time, you become a fervent believer . . . your social standing may demand it, not to mention the fate of your soul (whatever that might be), and if you behave you will remain in the good graces of the church. You need them (or at least you learn to believe so) and they definitely need you.

But as they merge toward the hub, the spokes begin to lose their individuality, they all begin to look similar, which is considered bad for business. The closer you get to the center, the more similarity emerges between the same spokes which appeared so different out on the circumference. You begin to see how they have certain things in common, and their similarities really outweigh their differences.

At the very center, of course, where there is no furious activity, where things are smooth and balanced, there are no spokes at all. By this time you have left all religion behind you; you have graduated from what the Hindus call the Wheel of Samsara, the wheel that takes you from birth to death to birth to death to . . .

The truly religious man does not embrace a religion, and he who embraces one has no religion.

--Kahlil Gibran

You are perfectly free to go in either direction on these spokes. You can go outward to the circumference, in which case you will be taken for a ride, sometimes way up and sometimes way down as you bounce through life. Or you can go inward toward the center, where the ride is smooth because it is in balance. If the center is where you want to be, then you will eventually have to leave all the spokes behind. Religion's official spokesmen don't want you to know this, or they will lose you as a paying customer.

So, ultimately all religions are also wrong, because God, or whatever you choose to call the ultimate ground of being, is the center, not only the center of this metaphorical wheel, but also the very center of you, and as such is immediately available to all of us.

If Deity, by whatever label, is really omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, then there is nothing else in existence which is not also It. How can there be? Otherwise the Deity would not be omnipotent, etc.

The analogy of the wheel applies to us individuals as well. When you have lost sight of your center, the place where you were when you assumed a human body, then you have moved out to the periphery where life is shaky and dizzying.

Even though you have been taught for a lifetime to mistrust yourself, that as you are you are not good enough to embody the divine, you will never find your center beyond your own circumference, because it's not out there . . . it is within.

Truth is immediate. The word immediate means not mediated, or without mediator; it means that there is nothing standing between you and it. That includes dogmas, priests, rituals, practices, time, space, and anything else you can imagine. Truth is what one realizes by living with the same quality of spontaneity that was lived by Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, and all the rest. Like theirs, our lives must not be caged in the confining prisons of dogma and conformity. The only thing that keeps heaven from our experience is the assumption that it is to be found somewhere or somewhen else.

One does not realize the spontaneous life by depending on the repetition of thoughts or affirmations; one realizes it by seeing that no such devices are necessary.

--Alan Watts

The American Indian sees no need for setting apart one day in seven as a holy day, since to him all days are God's.

--Charles A. Eastman

So many gods, so many creeds, So many paths that wind and wind, When just the art of being kind Is all this sad world needs.

--Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Religions and churches serve best when they serve as filling stations. When you are out of gas, you go to a filling station, you tank up, and then you move on with your life. Certainly there is a modicum of community surrounding a church congregation--people showing love to each other and so on--but the real test comes when someone wants to leave and move on with their lives.

What usually happens is that since churches and religions have become legal and institutional entities, with mortgages and payrolls, building programs and a full menu of available services, the officers are more interested in collecting life-long paying customers. Religions have become big business, and in so doing, they have become more like retirement communities, where you are expected, often under threat of eternal damnation, to remain docile, to blindly follow the pastor, and to unflinchingly remain in the fold. Sheep thrive.

When one blind man follows another blind man, they both fall into the ditch.

--Kahlil Gibran

I once wrote a short story about a community which lived on the banks of a great wide river. The prevailing religion held that across the river lay the promised land, but the river was so treacherous that very few ever dared to cross it, and fewer still succeeded. The local hero was presumed to have been the only one to successfully complete the trip, thereby earning him the title of savior.

One day a young commoner decided to find out for himself what the promised land was really like, so despite the risks, not to mention the threats of eternal damnation, he set out across the river. He was gone for a long time, nearly eighteen years, and those remaining behind thought him a fool for not conforming like the rest and believing the words of the true religion everyone else believed in. Stories abounded about how he had surely drowned, was eaten by sharks or captured by pirates, all because he doubted the divine revelations of the priests.

Eventually the young man returned. He hadn't been eaten by sharks, or captured by pirates; in fact, none of the dire predictions of the priests bore a shred of truth. But what he did report about his journey, the truths he discovered, did infuriate the priests. He said that the other side of the river was just like this side (the kingdom on heaven is at hand), and that anybody who cared enough could see for themselves if they were willing to take swimming lessons. This outraged the

priests of the home religion, who were making a killing selling soul insurance and life preservers, so they had the man arrested and then executed. Later, of course, he was martyred, and brand new religions sprang up around the various recollections of his teaching.

We now find the world full of religions which promise to deliver us to the next world in return for our moral and financial support in this one. These religions, built around vague, fragmented, and reconstructed recollections of the masters' teachings are like big, fancy cruise liners, complete with all sorts of creature comforts to keep their paying customers occupied.

There are plenty of embarkation wharves on this shore, since the channels have been dredged out to make it possible for these huge ships to come in close. But on the other shore there are no such wharves; instead, there are natural barriers like reefs, shallows, sand bars, and tricky currents . . . all manner of impediments to these expensive, ponderous, and unwieldy vessels.

Consequently, because of the investment and earning power they represent to their owners, these huge ships spend most of their time steaming around in deep water, covering the same stretches of the river over and over again (their navigators are often lawyers, merchandisers, and investment counselors), telling their passengers how lucky they are to be on this ship, and keeping them occupied enough to prevent their noticing that the ship never arrives anywhere.

The crews, of course, are well-schooled in deflecting any troublesome or disturbing questions that might be raised by passengers who happen to notice that their long-awaited deliverance is always being rescheduled to some vague time next year. They will assure restless passengers that the waters are shark-infested, that drowning is a certainty if one should choose to jump ship, that one might be captured by satanic pirates, anything to keep the numbers up.

If you look closely at the words of the masters (not necessarily at the words of those who came afterward and whose understanding of the message would have been clouded at best), then you see that they all talked of finding the truth within, not without. Some of these boats might get you a little closer to the other shore, but if you really want to arrive, you will have to do the last leg on your own.

Buddha, Jesus, and the rest didn't come to throw us a life-preserver, but to teach us how to swim so we wouldn't any longer have to depend on artificial flotation devices which always spring leaks at the wrong time. How can you have a leak in your ability to swim?

Those who are enslaved to their sects are not merely devoid of all sound knowledge, but they will not even stop to learn.

--Galen

Fanaticism consists in redoubling your efforts when you have forgotten your aims.

--George Santayana

From fanaticism to barbarism is only one step.

--Denis Diderot

Avoid, as you would the plague, a clergyman who is also a man of business.

--St. Jerome

Chapter 17-- What About the Devil?

It is well known in dramatic circles that the hero in a play will be no more convincingly heroic than the villain is convincingly demonic. The two roles contrast off each other, and without this contrast, the audience will leave.

Early in its history, when its adherents were still a criminal element hiding out in caves, Christianity found it advantageous to bolster the reputation of its hero, known as Jesus to the Romans, Jeshua to the Jews, and Issa to the Persians. It was high time for him to become a world-class messiah, and he needed a convincing opposite, an evil empire to do battle with. So, Christianity created Satan, borrowing on the ancient image of Pan to give him cloven hooves and a ruddy complexion, not to mention making him insatiably horny, and therefore eternally sinful. Ever since, Pan, the ancient god of animal wisdom and communion with nature, has been cast in the worst possible light.

It is interesting to note that the devil's name was originally Lucifer, which actually means "the bringer of light", and indicates the positive role he played before Christianity singled him out for infamy.

Lucifer's original job description was to present to mankind those challenges and trials which would result in the growth of human consciousness, learning more about the world . . . the opportunity to fall down enough that eventually you learn how to walk without crutches and other artificial supports.

You will not grow if you sit in a beautiful flower garden, but you will grow if you are sick, if you are in pain, if you experience losses, if you do not put your head in the sand, but take the pain and learn to accept it, not as a curse or punishment, but as a gift to you with a very, very specific purpose.

--Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

Growth never takes place without some sort of challenge, and it was Lucifer's job to bring light through experience. Needless to say, his contribution to human evolution has been severely perverted in order that Jesus could be a hero.

Fear of the devil is one way of doubting God.

--Kahlil Gibran

Nowadays, the strength of the belief in Satan is astounding among fundamentalist religions; such religions' adherents seem to fear the devil more than they love God. In fact, they seem to spend far more time and energy vilifying and running away from Satan than they do in loving their neighbors. This serves the exact opposite intent of the masters after whom these religions have named themselves.

Many religions people are deeply suspicious. They seem--for purely religions purposes, of course--to know more about iniquity than the unregenerate.

--Rudyard Kipling

If God (or whatever) is really omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, then how can there be a conflicting power? How can there exist anything which is "not God" or "not Life"? There can't be, of course, and once we realize this, then it becomes necessary to radically adjust our thinking about the devil, in whatever disguise we may personally dress it.

There is, of course, no such thing as a devil, but this reality remains hidden for those who believe in one. And their belief gives their fear-driven perceptions the strength of conviction. Like colored glasses, if your thoughts are red, if your colored glasses have red glass in them, then you will see red everywhere. That's no proof that the world is red. If an honest, true perception of reality is what you want, then sooner or later it will occur to you that colored glasses, regardless of their colors or claims, will have to be removed so that you can see reality directly, immediately. If you believe in a devil, then you will see devil-stuff everywhere, but that's no more proof than that red glasses make the world look red. This is one of the many negative legacies of organized religions: to remain in power, they have taught fear instead of love, judgment instead of forgiveness, separateness instead of unity. They have converted themselves from vehicles into destinations, and all the while ignoring everything that Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed, or whomever, said to the contrary.

We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another.

--Jonathan Swift

The present resurgence of fundamentalism everywhere in the world seems to indicate that a lot of people are scared stiff; it is not just coincidental that fundamentalism promotes fear as one of its basic operating principles. Intolerance, of anyone who happens to think differently about life, is rampant. Compare the atrocities being committed today in the names of religion or philosophy (the Middle East, Bosnia, China) with the driving spirit behind such abominations as the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the Nazi Holocaust, the McCarthy era, the Cold War, the drug war, to name but a few). Control spawns xenophobia.

The greater the ignorance, the greater the dogmatism.

--Sir William Osler

The Puritans nobly fled from a land of despotism to a land of freedom, where they could not only enjoy their own religion, but could prevent everybody else from enjoying his.

--Charles Farrar Browne

Chapter 18 -- Real Religion is Ultimately Personal

Behind all creeds the spirit is One.

--Andrew Lang

Recall the difference between who we really are and who we think we are. Who we really are was never born and will never die. Who we think we are is like the actor who is playing the roles of you and me. That actor doesn't come into being just when the curtain rises, and does not cease to be when the curtain comes back down, even though his character does. So it is with us. Who we really are is real, eternal, not limited to or confined by the time schedule of the play, and therefore eternally one with the ultimate reality some call God.

Real religion is personal because its intent is to relate and to contrast that part of us which is temporary (the role, the personality, You #2) with that part of us which is eternal (the actor, You #1). We have been talked out of our innate interconnectedness with Life, with Truth, and religion is what we call the process of rediscovering that link. The true Self (Atman, Brahma, the Father, who you really are) needs nothing to link it to what it already is.

Then again, since it deals primarily with the illusory part of us, religion itself can be said to be ultimately illusory; it will have to be different for each of us, because each of us has lost sight of the Self in a different way. The masters all discovered this, but they also realized that their followers didn't yet get the message, so they made suggestions in order to bring those followers back to their reality. Their advice to their disciples was not of the one size fits all variety, but was individually tailored to the needs and challenges of each disciple. Jesus' teaching was not given to an editorial panel, but to ordinary people who wanted to experience what he was experiencing; each needed different prompts.

All of us are different; what makes sense to me might not make sense to you. Naturally, our paths are different, so the promptings (and that's what they must be . . . not orders, but suggestions) we need as to how to follow that path will likewise be different.

But when they became organized, when the original master has passed from the scene and taken his divine insights with him, the religion that formed in his wake lost the ability to innovate, to treat each of us as a special case. The priests who came after the master didn't have enough soul

to fill his sandals, so their only option was a creed, a static set of beliefs which had to be accepted without question, resulting in an intellectual and emotional bullying of the sort to which no master would stoop. The masters said, "Heal!", but the priests said "Heel!. That's dogma.

Accepting things on faith was something I had trouble with as a child. I was brought up a Lutheran; I got over it eventually, but until I did I could never rectify two conflicting tenets that were ground into me at a young and impressionable age. The first was that God was omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent . . . okay, I could accept that.

But the second was that I, as a human being, was sinful, and therefore somehow other. In logical discourse, this is called a non sequitur . . . given that the first statement is true, the second doesn't follow.

If you start out with a ball of clay, and you make different things out of that clay--a cup, a figurine, a doorstep--these objects all have different appearances and functions, but they are still all made of that same clay. Similarly, if you begin with God and make a universe out of it (recall that, by definition, there was nothing else to work with) then what can that universe, and everything in it, possibly be composed of?

After I shook the dust of organized religion from my sandals, I learned that the link between big 'ol God and little 'ol me was no more and no less than consciousness. And each of us, at and as the very center of us, have this same feeling of I Am, for the not-so-obvious reason that each one of us is really God (Brahma) pretending to be each one of us. There is only one I Am, there is only one God, one Brahma, one Tao, one beingness. When I find Me #1, and you find You #1, we both see the same world, because we both are the same world. But we have so cleverly and convincingly hidden ourselves from ourselves that we really believe that we are separate entities. That's the hide part of hide-and-seek. Humanity has become hide-bound.

Chapter 20 -- What is Meditation?

Up until this century, the west looked upon prayer as the only valid route to happiness, the only officially sanctioned access to God, impossible if not downright blasphemous without the priests. This was fine as long as you had no problem with the prevailing dogma, because any deviation was called heresy, and heretics usually got dead quickly. But due to the cross-cultural exchanges which have taken place over the past hundred years or so, the concept of meditation has been introduced into the otherwise largely Judeo-Christian western world.

While religions hard-liners are always reluctant to admit that there can be anything good about a non Judeo-Christian idea, the more open-minded have discovered that, far from being a

detraction, meditation is a sorely-needed antidote to the frantic life styles we have developed here in the west, and which has been exported to societies all over the globe.

Many, many years ago, when our lives were relatively simple and straight forward, the practice of meditation would have seemed almost unnecessary, because people were still natural. Their lives were naturally integrated with the world around them, and the ego, which now serves to isolate us from the world, was not so crystallized that people were selfish and fearful of life.

Today, life in the mainstream has become frantic in its busyness, its headlong rush right past the present into the future. Because of centuries of incessant indoctrination via both the so-called work ethic and religious pressure (the devil finds work for idle hands), being at peace is perceived as almost unpatriotic. We have wrapped our egos so tightly around us to protect us that we have cut ourselves off from the eternal peace which is now just a religious or moral vision, a future attainment, no longer a present reality.

We have forgotten our place in the world. With the full aid and encouragement of material greed and a well-learned fear of death, we have for thousands of years viewed the world as our possession, with us at the top of the heap. Armed with this presumption, it becomes an article of faith that the world and all its creatures are here solely for the purposes of human exploitation and the lining of human pockets.

This attitude has led directly to the degradation of the environment, the depletion of natural resources, the fouling of the air, water, and land, the bureaucratic atrocities which are called governments, and untold misery for billions of people.

And more to the point, as we approach the end of the century, the traditionally positive outlook for young people has turned unpalatably sour. Perhaps this is why, in a recent national survey of thousands of junior high and high school kids, it was discovered that more than 20% have either contemplated or actually attempted suicide. All of the traditional promises for the future, including job security, a home in the suburbs, an honest government, and the prospect of living a life of conspicuous consumption, have turned out to be false. TV has sold us an erroneous sense of reality, and there seems to be nothing we can do about it.

Meditation, as both a practice and a way of life, has emerged in recent times to offer a workable, if not vital alternative to people who are fed up with living frantic, anxious lives, and who have found no solace in the worn out mantras of organized religion. Meditation is a way to get reconnected with who you really are and what you are really here to do and be. Meditation is like catching a glimpse of the backstage props to remind you that the play is really a play, that the so-called worldly realities are also part of the play, and that you are really the actor, not the role. For only then will you be able to play your role, to dance it instead of working it to death.

Some insist that in order to meditate you must sit a certain way, think certain thoughts, or hum or chant exotic mantras with your eyes closed, to mention just a few of the more popular instructions. It is generally presumed in all these methods that the mind must be perfected, cleansed of all its dross, purified.

There is a story about a disciple who let it be known that he was meditating to polish his mind to absolute clarity, to remove every last trace of human weakness. When the master learned of it, he sought out this particular disciple, who was sitting piously in a place of prominence. The master sat down next to him and asked what he was doing.

"I am polishing my mind to clarity."

The master thought for a moment, then picked up a brick and began rubbing it on the rock where the disciple was seated. Unable to resist his curiosity, the disciple asked the master what he was doing.

"I am polishing this brick to make it a mirror."

"You can't do that," said the disciple. "No amount of polishing will make that brick into a mirror."

Tossing the brick away, the master said, "And no amount of polishing will bring clarity to your mind."

There are said to be many methods of meditation, but really there is only one. Just as real prayer is not a one-way flow of requests and complaints, so meditation is not to be thought of as the admission fee for some celestial joy ride. The purpose of meditation, regardless of the technique involved, is to slow down the mind, to bring it from the high rpm's encouraged by our fast paces back to idle speed. Having learned to separate the mind from the body (at least in our thinking), and having concluded that it is the mind which is somehow responsible for our being, our minds are in nearly constant activity, thinking about one thing or another, worrying or planning or recalling or projecting. After all, time is money, right? And when you waste time (money), you are committing a grave, if not treasonous sin.

This continuous mental activity becomes obvious if you should ever decide to sit down and hold your attention on one thing to the exclusion of everything else. One thought naturally leads to another. You begin by thinking about, say, a flower, and before long you find you have been thinking about flower arrangements, pesticides, bouquets, mother's day, and insects, and soon the original thought flower has wilted to nothingness.

The purpose of meditation isn't to still this continual activity, because it is the mind's special talent to provide associations. The purpose is to learn the difference between all those thoughts and the consciousness which is experiencing them. Meditation is a space in which you can hold to

one idea so completely that it is exhausted and transcended without the mind immediately jumping to a new subject. Only then is it possible to become properly aware of that mysterious facility called consciousness which is having these thoughts, only then is your real center reached where, unlike the periphery of spinning thoughts, there is peace.

This example may help illustrate the difference between consciousness and its contents, called thoughts. Picture yourself standing on the curb watching taxi cabs driving past you. Each taxi is a thought group, a sort of theme park on wheels. Each is a joy ride of serially associated thoughts. One taxi advertises thoughts about work, another about love, another about paying the bills, or getting your act together, or whatever. There is even one about meditating. Some advertise more boldly than others, saying, "This is important to think about" or "You are being wasteful or inefficient or irresponsible unless you get into this cab." Habitual thoughts are just taxies that you habitually like to ride around in.

Whenever you indulge your attention in any line of thinking, it is like getting into one of those taxi cabs. Their purpose is to take you for a ride, and that's precisely what they do. You are whisked away into a joy (or horror) ride, and soon you have completely forgotten that you are not experiencing reality. The entertainment consoles in these taxies, programmed with our prevailing world views, hopes, fears, and self-images, are state of the art . . . virtual reality, perhaps, but not really reality. Virtual reality is still not real.

Reality . . . what a concept!

--Robin Williams

Of course, reality is not just an idea or a concept . . . it is too huge for any idea to contain. Someone said that if the human mind were simple enough to be understood, the human mind would be too dumb to understand itself. If we can't understand our own brains, what can we say about the universe, let alone that which gave rise to it? To claim to be able to do so would be like some character in a book claiming to understand the motivations of the person who wrote the book. Not likely.

All the ideas you have in your mind are just ideas; they may mimic or resemble reality in some specific way, but even the most detailed picture of the Grand Canyon is certainly not the Grand Canyon. Meditation is the process of getting out of the cab and remaining on the curb, simply watching the picture show without becoming absorbed by it.

Because you are consciousness, and because consciousness is inactive in the usual sense (how active is a microphone?), standing on the curb can make it seem like you aren't getting anywhere. Any yet these cabs don't usually get you anywhere either . . . they merely give you the impression that you are getting somewhere . . . in-flight movies which have nothing to do with where you really are is really going. The whole purpose of meditation is to take your attention away from

the joy rides and put it back onto the curb, to show you that the movie is an illusion, while the witness who is aware of it is real.

Meditation is not an exclusive state into which you immerse yourself, because who you really are is not exclusive. Meditation is often thought to be a state of mind, a mental plane perhaps filled with beatific visions of ascended masters in flowing robes. Sometimes meditation is thought of as a state wherein you discard sense perception, then go on to discard any concepts you may have, so that for all practical purposes you are totally absorbed in some mystical state and completely insensitive to the world outside. But this is not meditation either, because who you really are is not exclusive: it is ALL. Meditation is more correctly a state of no-mind, where the personalized ego is turned off for a time so that reality can reveal itself.

Meditation is not what you think.

--Anon.

Therefore, meditation, as a practice, presents us with a very curious problem. It is not an end in itself, but more of a means, a reconditioning which allows us to really live, sort of a process of retuning ourselves. An orchestra in which all the players are out of tune is a cacophony, not a symphony; being in tune is essential to harmony. But neither would we think much of an orchestra in which the players spent all their time just tuning up; they are tuning up so that they can play in tune. If you practice meditation for its own sake, as an end in itself, and unless your meditation serves merely to clear the screens, then you never end up playing anything. You become a meditation junkie.

Meditation doesn't get you anywhere; it shows you where you are. And in this sense, meditation is medicinal, not dietary. Its only purpose is to get you back in tune when you are out of tune. When you are stressed out, and can remember that being stressed out is not what you are here to experience, then meditation is very helpful in getting you back to your center, back to the point where you realize that you are not your thoughts, you are not your ego; you are that which is conscious of these things.

Remember the analogy of the wheel. When you are out at the circumference, life is spinning so rapidly that you can't make much sense of it. From that perspective, the whole world and everything in it is a chaotic blur, but since everyone else you see is spinning too, it is easy to presume that spinning fast and getting dizzy is the natural way to live. In such a state, facts look straight when actually they are crooked, and vice versa, and it is next to impossible to recognize it when someone is centered and not dizzily spinning like you.

The masters are those who have reached the center of their wheels. Though their wheels are probably spinning faster than anyone else's, from their perspective at the center everything is clear and unjumbled, their lives are smooth and tranquil because they are balanced. All the masters have lived to show others what life looks like from that unmoving center, and their

messages all have this as their theme, regardless of how their various teachings may appear to differ.

All meditation is based in the conviction that we have only to acknowledge and assent to the reality from which we have never been separated.

--Hugo L'Anson Fausset

There are no impediments to meditation. The very thought of such obstacles is the greatest impediment.

--Ramana Maharshi

Meditation is really nothing more exotic than falling back into the natural human state wherein the attention, though aware of the contents of the mind, is not fixed on them, is not entranced in those taxi cabs or hypnotized by the movies. You can meditate while sitting on a park bench, listening to music, doing the dishes, anything . . . as long as you are standing on the curb and not going for a ride. This is what Jesus meant when he talked about prayer without ceasing, for properly understood, prayer and meditation are the same thing looked at through different cultures. Like prayer (the dissolving of the self into the divine), meditation is not a state of mind . . . it is a state of no-mind.

Since meditation is not an exclusive state, its essence pervades the lives of those who have recognized how to tell the difference between the real and the illusory. Meditation is actually the state of being we were designed to experience, and after hundreds of thousands of years developing in oneness with the world, man has gone off on a tangent, organizing the ways in which people can be drawn out of that meditative, unified existence, into the marketplace.

Hindu scriptures speak of the Great Sky, metaphorically equating it with the true nature of Self, of consciousness. They say your true mind is like the sky which is never soiled by what it contains. In this regard, all thoughts, no matter how elevated or pious, are like the clouds in the sky. Clouds come and go; some are delicate and lacy, others are ponderous and dark. The point is not to cling to or identify with any of the clouds, but to just watch them come and go, as they always will, while keeping the attention on the sky which contains them all.

Just as the sky is not identical with whatever clouds may presently be in it, so your real being, your consciousness, is not identical with the thoughts you may be entertaining, your ego, the taxi cabs you ride around in. Learning how to tell the difference between your thoughts and the You who is having them, between the sky and the clouds it may contain, this is what meditation is all about.

Chapter 21 -- The 100th Monkey

Another effect of meditation has to do with what happens when many people are meditating, vibrating at the same frequency. When you meditate, what happens in addition to stilling your own vibrations is that you will sort of lock in to other people who are meditating, no matter where or when they happen to be. Remember, you are always broadcasting yourself to the world anyway . . . you may not be aware of it, but because of the interconnectedness of all reality, it's happening all the time. When you and I are both on the same wave-length, our vibrations tend to harmonize with each other, even strengthen each other, and the more people on the same wave-length, the more of that sort of energy will be released.

This phenomenon is known as entrainment, a process arising from resonance, wherein anyone whose vibrations are close in frequency will entrain, will lock in with everyone else generating those vibrations.

At the end of World War II, on a chain of small islands north of Japan, some interesting and instructive things happened. On these islands lived several clans of monkeys whose behavior was being studied by anthropologists. At the same time, some humanitarians decided that it would be a good thing to drop sweet potatoes onto the beaches to help the monkeys make it through the cold winter (maybe they were simianitarians?).

The anthropologists soon noted that on one of the islands, one of the younger monkeys had discovered that the sweet potatoes tasted a whole lot better if she washed the sand off in the surf before eating them. Other young monkeys quickly learned the new behavior, while the older monkeys, of course, disdained this juvenile behavior (kid's don't know anything . . . it's just a passing fad).

What happened then was a perfect demonstration of entrainment. As the number of monkeys who washed their potatoes grew and reached some kind of a critical point of involvement, this new behavior suddenly appeared from out of nowhere on several of the other islands, not in weeks but in hours, even though the monkey clans had no physical contact with each other. The phenomenon became known as the 100th Monkey Syndrome. Apparently, when a sufficient proportion of the population adopts a new behavior, in this case the washing of yams, the behavior blossoms beyond that limited group, so that even the older monkeys begin to see the wisdom in it.

Lots of people are meditating these days, perhaps more than ever before in history (if only because today there are more people than ever before in history . . . there are more people alive today than have ever died! . . . think about That!). Because we are in such times of change, and because things are always more volatile, more flexible during times of change, the effect of all these people meditating will help you meditate, your efforts will be of assistance to them, and

together lots of interesting things are likely to happen. It is important for you to remember that everything you do matters, everything has an effect.

I will act as if what I do makes a difference.

--William James

Genius all over the world stands hand in hand, and one shock of recognition runs the whole circle round.

--Herman Melville

Where it comes to turning the world into a better direction, the best that any of us can do, for ourselves and for the rest, is to get our own acts together, for only when we are in tune will we know what needs to be done.

Humanity has been on the wrong track for thousands of years. We have learned to look upon the world as a commodity, a resource to be exploited, and upon each other as dangerous strangers who need to be controlled, and only recently have significant numbers of people sounded the alarm about what we have done to the planet, and to each other.

Populations have grown beyond the carrying capacity of the places where they live, forests have been chopped down to grow hamburgers, swamps have been drained to build chrome and glass shopping malls, material progress has come complete with polluted water and poisoned air, industrial waste lines have become bloated, whole species of plants and animals have been decimated for investment purposes, and unless these trends are starkly reversed, our grandchildren might not have much of a planet to live on.

In the recent past, when problems have arisen, we allowed ourselves to be lulled into the belief that future generations of experts would figure out how to deal with them. But the whole of civilization is now at a crisis point; things are moving so fast that we can't wait until some mega-computer to be built in the late 21st century figures out how to bail us out, or until some brass-winged angel swoops from the sky and fixes everything. The future fate of mankind can tip in either direction---toward chaos and mud, or toward a higher order; maybe both. The people who will ultimately decide the fate of mankind have already been born. That's YOU!

Our 'boundaries' are limitless. We can direct feelings like symphony orchestra conductors in order to connect, unite, expand, and grow with the oneness, rather than allow ourselves to be slaves to our own past.

--Anon.

Appropriately enough, the social institutions which helped create these global problems are now breaking down. Mass organizations of all kinds are floundering, governments and businesses are

operating on red ink, and each new solution they propose, while making the short-run look rosier and keeping the bankers and tax collectors happy, only make things worse in the long run.

It is time that we took back our birthrights. It is time that real people stand up and insist on reality . . . not promises that if we just be patient and let the experts do their thing, everything will work out by some time in the next decade. That has never worked, it's not working now, and it won't work in the future.

The frameworks which will actually work in the future will be those which are worked out by people who have made the journey to the Self. You don't get a bright light by rearranging darkness, and you don't get peace by re-arranging unpeaceful people. There is a phrase in therapy circles which says that the therapy is no higher than the therapist. The same holds true for every other walk of life. The reason that all our institutions are under fire today is because they have been guided and staffed by people who haven't made that journey, people who were as lost as the next guy. We can no longer afford such charities.

The challenge facing the world today is personal in that it is up to each of us to learn how to live in the present. Not in the past, because the past is over and done with, and not in the future, because the future hasn't arrived yet. And when the future does arrive, we will probably ignore it anyway because by then we will be chasing some further future.

The supreme reality is not the future, but the present. The future is a deceitful time that always says to us, 'Not yet,' and thus denies us. The future is not the time to live; what man truly wants he wants now. Whoever builds a house for future happiness builds a prison for the present.

--Octavio Paz

How real are you? Are you living out of the past, out of habit? The ego is constructed from the past, but what's real is not past; neither is it future. How happy are you? Are you doing what you came here to do?

Chapter 22 -- Believe It or Not

Beliefs are powerful influences on how we experience life. We have already discussed the effects of belief in a devil, that people who believe in a devil are continuously beset with fears. Those fears are created by their beliefs, which in turn are created by their fears. This syndrome (sin drone?) is a viscous (sic) circle.

The Hindus have a word for the world of the mentally-created illusion which we all experience. It is called maya, which means both illusion and magical creative power. The so-called veils of maya must be parted if one would glimpse the truth, but maya in and of itself is not a bad thing . . . it is

simply the result of the creative process, the experiments we humans have set up in order to figure out our predicament and to understand how this world works.

Similarly, karma and reincarnation are different ways, different metaphors, for assessing our situation. You make what is called bad karma when you act out of rhythm with life, and you make good karma when you accord with life. Karma is like the ripples we make in the pool of life as we thrash around trying to stay afloat while weighted down by our attachments. The waves we make come back to either aid or obstruct us, whence we call them good or bad karma.

Karma, whether it be termed good or bad, is simply the measure of the degree to which the ego is still in control. When you have learned to tell the difference between your role and the actor playing that role, and you act as a whole and not as a frightened little part, then you make no karma, you are no longer slapped about by circumstances. Karma is just another way of looking at the ways in which we have lost our balance.

Likewise, reincarnation is a way of explaining present conditions and events on the basis of our actions in what are called past lives. The part of us which is said to partake in these successive lifetimes is labeled "the soul", or something equally ethereal, and while theories of reincarnation may make us a little more comfortable with our conditions, this knowledge doesn't really help us out of them.

It is something for a frightened person to cling to when he is told that in a past life he was King Richard, a Roman centurion, or the head of some forgotten tribe of wonder-workers. In truth, of course, we have all lived all past lives, because there is only one consciousness, there is only one Actor playing all the roles. In this regard, ideas of reincarnations tend to whet our curiosity, but they bring us no closer to the truth of our being. We will not find answers for the present in the dim past, although it should be recalled that Life will use even our mistaken beliefs to present us with learning experiences to bring us back to our only reality. Reincarnation and karma are just ways of looking at life, they are not life itself. Like most religious ideas, they are both relatively true and absolutely false.

Our systems of belief determine our experience, and resonance is the key to understanding the functioning of any belief, because "as a man thinketh, so is he". If you believe that you were born in sin and are a sinner, then your life will reflect that perception, but you will call it fact.

If you believe that your body is vulnerable to disease, germs, and unforeseen calamities, then that will be your experience. If you believe that everyone is out to get you, then you will have all the proof you need that people are cruel. In other words, your experience will follow your beliefs, those beliefs will resonate with the potentia of the world around you, so that's what you will see.

It must be realized that men are driven to their fates by the quality of their beliefs.

--William Carlos Williams

You pick your own chains, and you can pick your own locks.

--Anon.

The universe is change; our life is what our thoughts make it.

--Marcus Aurelius

Chapter 23 -- Living Your Life

Do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the men of old; seek what they sought.

--Matsuo Basho

Nobody can tell you how you ought to live your life, or what you ought to do with it, though the world is filled with people who are paid handsomely to try. It is certainly not the purpose of this book to do so. Rather, the most important thing you will learn from this or any other book is that you already have all you need.

At this point you may feel like a mechanic whose job it is to fix a car you barely understand, a car which always seems to be sputtering along on three cylinders and never quite in the right gear, and you find yourself in possession of more spare parts than could possibly belong to your car. How do you sort them all out, how do you know what belongs to your car and what doesn't?

If you are really interested in being happy, if you are really interested in making a meaningful difference in the world, then the journey you are taking will bring you no end of challenge . . . plenty of warm moments, and plenty of trying ones as well, because it is never easy to be real and swim against the tide of human lethargy. In the end, though, there is no substitute for being who you are. The certain alternative is misery and unhappiness.

To be nobody but yourself, in a world which is doing its best day and night to make you like everybody else, means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight . . . and never stop fighting.

--e. e. cummings

It's not when you realize that nothing can help you--religion, pride, anything--it's when you realize that you don't need any aid.

--William Faulkner

It is only the belief so deeply engrained in all of us that we are not good enough which keeps us from realizing that we are good enough. It is only the belief that we must control reality which keeps us from seeing that life knows better than we what it is about. It is only our belief in our

separateness from life which hides the fact that Life is on our side. It (call it God if you wish) wants us to be happy, because we are part of It and It is part of us.

Seize the day, put no trust in the morrow! (Carpe diem)

--Horace

Life is not a journey with a destination at the end . . . the journey is the destination, the destination is the journey. The future which is lived for is a wasted future, and a wasted present.

Living for the future is a farce which has been foisted on us, and it is a farce which is long overdue for disposal. When you are a child, you are fooled into this future habit by the promises of how great things are going to be when you get older. Life is put off till some undefined future time when all the groundwork will have been laid: till the house is paid for, or the kids are through college, or whatever.

What to do with your life? This is a question faced by a growing number of people, not all of them just out of high school. There is, for those who decline to take responsibility for their own lives, the promise of the military. But "Be all you can be" really means "Be all we let you be", which it turns out isn't much. The military life is not a life for a reasoning, feeling human being, for it teaches you not to think, not to wonder, not to make decisions independently. It teaches you to ignore the majority of your being, and to believe wholly in force and might. You are trained to react automatically without letting your humanity get in the way, you are rewarded for killing, maiming, and destroying. You are reduced to being a body which is patriotically proud that it has surrendered its natural wisdom and autonomy to somebody else's brain.

The professional military mind is by necessity an inferior and unimaginative mind; no man of high intellectual quality would willingly imprison his gifts in such a calling.

--H. G. Wells

Of course, graduation from high school or college is simply a short-lived high, because now you must find a job. If you don't, you're a failure (See! We told you!). Once you have a job, you can look forward to rising through the ranks if you are aggressive and callous, toward the day when you will be able to afford more and more goodies.

Then, after working for years at something you may or may not do well and may or may not enjoy, you get to retire and suck on what's left of the fruits of your life-long efforts. But by the time you retire, your body is a mess, your youth has long since fled, your kids have moved away, and all you have to look forward to are a few good years of feeble leisure. And all the Lawrence Welk you can stomach.

In the meantime, you have missed Life, because Life only happens in the present, and if you don't know how to live in the present, then you don't know how to live. Striving and straining have become a way of life, but they don't bring happiness or meaning to life.

Tired of lying in the sunshine/Staying home to watch the rain. And you are old, and life is long/
And there is time to kill today. And then one day you find/Ten years have got behind you, No
one told you when to run/You missed the starting gun.

--Pink Floyd

Suddenly your life is all in the past. By then, of course, there is death to be dealt with. It has been learned that the average life expectancy of bank executives upon retirement is less than four years. After spending their adult lives being the boss, now they are just another old person, and they can't handle it, so they leave.

Anything beyond the next step is imagination.

--Ram Dass

Nobody can foretell the future. Even Life itself, apparently by design, doesn't know what's coming next, which is why it has been able to continue all these billions of years without getting bored. The only predictions which ever seem to pan out are those which are stated in such vague terms that their usefulness seems to exist only in retrospect, and can be applied to any number of ages. Predictions give the frightened something to cling to while they flee from the present eternity.

Why should you trouble yourself about the future? You do not even properly know about the present. Take care of the present; the future will take care of itself. --Ramana Maharshi

Take no thought for the morrow . . .

--Jesus

This simple concept is one of the major thorns in the side of Christianity, and all of modern life as well, and because modern man has ignored it, the world is fast becoming economically, ecologically, and morally bankrupt. We have begun to eat our seed crop, we have not only borrowed on the future to pay for the past, but we have learned how to ignore the present even while it is happening. It's like picking out a tree in the distance and telling yourself, "When I get to that tree, I'll be satisfied." Of course, by the time you get there, you have long since picked out another better, and further tree.

The present is the only place you can be. Don't miss it, don't be so constantly looking beyond the present toward a future which never arrives. When it does arrive, it will do so in a form you will never have expected, just like it always does. Wherever you are today, in time and space or in your affairs, you will never be here again. Don't miss it, don't miss what it has to show you.

You can never step into the same river twice.

--Heraclitus

The present is always changing. It is never the same from moment to moment, because everything in time changes. You never meet the same people twice, you are never the same person twice, because everything you experience changes you. Fortunately, the present comes readily equipped with whatever you really need.

You can't always get what you want, but if you try some time, you just might find you get what you need.

--Mick Jagger

But, you ask, how can I live in the present without thinking about the future? How will I earn money, where and how will I live? Good questions, but they are questions to which you already have the answers, even though those answers may not appear in the form in which you expect them.

Look inward. Look past the fears and anxieties your socialized mind presents to your awareness, look beyond the appearances. Learn how to listen to your being. The truths you need to hear aren't in this or any other book--they are already there within you.

When you follow your heart, you may find yourself out on the fringes of what is acceptable, regardless of the general field of your interests. In fact, you are guaranteed that there will be nobody else doing exactly what you are doing; that's the way it must be. If you get the jitters, just consider all of the other people, the great ones, who have persevered the time you are now experiencing. They did not persevere because they were great; they were great because they persevered.

You will find that when you are doing your thing, whatever you need will be provided. That's just the way life works.

Chapter 24 -- The Illusion of Time

Time is the way our human brains cope with an infinite which is too huge to be comprehended all at once, so we experience the Infinite a little bit at a time.

Consider the vast stretches of what we call time . . . with our imaginations we can project outward billions of years into the past and billions of years into the future. The Big Bang, from which cosmological time is measured, happened around 15 billion years ago, give or take a few billion

years. Life as we know it has been leaving a fossil record for about three and a half billion years. How long is that?

If a year were equivalent to a second, making you 15 of 50 or however many seconds old, then the Big Bang happened about 475 years ago. Life as we know it began nearly 111 years ago. The last dinosaurs died out only two years ago, the pyramids were built less than an hour ago, and the Declaration of Independence was signed a little over three minutes ago. And several billions of years are only a micro-microscopic slice of eternity, essentially nothing at all.

Compared with these incomprehensible expanses of time (and we aren't even counting into the future), the present moment seems like nothing at all . . . an immeasurably brief but endlessly recurring instant of reality sandwiched between two extremely thick slices of rumor and guess work. Compared to the past and the future, the present seems like nothing, and yet the masters throughout time have insisted over and over again that the present is the only reality, that the past and the future are phantoms. How can this be?

Picture yourself standing on the curb again, watching the traffic go by. The traffic which is presently before you is called the present . . . you can smell it, touch it, see it, hear it, and so on. You can see about a block in each direction, up and down the street. This narrow slice is called the present.

The past is the traffic which has already disappeared down the street , and the traffic which has yet to appear up the street we'll call the future (to avoid needless confusion, we'll call it a one-way street, even though what we call time might run in both directions, and even at right angles). Compared to the past traffic (which has been going past for millennia) and the future traffic (likewise), our block-wide present doesn't look like much.

Suppose further that as you are standing there, you hear a voice which says, "In about three minutes a green truck will come by." You look up the street, you don't see anything, but sure enough, in three or four minutes a green truck comes by. Amazing! You hear the voice again, and again you hear a prediction. You might freak out (if you are a fundamentalist), you might think it is magic, you might even set yourself up as a trance medium if you can get the voice to cooperate.

In fact, though, it is only someone leaning out of a fourth story window over your head. From his position up there, your cosmic traffic announcer is looking at a present which is much wider than yours . . . from his higher perspective, his present includes part of what you call the past and the future; he is reading your future from his present.

The higher up the building you go, the more the past and future resolve themselves into the present. Going higher up in the building is raising your consciousness, which is the true meaning and intent of getting high. From the top of the building, you have raised your consciousness to

the point where the so-called future and the so-called past have ceased to exist, and there is only the present. There never was anything but the infinite present, but from your incredibly limited perspective down on the street corner, you couldn't see much of it, so there appeared to be a past and a future.

What does eternal mean? It means always the case. "For ever" means ever so. Ever-lasting . . . things can last only in the present. Endless, ceaseless, permanent, timeless, enduring . . . all of these terms are present words, they mean that what is eternal and timeless doesn't exist in time, doesn't depend on time.

The only place outside of time is now. Time is composed of the past and the future; the present instant is too infinitely short to be measured--it is instantaneous. What is timeless always is, it is never was or will be. This is where You #1 and Me #1 always are, this is where reality always is.

There is a place in the Bible where someone was questioning Jesus about how come he knew so much about history. His response showed that he knew about the illusory nature of time; it was a response which alluded to time both in the sense that most of us are aware of it, in terms of before and after, and also from the perspective of You #1, the divine, eternal, timeless part of us. He said, "Before Abraham was, I am".

This strange statement is really a very clever bridge between these two perspectives. The first part of the statement is in the realm of time, of before and after, earlier and later, where his questioners presumed they existed. For their benefit, he used their time-oriented perspective to begin the statement. "Before Abraham was" is a time-like statement, firmly in the Jesus #3 realm. (If there were twelve disciples, then there were twelve different Jesus #3's, one for each disciple. Judging from the record, none of them, with the possible exception of Thomas, saw Jesus #1).

But then he shifted gears into the Jesus #1 mode and took the whole discussion beyond time into the timeless. Even before Abraham was, "I am" was still a present reality, standing on the top floor of the building watching time flow past for those on the street. He didn't mean to imply that the role Jesus was there before Abraham was; after all, Jesus was only in his early thirties at the time. He meant that "I am" always is, regardless of the when or the who of a time-based personality or way of thinking. When you raise your consciousness beyond the street level to the top of the building, you move out of time orientation into eternity, the place where "I am" always IS.

Raising consciousness is what all the masters intended when they told their stories. Raising consciousness is also what the psychedelic revolution is all about, it's not about getting stoned for kicks; it's about getting fluid, elevating awareness, becoming more at-one with reality. The present eternally is what is eternal eternally is, right here and right now. This is only an analogy, of course, and all analogies break down if you try to stretch them too far, but who you are is eternal; you are only pretending to be pedestrian in your perspectives. If that perspective is no longer comfortable, quit it, take the elevator, and see what is.

Chapter 25 -- What Is

Go right on and listen as thou goest.

--Dante Alighiere

Listening is an art. It makes use of the female side of our nature, a side which has been ignored for far too long. Vision is male, it probes and delves, it is aggressive, investigative, rude, and driven by ego. Hearing, on the other hand, is female in that it is receptive . . . it is a passive, non-judgmental receptivity of what it.

Don't forget that we are all fitted out with qualities that are both male and female; in fact, it is our unique mix of these qualities that helps define our egos. It has nothing to do with gender. In fact, a person equipped with all male characteristics would be a brute, while a person equipped with all female characteristics would be a confirmed wall flower. We are all a mix of what are called male and female traits.

When you are caught up in your thoughts, fears, and anxieties, then you can't see anything but those thoughts, you are not listening to anything but those habitual ideas which by their very nature are limited and of the past. But the world is infinite, it is actually overflowing with hints and clues for the benefit of those who know how to listen. Remember that you are not really separate from Life, and Life is not really separate from you. Life wants you to be at peace, to be happy, because only then will things be in harmony.

Everything is intimately connected with everything else. You have not been left out in the cold on your own, with nothing to work with but your wiles and brains, even though that's how it often feels. Every situation you find yourself in contains within it at least traces of everything else. By learning how to listen, the world will speak of itself to you because you are now open. When you are closed, with your earphones plugged in to your own internal tapes, the world goes right on speaking, but you'll never be able to hear it, you'll never become enthralled with the splendor and interconnectedness of all of life.

We encounter rude surprises in life when we fail to see, to hear, to listen to each other and the world around us. When we are so caught up in our egos, projecting our hopes and fears into the world around us, we can't be aware of all the things the world is trying to tell us. And the world gains nothing by keeping secrets . . . there is no mechanism in nature which seeks to make things a secret. It is our own thrashing and bluster which hides Life's subtle messages from us. When we miss these messages, we get surprised.

One of the most intriguing technologies of the modern age is that of laser holography. The message of holography is one of unity in diversity, providing an example of how everything can be present everywhere, a holistic metaphor for the interconnectedness of all of life. A hologram is a

three-dimensional light image projected with laser light. A three-dimensional light image is fascinating in itself, but the real magic of holography is found in the negative from which the image is projected.

A holographic negative taken of, say, an apple, looks nothing like a regular photographic image. A photographic negative will still display the shape of the apple, though in negative colors. A holographic negative, by contrast, looks like a splatter of splotches.

If you cut a photographic negative in half, then develop it, you will get a picture of half the apple, just as you might expect. But if you cut a holographic negative in half, then project it, you will still have the image of the entire apple. Cut it in half again, and the result will be the same . . . the only thing lost in the process of reducing the size of the negative is definition . . . the smaller the piece, the fuzzier the projection, but the entire image is present in every part of the negative.

In the same way, Life is now being viewed by many as a hologram of itself, the so-called holistic view of life; all information is contained everywhere. Though it defies logic, this is the view emerging from such diverse places as mysticism and quantum mechanics.

There was a time when it was against the logic of everyday observation to proclaim that the world was round, or that it revolved around the sun. This is what got Galileo in hot water with the Church, which didn't appreciate his refutation of church doctrine that said the earth was the center of everything. Likewise, there was a time (we're living in its last dying gasp) when people were certain that the world was made up of a bunch of things whose intimate interconnections didn't exist, or were merely incidental.

We are now entering a time when this interconnectedness of everything will be seen as a natural phenomenon . . . just the way it is. People have never been separate, from each other or from the world around them. Knowing this greatly aids in the formation of perceptions which are more in line with the way things really are. And curiously, this expanded perception of life has the facility of bringing our center of reality from the head down to the heart, where it probably should have been all along.

Logic is of the head. Logic seeks to reduce the infinity of life to symbols which are finite, and which can therefore be manipulated more easily, which is why the logic of sentence structure seems to make sense in linguistic terms but is highly misleading about what's really the case. Could not the same be said for some of the other rational perceptions, arrived at through logic, that we hold about life?

When you reflect that it's the human mind that has invented space, time, and matter, picking them out of reality in a quite arbitrary fashion--can you attempt to explain a thing in terms of something it has invented itself?

--Aldous Huxley

What is a human being? Despite the fact that we spend our lives amongst them, nobody really knows what a human being is in terms of knowledge. Are we really divided from the rest of the world by the boundary called our skin? Before you say, "Yeah, I know what a human is," think about this:

We all know what is referred to by the label of, say, a bee. A bee is a winged insect that lives in hives and makes honey, right? Partially right. For a bee to be, and for a bee to be a bee, there must also be flowers, and for there to be flowers, there must be bees. Flowers are as vitally dependent on bees as bees are on flowers. It is perhaps more accurate to consider a bee as the flying part of a flower, and a flower the rooted part of a bee, because neither could exist without the other, just as you could not be you without the food, air, water, and all the rest which helps us humans exist.

Can we separate a bee or a flower out from its environment and presume that it is fundamentally separate? Can a bee or a flower exist without soil, and water, and light? Can they exist without the sun? If you say yes, let me remind you that all of the energy available to us on earth ultimately depends on the heat, light, and everything else we receive from the sun. And we have no idea of the things on which the sun may in some way depend.

Similarly, we can't really describe a human being without also describing the environment in which that human is being. Someone once said that you can't really know anything about anything unless you know everything about everything. That's our predicament.

Is a zebra a black animal with white stripes, or a white animal with black stripes? Neither one . . . it's an invisible animal with black and white stripes so you can see it.

--Jerry Colonna

There is a lesson in this little joke. Was Jerry Colonna into Zen? This is a Zen story if there ever was one because it reflects one of the critical facts of our existence. Nothing is like our senses tell us it is, because with our eyes or ears, or fingers, or all of them together, we can see only a fraction of what is there, and it's never a conclusive fraction. Life is invisible, but has black and white stripes so we can see it.

With our senses and rational logic, we can see only a tiny fraction of reality. This we have forgotten, and instead we believe that the sum total of reality is that which can be filtered through our paltry senses and intellects, then summarized through the awkward tools of language. But Life is neither this nor that; it is an invisible truth with temporal and spatial manifestations so we can see it.

We have convincingly broken the world up into pieces, so we feel perfectly justified in presuming that it is made of pieces. Thankfully, and hopefully in time, the lessons of holography are getting an assist from the science of ecology, showing up in no uncertain terms that over-simplified ways of thinking are not only untrue, but ultimately destructive of the intricate web of life on which the whole system of life on earth is dependent . . . you can't cut down a rain forest without drastically altering the biodiversity, the landscape, even the weather. You can't kill a person without changing the whole world. You can't even have a thought without changing the whole world.

Everything is connected to everything else in ways which are hopelessly beyond our ability to comprehend, let alone control. Fortunately, figuring out life to the last detail isn't necessary; in fact, the urge to do so is simply a postponement of the day when we must drop our intellectualizing armor and make ourselves vulnerable to Life, like we ought to be.

It is only with the heart that one can see rightly that what is essential is invisible to the eye.

--Antoine Saint-Exupery

"We are all connected." We've all heard that before; it has become a new age platitude. But do you really know it? Is it a reality for you, or just a handy bromide that feels comfortable to your ear? I wondered about this matter myself . . . what evidence could I find that I am really connected to everything else? How could I justify this move from the head to the heart? Without straining my brain much, I came up with two pretty convincing examples of how we are connected.

First, there is the so-called law of gravity (so-called because laws are human inventions, attempts to understand in logic and mathematics something which exist independent of both logic and mathematics . . . gravity is whatever it is, with or without explanation). Scientists don't really understand the nature of gravity, what it actually is or how it communicates itself between two masses; all they know for sure is that something they call by the name of gravity seems to be a universal phenomenon, measurable and calculable. Every particle of matter in the universe (so far as we can tell, never having seen even one of them directly) is apparently attracted to every other particle of matter. Even light, which is supposed to be the hasty, flighty flip-side of matter, is bent by gravitation.

We remain on the surface of the Earth and are not flung out into space because of the gravitational attraction between our bodies and the Earth. We have tides on Earth because of the gravitational pull on the seas from the sun and the moon. The Earth itself is kept in its orbit around the sun by gravitation; the sun is kept in place in the Milky Way galaxy by gravitation; the Milky Way itself is held in shape by the mutual gravitation of the billions of stars composing it.

Did you know that when you wiggle your little finger, you are actually wiggling the sun, the moon, the Pleiades, and the nose of the person in the next room? It is not a measurable wiggle, to be sure, but it is just as certainly a wiggle as the tides are to the oceans. For me, the fact of gravitation became like one of Plato's shadows on the cave wall, not necessarily true or accurate in

itself, but indicative of something even more true. Whatever gravitation is, it ties everything in the universe to everything else, and the slightest movement by any particle anywhere affects however slightly every other particle in the universe.

The second example I thought of is that of electrical fields. I am something of a thunderstorm fan, and when there is one going on in the neighborhood, I have found that I can listen to the lightning on the radio. By tuning the AM dial to a point between stations, I can hear the electrical discharge of the lightning over the radio.

I can hear it on the radio because the radio's circuits are designed to receive and amplify electrical activity in a certain frequency band, and lightning covers many such bands. If there is an electromagnetic wave that the radio can pick up, then that same wave is also passing through my body.

So what? Well, our bodies are made of cells, right? All cells are made of molecules which connect to each other by means of electrical attraction (in addition to some other more complex mechanisms which only further prove the point). The molecules themselves are held together by the electrical affinities which exist between certain atoms. The quantitative and qualitative interactions of molecules and atoms is also called chemistry, which itself is ultimately electrical in substance. Molecules can be thought of as being assemblies of atoms. And atoms themselves can be thought of as being composed of various numbers of subatomic particles--protons, neutrons, electrons, and so on. Protons, electrons, and several other types of subatomic particles carry electrical charges, and are therefore alterable, if only temporarily, by the imposition of an electrical field.

In other words, your body's cells, molecules, and atoms are all affected every time someone turns on a light, or lightning strikes. In fact, every atom and molecule in your body is affected however subtly by every other atom and molecule in the universe, because all atoms and molecules undergo continuous changes which emit electromagnetic signals.

Since we are all connected, we only need to learn how to listen, to become aware of the world around us and what it might be trying to communicate with us. Like our radios, our very bodies are picking up the world around us. By learning to listen to our bodies, we can sense the mood and flow of events around us. Really!

When you listen to your hunches, you are making use of a sense which science has traditionally ignored, but which is just as real as sight for a bat or touch for a snake. When you allow your awareness of the world around you to move out of the well-worn ruts of conventionality, you are making yourself vulnerable to new and more meaningful perceptions.

Life is infinite, and it communicates in an infinite variety of ways. We are mistaken in presuming that life, or God, only speaks Elizabethan English, or Latin, because every morsel of creation is

nothing but a variation on that one eternal theme, an alternative voice of God. In truth we are already connected to everything . . . all we have to do is get our egos out of the way and let the awareness flow, let our border fences collapse from disuse, allow the light of awareness of the eternal moment called Now to flood where it will within us.

This is the goal of all the world's enlightened teachings: not so much to communicate the experience of oneness, because no teaching can do that, but to create and nurture the conditions in which individual people can have the opportunity to rediscover that experience within their own being. This experience is not a matter of knowledge; it is a knowing.

There is a significant difference between knowledge and knowing. Knowledge is of the head, it is borrowed, it is a systematized and ordered collection of facts and definitions which someone else has discovered, it is a symbolic translation, a logical deduction. It can be bought and sold, it is a commodity.

Logic is an organized way of going wrong with confidence.

--Robert Heinlein

Knowing, on the other hand, comes from within, it is the fruit of one's experience in life, it comes from the heart. Knowing is how a golfer hits a golf ball . . . there are no facts, no separate parts of the act, no step-by-discrete-step process. It is an inner knowing, a procession of smooth motions arising from and resolving themselves into each other, it is a feel which is based on inner knowing, not outer knowledge or technique.

We all know how to grow hair, but none of us can convert that largely unconscious knowing into knowledge, into facts and tables; and none of us can take knowledge and grow hair with it. To know from within is the only way that the complexities of life can be comprehended, but it is not a matter of knowledge . . . it is a matter of knowing. It becomes a very hairy problem only when you try to figure it out with your brain.

If you would live a peaceful and fulfilling life, you have to find out what is. Useful, practical information will still occupy your cranial intellectual skills, but listening with your whole being will fill in the vast blanks much more adequately than logic. Listen to your body, because it is likely that each of us has his or her own special extra-sensory perceptive capability, not as a novelty or party gimmick, but as an essential tool to help us learn the things we came here to learn, to create the things that nobody else can create.

Still, there is mystery in our lives, but when we find out who we are, those infinite mysteries are no longer intimidating, they become enthralling and captivating, a wondrous kaleidoscope of Life's limitless novelty and variation. We begin to celebrate for no particular reason, for when we are happy, life is happy.

All things are filled full of signs, and it is a wise man who can learn about one thing from another.
--Plotinus

Chapter 26 -- The Koan Everyone Knows

Buddha lived about 2500 years ago in India. His teaching was carried through the Himalayas into China by a man named Bodhidharma. When it reached China, this early and therefore relatively pure expression of Buddhism found fertile ground in the Taoist tradition already well established there, and flowered into what was then known as Chi'en. When it reached Japan, it became known as Zen.

Simply stated, Zen holds that getting a real understanding of life is a non-verbal thing, that words are totally inadequate to convey the immediate essence of life. So the emphasis in Zen is on direct experience without depending on translation into words and concepts. While there certainly exists something called a Zen teaching (many of them, in fact, not unlike what one finds in religious sectism), the real spirit of Zen is incommunicable through words, as might also be said of the true essence of Buddhism, Christianity, and all other cultural metaphors.

As tools to convey this non-verbal understanding of life, the Zen masters developed what are called koans, which are like thought problems designed to bring the seeker out from behind the veils of intellect and logic into the full light of immediate, and unmediated, truth.

The koan most familiar in the west is "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" This is a riddle presented by the master to the disciple, and it is the disciple's job to solve it, to present to the master his understanding of the solution. To solve this riddle, the disciple must pursue every rational solution he can find. He may try to imitate what he hopes is something like the sound of one hand clapping, he may compose a poem to express it, he will try all the possibilities he can imagine, but the master will reject every one of them.

The intent of the koan is that the disciple, in accepting the presumption that the koan has a correct solution, will try and try to rationally solve it. He will fret over it, he will lose sleep, he will stretch his intellect to the very limits of its capability. He will not find a rational, logical solution, because none exists; but this is what he has to discover for himself. Finally the day comes when, in exasperation, he gives up, and in that giving up, when the last attempt possible has been made, something mysterious can happen.

Each of us is like a person sitting in a room called out intellect. There are curtains hanging over the windows and blocking the light, curtains which represent our learning, our systems of thought, our common sense, our world views. On these curtains we hang like honorary plaques and charts and graphs our knowledge about ourselves and about the world. Under normal circumstances, when we are asked a question or presented with a problem to solve, we can respond by regurgitating the information stored in and on our curtains.

But in this case, the master or guru is asking for a solution which doesn't exist in the form of a fact or a logical deduction; he is asking us to demonstrate the experience of light. He is asking not for knowledge, but for knowing. So we thrash through our storage banks of knowledge, looking up definitions or similes or metaphors, but every solution we offer is refused; every description, every formula, every poetic reference is rejected because it is knowledge, it is not knowing. Eventually we give up and fling the curtains out of the way in consternation. When the curtains are flung aside, real light comes in, and if we are paying attention, we have what is called and "Ah-hah" experience, wherein suddenly we understand something we didn't understand before.

This "Ah-hah" is what the master is looking for, it is the birth of knowing. One can discover the sound of one hand clapping only through the experience of silence, when the figuring, calculating part of us is demoted from the captain's chair, and our minds are thrown into neutral. This silence is like the blackboard upon which is written what we call light, sound, touch, smell, and taste, whether they be internal or external. We call it silence because this word comes closest to indicating the transcendent experience which awaits at the end of seeking; it is not nothing, but is as far beyond the concept of silence as is the rest of reality.

When the "Ah-hah" happens, when the light streams into the disciple's awareness and he experiences for perhaps the first time what light is, what silence is, it changes the quality of his being to such an extent that a true master will readily note the change.

Now, when the master asks "What is the sound of one hand clapping?", the disciple might respond by saying something apparently unconnected and frivolous, like "Three kites are caught in that tree over there," or, "Your fly is open." Oddly, it doesn't really matter what the factual content of the answer is, because it isn't the intellectual content that matters . . . it is the change of state of the disciple's being.

Well, we have a koan in our culture too, and you have probably known it since you were a little child, except that you don't know it as a koan, but as a nursery rhyme. Still, it is a koan if you approach it in the right way.

Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the king's horses and all the king's men Couldn't put Humpty together again.

One assumes that Humpty Dumpty began life as a good egg, but an egg regardless. An egg is symbolic not only of the magical beginnings we all experienced (how did something alive get inside that unbroken egg shell?), but is also symbolic of the state of our situation when we arrived. For a little child, the world is unbroken, there are no seams between "this" and "that", just as the egg shell has no seams in it. It is integrated, all of a piece. This is how we experienced the world before we learned how to break it into pieces. The power and purity arising from this

unbroken state is what makes babies so attractive and captivating . . . we sense something in them which we have lost.

But Humpty had a great fall. Some say he jumped, others that he was pushed. Either way, he fell from that pristine, elevated, unified state of being down to the ground, where his unity and integrity were instantly shattered into a million pieces. Literally and figuratively, he got kicked out of the garden.

And this is our present state. We have all learned to view the world and ourselves as though it is all composed of pieces. There are good guys and bad guys, right and wrong, before and after, causes and effects, rich and poor, healthy and ill, there are do's and don'ts, shoulds and shouldn't's, there are bodies and minds and spirits, there are gods and devils, sins and blessings . . . the list is endless.

And now that we are a pile of pieces, the challenge we face is to regain that original happiness, to put the pieces back together again in such a way as to be both socially acceptable and personally satisfying. This is the goal of psychiatry and psychology . . . to put us back together again, which is rather incredible when you consider that most psychiatrists and psychologists are in just as many pieces as we are, although they may be better at hiding the cracks in their lives.

Gluing the pieces back together again, even with the best glue, still leaves seams; there will still be cracks which won't hold water, and the job won't ring true, like a piece of crystal which has been broken and then glued back together. But all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again. All the king's horses and men means all of the best skills, powers, and advice available . . . the absolute best that can be offered by any state-of-the-art counselor, clergyman, scientist, guru, angel, or anybody.

The koan is, how do you put yourself back together again if even the most advanced science, technology, psychiatry, religion, philosophy, or raw luck are insufficient? How can you recapture the same innocent, unified, elevated consciousness you had when you were first born, before you fell off the wall? Because it is only with that integrated consciousness that happiness and meaning will become once again natural and automatic. Like Jesus said, "unless you can become again as you were when you were a little child, you're not going to understand what I am talking about." Show me the churchperson, or businessperson, or politician, or analyst, who is like a little child.

He who possesses virtue in abundance may be compared to an infant.

--Lao Tzu

We certainly can't grow down again, we can't reverse time and become physical or emotional children again. In fact, we call the attempt to do so by the name of senility, when old people "lose it" and revert to earlier, more pleasant times.

Neither is it a matter of putting on the right face, the right act, a countenance of moral rectitude, because happiness cannot be faked. Certainly you may be more or less successful at convincing others that you are happy, but when you are alone late at night with your thoughts, there is no place to hide.

You know it when you are not happy. How can you arrange genuine happiness without it being just a facade you have learned how to put on? How can an ego reshape itself in such a way that the result will not be just another clever deception? How can you regain the innocent purity of a child? How can you put Humpty Dumpty together again?

Ironically, this is where society has left the matter . . . "Oh, well, poor Humpty, but that's life." What makes it a koan is that it relates to the mystery of self-realization, of seeing behind the veils of illusion.

Well, I could make you read a few more chapters before I solved this koan for you; you might not sleep for weeks. But I won't, And in truth, it isn't up to me to give you the answer. I can tell you the words, but it will be totally up to you to understand what they mean.

Like all koans, this one is a little tricky. It poses a question which seems to call for a rational answer, like the sound of one hand clapping, and within the conditions already stated, there seems no way to put Humpty back together again, since once there is a crack, there will always be a crack no matter how good the glue.

The trick, of course, is that Humpty never really fell off the wall in the first place, because in truth, the real world, including us, is not broken up into pieces; it only seems that way because of how we have learned to look at it. We have chopped it up into pieces with our intellect, into words, parts, processes, phases, atoms and molecules, species and minerals, bodies and egos and souls and gods and devils . . . and having chopped it up in our thinking, we are incapable of seeing it as the unified, unbroken whole that it really is. Life becomes a continual mincing of words, and words inevitably lead to a mincing of life.

When it begins to dawn on your awareness that everything is already part of, actually one with, everything else, that every point in space is the center of the universe, that the whole of existence exists in your behalf and with your best interests in mind, then Life blossoms into the wondrous celebration it was always intended to be. Imagine Brahma's capacity for celebration, if you can, which you can't, and neither can I. Every time someone rediscovers the truth about his being, it is only Brahma once again recognizing himself in everything. Imagine Humpty's delight at waking up from his dream of disaster to find himself once again on the wall. No wonder he is smiling.

And when one of us rediscovers who we really are, then it is actually the whole cosmos which celebrates. It is the prodigal son returning to his rightful place, not as an overlord to the rest of creation, but as an active participant guided by the recognition that there really is no other, that

all the forms of life and non-life are but individual fingers, apparently separate until we spy the hand that they are all part of.

We're no different from the plants, we're no better. We're all part of the whole, and everything--a grain of sand, dirt, the birds and the animals--they are all part of us.

--Rolling Thunder

Chapter 27 -- The Search for Happiness

Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.

--Abraham Lincoln

We all want to be happy. We all want to recreate the state we existed in when we first arrived here, we all remember the feel of it, even though we may not be able to recall the details. Having been kicked out of the garden, we spend the rest of our lives trying to get back in, and having been talked out of our true purposes in life, we have little alternative but to try our best to recreate that happiness from the paltry tools available through religion, or power, or worldly possessions.

But happiness is not a commodity, it is not a noun. Neither is real happiness a state of mind, because happiness is, eternally, while the mind can deal only with things temporal. The words "happy" and "happen" both come from the same root, and for a good reason: happiness happens when we have gotten out from behind the yearnings and frustrations of the mind, which keeps it hidden from us.

Happiness is not conditional on circumstance, because happiness eternally is, while circumstances come and go. When you base your happiness on the right job, or the right mate, or having lots of money, then you are as much as saying that your happiness depends on things you once didn't have and which you one day will again not have. That may be called pleasure, but it is not happiness. Nothing that can be taken away from you is yours, including your possessions, your reputation, your body, even your mind. None of these is the source of true happiness.

The times when we were happy were the times we never tried.

--Jackson Browne

Happiness is not caused, it is not do-able. That which is caused will disappear; that which is uncaused is eternal. And like love, truth, and wisdom, happiness is our natural state of being; it only seems special because we have hidden ourselves from it behind the masks of our egos, our feelings of separateness, and all the modern nonsense created to support these illusions. The ego will never be the source of happiness, because the ego is temporary, and that which is temporary can never lead to that which is eternal.

Most of us live in our heads; we try to figure everything out. We feel secure in the realm of logic, but we feel threatened in the world of feeling. Our egos are fragile, they feel threatened at the slightest provocation, because the ego doesn't like to admit that it is not in control, that there might be something bigger than it. We will feel threatened to the degree that we have identified with our egos, and we will be unable to find the only happiness which really matters.

Most of us are driven by our fears. We have learned that we are small and helpless, and that unless we protect ourselves, we will not prosper. We can, to some extent, control the logical sides of our thinking on the basis of the beliefs we select, but the emotional side, thanks to the psychoanalytical theories which have been developed since Freud, still feels risky, almost as though the ego recognizes that it is in over its head.

In truth, and from the strictly human perspective, Life is a risk, and nothing worthwhile is ever experienced without that risk. Being born is a risk, living is a risk. If you have learned to fear that risk, then you will build around yourself protective mechanisms which you believe will insulate you from those risks. They may prove effective in insulating you from some of the conditions of life that you find distasteful, but in the long run they will succeed only in insulating you from all that is good.

Life is not separate from us, and It wants us to be happy, so it sends us subtle messages to let us know which way to go next. When we are vulnerable, when we are not locked into our habitual mind-sets and are unjudgmentally open to what the world has to show us, it takes only a nod from life to show us the next step, or a raised eyebrow, like the sort which Mr. Spock silently launches at Cpt. Kirk when he's about to do something dumb.

If the raised eyebrow doesn't get through to us, the Life will tap us on the shoulder to get our attention. If that isn't enough, Life will give us a gentle shove. Most people, however, have grown so insensitive to Life's loving cues that it usually takes a whack upside the head with a 2X4 to get their attention. Of course, by that time they are nearly comatose to Life, so for most people, their days are filled with one crisis after another. No wonder there are bumper stickers which morosely announce, "Life is a bummer, and then you die."

Life is not a destination, but a journey; happiness is not to be reached only at the end, because there is no end. Happiness can exist only along the way, in the present moment. The present moment is the only place consciousness can be, now is the only time you can be conscious, the only place where happiness can happen, and since existence and everything in it is none other than consciousness, the present moment is the only place to look for happiness, peace, love, or any of the other things that make life worth living.

In a way (on the Way?) each of us is walking a path which nobody has ever walked before; it is not a well-marked boulevard because nobody before has taken it. But our feet, guided by the heart,

will know the path by feel (everyone has a tender sole unless they've been booted for too long and have become heels).

In the center of the path, there is soft sand or grass . . . comfortable on your bare feet. Walking there is gently and light. On either side of the center there is a border of gravel, sort of a raised eyebrow, not quite so comfortable, but still not too bad. Beyond the gravel there are rocks, then boulders, and if you are really off your path, there are ditches, ravines, wild animals, and all sorts of nasty indications that this is not where you belong: 2X4's upside the head. When you are not happy, it is a pretty good indication that you have strayed from your path.

These paths are not straight, either (the strait and narrow does not mean straight). They curve and twist, taking us now in one direction, now in another. And they can be found on no map, because maps are static, and life is alive . . . the path comes into existence as our feet come down on it, so nobody can tell you where it is.

But society and its established experts, on the presumption that they know what is best for us, have usurped our rights to self-determination. Society will say, "You are young and/or ignorant of the facts we know; we are experts. If you really want to get somewhere in life, then you'd better listen to us . . . over there is where you ought to try to get."

What makes men happy is liking what they have to do. This is a principle on which society was not founded.

--Clad Adrian

Helvetius

It may be painful, it may not feel right inside at first, but eventually we are lured away from our own path. Away from the center there's gravel and rocks, and when our feet begin to hurt, we will be told that it's okay because we are only paying our dues. If we can afford it, society will provide us with boots to protect our feet. Fine, because now we can walk on the gravel and not feel the sharp rocks.

But eventually we will also have to buy leg protectors to keep from snagging our skin on the boulders and cacti, we need shoulder pads and helmets, chest protectors, gas masks, protective goggles, crucifixes, crystals, medicine bags, pills, inoculations, and no end of other self-defense accessories. After all, life is dangerous, and you'd better be well-protected. (Fear is the largest public works project every launched in the history of the race; it might also be the only one).

There are two problems with this regimen, however. The first is that society's path is not our path, and though we never find our happiness in the things we encounter along society's well-worn path, we are kept moving by the endless promises that "it's just up around the next bend". As long as we believe it, the hoods wink at each other as they punch our mortal tickets.

The other problem is that in the process of putting on all of this defensive, protective gear, we have insulated ourselves from the messages that life is always trying to send us. When we are weighted down with all of this protection, we get heavy, grave, serious, by which time we have lost the ability to dance and enjoy the subtleties of life: the best things, which are free. Life can no longer reach us without clubbing us over the head, and even then, we are protected, or so we have been led to believe.

We're so engaged in doing things to achieve purposes of outer value that we forget that the inner value, the rapture that is associated with being alive, is what it is all about.

--Joseph Campbell

Life is not suffering; it's just that you will suffer it, rather than enjoy it, until you let go of your mind's attachments and just go for the ride freely, no matter what happens.

--Anon.

What are these attachments? They are our protective gear, our defense mechanisms, the accessories which we have been wearing for so long that we think that's who we are . . . our attitudes, opinions, beliefs, biases, our images of who we think we are and where we think we're going, and our fears about everything that we perceive to be standing in our way. Society's defensive gear doesn't help us live our lives or find our paths; it is there to protect us when we wander from our paths, which we certainly will if we follow society.

Of course, when asked to give up these attachments, we very soon learn that to do so, we must also give up who we thought we were, and most of us are not casually willing to do so voluntarily. That's why throughout history there have been very few who have taken those last few steps . . . it's terrifying to the ego, so most of us put it off indefinitely until there's no more time to work on it and we are about to leave these bodies behind. This is what Jesus meant when he said that those who would save, or protect what they thought was their reality (their egos) will eventually lose them, but those who recognized that there was a Self far beneath and beyond their egos, and those who at least temporarily abandoned their egos, only they would find eternal being. It has nothing to do with a place called Heaven or nurturing a belief in the right dogma; it has to do with waking up and learning that we are already in heaven.

But in the light of our attachments to our egos and their contents, this advice to "go for the ride freely" appears to be a foolhardy risk. Life itself is a risk; it is a risk which we all agreed to take when we got ourselves born. But what is at risk?

It is preoccupation with possession, more than anything else, that prevents men from living freely and nobly.

--Bertrand Russell

Convinced as we are that more things will help us be happier, most of us spend our lives accumulating things. And not just physical things, but also emotional and psychological baggage.

Once while I was in the process of unburdening myself of several years worth of accumulated stuff via that wonderfully common and simple institution known as the yard sale, I experienced a flash of intuition, one of those out-of-the-blue glimpses of something unexpected but informative, sort of a mini-Ah-hah (Hiya, Watha!). I saw myself, and everyone else, going through life wearing overalls with enormous pockets all over. Crammed into the pockets were all of our worldly possessions, the things without which we might feel unequipped to deal with life.

Happiness is the only sanction of life; where happiness fails, existence remains a mad and lamentable experiment.

--George Santayana

The immediate sensation was one of oddly comical futility, people like me trudging through life dragging all this expensive junk along with me, unable to dance and be light, and each time someone came and took away some of my junk, I felt my own situation becoming lighter and more unburdened. It was delightful.

Attachment is the great fabricator of illusions; reality can be attained only by someone who is detached.

--Simone Weil

It is said that we are possessed by our possessions, and this is true. That's not to say that things per se are bad; we all need food, shelter, and other material things to exist here. Rather, it is our attachment to them, our identification with them, which results in our being possessed by our possessions. And not just old couches and chairs, but also all of the emotional baggage that we have attached ourselves to . . . feelings of unworthiness, fear, guilt, anger, victimhood, pride, jealousy, pity and envy, and many more which are components of our egos, of who we think we are. Unhappiness is the evidence that we are being fettered by our attachments.

And yet unhappiness is not something to be avoided, either. Its purpose is not to punish us, because there is no one to punish, but to alert us to the fact that we're missing something important, that we are somehow out of focus. Unhappiness is life's way of hinting to us that we haven't understood who we are, that we have fallen for a masquerade, that the maya, the illusion of separateness, still has us fooled.

Man's unhappiness, as I construe, comes of his greatness; it is because there is an Infinite in him, which with all his cunning he cannot quite bury under the finite.

--Thomas Carlyle

Who you really are is infinite, even though you appear to yourself to be a fragile personality cloistered in a fragile, finite flesh-and-blood body. Unhappiness is like trying to wear the same shoes you wore before you learned how to walk . . . you will continue to groan until you realize that it is your feet which have grown, your understanding has expanded.

We are like radios, capable of picking up many stations on innumerable bands of broadcast spectra, but our tuners sit stuck between stations on just one of those broadcast bands. We have never been told that we can retune our frequencies, because all those around us are similarly stuck. Experimenting with alternatives of personal consciousness is often viewed in modern polite society as highly questionable, if not downright illegal, and certainly not something that can officially be suggested. All that comes out of us now is static, but something deep inside tells us there's more to life than just static. The radio does not contain within its tiny box all the broadcast stations it can pick up, but we believe that what's in that little box called us is all we are.

All the great people throughout history have tried to tell us that if we would only fiddle with our knobs once in a while, we might be astounded at the things we are capable of picking up. Societies throughout history, on the other hand, worshipping as they do the lowest common denominators, have done everything in their power to prevent this kind of experimentation, calling it everything from unhealthy to satanic. Unhappiness is the result of hearing nothing but static, knowing there is more there, but being afraid to retune ourselves for fear of offending someone, or getting in trouble.

Just trust yourself, and then you will know how to live.

--Johann von Goethe

The self Goethe refers to here is not, of course, You #2, the tiny little ego with all its fears and conditioning. Self, the Self of the universe, You #1, is who we really are-- Brahma playing hide and seek and totally befuddled by his self-imposed pretense is still Brahma. The infinite is not finite, not prevented from being anywhere, including the very center of every atom and molecule of your being.

This is the mind-blowing realization that awaits you. It is always there, it is eternal. And of course, when you realize it for yourself, you immediately realize that it holds equally well for everyone else.

If you want to be happy, be.

--Alexi Konstantinovich Tolstoi

Happiness is not a doing--it is a being. This being-ness is so simple that it doesn't seem to give our egos anything to chew on, which is why most of us try to bring about happiness by doing. You can't really do effectively until you've learned what it means to be effectively.

The irony, though, is that when you discover that being is everything, then doing is no longer something you have to think about. Then, even the most mundane activities of life continue to take place around you, yet it is no longer You #2 who is doing them. This is the sense of the Zen saying,

Miraculous power and marvelous activity, Chopping wood and carrying water.

--Ch'uan Teng Lu

When you have fallen back into tune with who you really are, things just seem to happen around you. That's happiness, or happen-ness. When you are no longer doing You #2 and are just being You #1, then you are naturally attuned to the whole cosmos, and you understand that the whole cosmos is forever and always on your side because now you are on its side. In this space, you don't feel so much that it is you doing things; your concept of you has been enlarged to include everything and everyone around you.

You don't have to think about what needs to be done, it is just there, and you just watch the doing of it happen. You are not doing things at the direction of your ego, but at the direction of life itself, which is who you really are.

Thinking about these things gives rise to the concept of a lower and a higher self. The lower self is the ego, the higher is the Self. Since we spend almost all our time in the lower self, this is our perspective on life. And since that lower self is out of tune with Life, we have a rough time, so our lower selves look for ways of improving themselves while also preserving themselves.

But this creates one of those annoying bootstrap problems. When you decide to try to improve yourself, an immediate fractionation of your being takes place. Suddenly there is the you that needs to be improved, there is a different you who is going to do the improvement, a you which will oversee the operation, a you which is the goal, and the cacophony from the voices of all the other personalities you have met, offering advice and criticism. Suddenly there is a crowd in our heads . . .and who's doing whom?

How to get rid of the lower self? The blossom vanishes of itself as the fruit grows, so will your lower self vanish as the divine grows in you.

--Ramakrishna

Happiness is not a matter of becoming something that you are not; it is a matter of becoming once again conscious of what you already are.

Unite yourself to the cosmos, and the thought of transcendence will disappear. Transcendence belongs to the profane world; when all trace of transcendence vanishes, the true person, the Divine Being, is manifest. Empty yourself, and let the Divine function.

--Morihei Ushita

Happiness is not the result of any doing, be it a pilgrimage, a religion ,or any discipline. Happiness is already the case, like the sun shining on the world, but we have cooped ourselves up in the tiny closets of our intellects where happiness can only appear to be the culmination of great intellectual or moral strides and sacrifices.

Happiness, like light, is not a matter of theories or beliefs . . .it already exists. Our only task is to allow it into our awareness, to draw aside the curtains of belief and ignorance and let it shine in. You can't pull or push the light . . . you don't have to because its nature is to penetrate everywhere it is not prevented.

Indeed we are running away all the time to avoid coming face to face with our real selves, and we barter the truth for trifles.

--Reginald French

The whole of western thinking wants you to be on the move, to always be dissatisfied, to always be seeking to improve yourself, always striving for a future which never arrives. This is because the whole of western thinking is against life; it is stuck in ideals. Ideals are held up to us to convince us that as we are, we are not good enough.

Future freedom has no reality; it is only an idea. Reality is what is.
--J. Krishnamurti

Ideals are always of the future, and are never fulfilled. Look back into history, and of all the ideal-driven social movements, you will not find one which has succeeded. Society, the ministers and politicians, the idealists, they don't want you to become free, because if you should become free, you won't any longer pay attention to them, and the power they seek as a replacement for not being happy themselves will fade. Until we get even the slightest glimpse that we are already much more than any ideal can encompass, until we even begin to suspect that there is more to us than we can comprehend, then we will continue to chase rainbows, seeking the gold at the end and never quite catching up to it. There is, in fact, gold at the end, but it's not out there somewhere.

Rainbows are intriguing phenomena. Three conditions must be met for there to be a rainbow: there must be a light source such as the sun, there must be water droplets in the air, and there must be an observer. If any one of these is missing, there will be no rainbow. Additionally, no two people ever see exactly the same rainbow, for no two people can ever stand in exactly the same place at the same time, so each will see a rainbow composed of slightly different droplets.

Anyway, did you know that a rainbow isn't a rain-bow at all? It may look like a bow, an arc out there in the distance, but that's because we rarely stand in the rain to see one. If we did, then we might see that the droplets refracting the sunlight into those brilliant colors are close by as well as

far away. A rainbow isn't a bow at all, but a cone. We are seeing it from the exact apex of the cone, looking along the sides edgewise, and since all the droplets refracting color tend to blend in with each other, the sides of the cone look from our perspective like a bow. Nobody will ever get a side-view of a rainbow, because there is no such thing.

While there may be two ends of a true bow, there is only one end of a cone, and that is at the apex, where you are standing while seeing it, at a point directly between and behind your eyes. Therefore, the gold at the end of the rainbow is precisely where you are.

Perhaps rainbows enthrall us because we perceive them from the focal point of a pyramid-shaped phenomenon and are receiving more than just the visual kicks. Whatever, you are already the gold; there is no need to go chasing after what you already have, unless you have been talked out of it, in which case you will never find it if you confine your search to the exterior world.

Chapter 28 -- Dealing With Adversity

In the natural rhythm of life, in the natural world, which few of us have ever experienced for very long as adults, there is no such thing as adversity. Adversity is rather a judgment based on a state of mind, a relative perception, and is the result of being mistaken about the directions of Life, the result of trying to force change into a direction it is not inclined to move. When you have a goal, when you are trying to accomplish something, and the world steps in and blocks your progress toward that goal, it is called adversity.

The word adversity derives from the Latin word *vertere*, meaning "to turn". A verse is a turning of a phrase, a universe is a singular turning, and a university is a turning over your money over. Adversity, as advertised, carries with it negative emotional overtones, but *ad-*, meaning "to" or "towards", coupled with *vertere*, means a turning towards. Towards what? Advertising tries to turn you toward a product or service. Toward what does adversity turn us?

The best way out is always through.

--Robert Frost

It is perhaps not so surprising that the activities pursuant to the endless modernization of our human lives on Earth have met with adversity at almost every turn. All the wars ever fought have brought us to a world which today is perhaps more at war with itself than ever before (wars begin as shared personal imbalances). All the religions and philosophies ever devised have led to millions of confused people suffering nearly everywhere on the planet; all the social programs ever enacted have resulted in a never-ending and unfulfillable need for even more. Overcoming adversity is publicly praised and encouraged as a sign of strength of will, and yet the victories so gained are short-lived. What might this be trying to tell us?

How we handle these apparent barriers depends primarily on who we think we are and where we think we're going in what we think is life. Most of this book has been a discussion about the nature of Self, contrasting who we really are with who we have been led to believe we are. Working on a false premise will always result in adversity, since the real world doesn't really give a hoot about our illusions. Any yet it is just possible that the nature of adversity can have the effect of turning us away from the illusion and back again to reality.

When something doesn't work, more of it won't work any better. This is the message which society's managers have ignored for thousands of years in their quests to conquer the world and each other. The general feeling of well-being throughout the world has probably never been lower in all of history than it is today, a condition which is the result of all of man's increasingly powerful efforts to control life.

Governments and religions are guided by beliefs and presumptions which are held sacrosanct. To the degree that these are out of balance with life, the results will be destructive. How much more can the Earth endure?

It is never too late to give up our prejudices.

--Henry David Thoreau

Prejudice means to judge in advance of. All judgments are based on the past, on past events, and yet the past never repeats itself. Everything that happens happens for the very first and last time, so the application of conclusions based on previous events will not be entirely appropriate. Generally, yes, events seem to repeat themselves . . . the pistons go up and down in your car's engine pretty much the same way every time, and yet even there, each stroke shaves a few more molecules from the cylinder walls, the piston rings, and the bearings. The fact that the engine works one day and doesn't some other day indicates that change has taken place, it's not the same engine that you drove out of the showroom.

Where human activities and relationships are concerned, since there are infinitely more variables at work, you never do exactly the same thing twice, you never meet the same people twice. The errors we make in presuming constancy in people and conditions are additive, so the longer a prejudice of any kind is maintained, the greater the ultimate error of that judgment, and the greater the shock to our systems when Life steps in and alleviates the imbalance. The emergence of adversity (the change in a person's attitude toward us, the accumulated errors of an inappropriate course of action, and so on) is merely an indication that we have gotten off the track somewhere.

How do you handle it when things don't go as you would like them to? Most of us have learned how to react, to get mad, to look for someone or something to blame. This is natural, considering how strong our egos have become . . . we feel we have been slighted, that someone intentionally

"did us in", and usually we will entertain thoughts about how we might "get back" at them for intentionally slighting us. Sometimes it really is intentional, but more often it isn't. In either case, how we respond to it is totally up to us.

Recompense injury with justice, and recompense kindness with kindness.

--Confucius

Confucius' advice here is not an appeal to some higher morality--it is simply common sense. When you recall that each of us "gets what we look for," that we manifest who we are and what we spend our energy thinking about, then sending out negative vibes is just plain self-destructive. It is a compounding of the distress already present. Anybody who hurts another person, for whatever reason, is already suffering inside. We may assign clinical labels to the ways in which this inner frustration emerges, but at root it is unhappiness. Will our angry response really accomplish anything but further pain?

Let's say somebody says something which we interpret as a personal slap. There are two possibilities: Either it was intentionally cruel, or it wasn't. In the first case, we have an unhappy person who is lashing out in their frustration, doing so in the only way they can think of. By reciprocating with the same low standards, we gain nothing except a compounding of the misery, frustration, and anger already present. In other words, we lose.

The price of hating other human beings is loving oneself less.

--Eldridge Cleaver

Hatred is always a bad bargain to strike, just for the short-lived pleasure of trying to make someone else as miserable as we think they have tried to make us. Besides, if the action or comment was actually unintentional, then we have misinterpreted the situation. Our problem then is that our egos don't want to let it go at that. The ego can always find a way of justifying itself. When we fly off the handle, we are being shown an area in our own thinking that needs some attention.

The heart that you break, that's the one that you rely on/
The bed that you make, that's the one you gotta lie on/
When you point your finger 'cause your plans fell through/
You've got three more fingers pointing back at you.

--Mark Knopfler

What does it mean when we let the actions of other people get under our skins? Essentially, it means that we depend to some considerable extent for our happiness on the actions and approval of other people. That's dumb, because by these rules, we won't be happy unless everyone else strives to bring that happiness into our lives, and people are too wrapped up in their own egos to satisfy our dreams, even if they could be aware of them.

You can live like an arrow, or you can live like a target.

--Anon.

Your happiness is already the case; it is unconditional. If it were conditional, then it wouldn't be real and lasting happiness, because it would depend on everything being static, always the same, and things are never always the same.

But further, adversity has the ability to lead us in the direction of re-examining our own thinking, the contents of the screen through which we sift our worldly experiences to make sense of them. Adversity is an absolutely neutral agent in our lives; when we rush to label it as negative and then fret about how we are going to rid ourselves of it, we are missing the true intent of its emergence.

If we could view adversity as neutral, like a road sign which doesn't try to tell us where to go but informs us of our choices, then we might see that, yes, maybe it is forcing us to make a change of direction in our lives. How we greet adversity has everything to do with what we come through it with. Experience is not what happens to a man. It is what a man does with what happens to him.

--Aldous Huxley

How we greet adversity is a function of the moods and attitudes which we carry around in life with us. It is perhaps a truism, but you get what you look for, even though there may have been much more there that you miss. Often it happens that events in our lives which began as disasters soon prove themselves to be lucky breaks in disguise. In fact, all breaks are ultimately lucky, because Life wants us to be happy, so everything that happens to us is intended to get us back in rhythm with reality.

In interactions between people and other life forms, the higher their consciousness, the more of an impact our moods will have on them. Scientific studies show that even plants can feel human vibrations; animals are far more sensitive and responsive than all plants and some people. Not just people, but animals, plants, and everything else will respond to the moods we are living in. The world responds to us because it is part of us and we are part of it--not just elements in it, but aspects of it.

When a dog runs at you, whistle for it.

--Henry David Thoreau

How you interact with life, how you believe about life, has everything to do with the way life ultimately treats you. Your beliefs about life, the moods you are in the habit of entertaining, these will elicit treatment in kind from everything around you.

While I was in high school, I had a friend who had a large German shepherd named King or something. This dog knew all the regulars. Several years later, I thought it would be fun to visit my friend, so I did. Opening the gate, I was greeted with enthusiastic barking from the porch. "Hey, King, how's it going?" The dog's tail began to wag only when he had drawn close.

I went to the door and my friend greeted me with a look of disbelief. "How did you get past the dog?"

"Oh, King? We're old buddies . . ." I responded, scratching his ear.

"King died three years ago. That's a guard dog."

Evidently, the dog felt only friendly, non-threatening vibes from me, because while he began by barking rather convincingly, he soon felt that there was nothing to fear.

Fear is an emotion which, like all emotions, radiates from us like a light we can't see with our eyes. But animals and small children, not having lost touch with reality, can readily sense fear in people; some adults can, too, but only the real clear ones, the ones who are still child-like.

One of the many benefits of getting to know yourself is that you will become more and more difficult to deceive. As you learn not to project your ego into the world around you, you will be able to see far more detail in the people and situations you encounter. You are no longer striving to project--you are learning to receive. The best acting in the world is incapable of hiding fear, doubt, mistrust, or cunning from someone who is clear in their own being. Hiding a light, whatever its color, from a blind person is easy, but you can never hide that light from a person who is no longer hide-bound.

Chapter 29 -- Disillusionment

Our personal system of beliefs is the collection of opinions and presumptions we have made, and accepted from others, about how life works, about what is true, and about who we are. In a way, our individual systems of belief are like stained glass windows which surround us on all sides, and through which we view and interpret the world. And because those pretty windows are nice to look at, we usually forget that the real world is far more beautiful, far more alive and changing, in short, far more dynamic and fluid than our static, frozen windows.

The window is our way of living in illusion by creating and perfecting our own mental equivalents of life. The mistake we make is in disregarding reality and relying solely on our ideas about what reality is. What we see in the world around us is usually just our windows, not the world around us.

The windows are colored with all of our presumptions about how life on Earth is, all our value systems, all our various principles and moralities and ethical Gibraltar's. A window is static, but the real world changes constantly. Our fears--about health, crime, the future, disease, famine, salvation, whatever--are simply portions of our windows, in our heads.

The mark of your ignorance is the depth of your belief in injustice and tragedy. What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly.

--Richard Bach

Sometimes reality comes along and tosses a rock through some section of our windows. It could be a turn of events, losing a job, an accident, some contrary or unanticipated behavior from a loved one, anything which we might be able to label as adversity.

When something like this happens, we reflect that we have been disappointed, dis-illusioned. This is precisely correct, because life has come along and tossed a rock through some of our expectations, reality has shattered some of our illusions.

But this adversity, this "turning toward" is also a tremendous opportunity to re-evaluate the relevance of our stained glass windows, to see whether or not the view of the world they are showing us is really helpful or just elegantly distracting. It is an opportunity to turn back toward what is real.

Naturally, when life takes out a section of our window, the familiarly pretty colors and patterns are no longer there in that part of our lives, and instead of our delightful little slide show, we see a hole. But a hole is also an opening, and through that opening Life has a chance to show through unaltered by our illusions and our beliefs.

Life is real, while those pretty pictures are simply pretty pictures. What we see through that hole will probably not resemble the piece of glass that used to be there, which only means that life is not in the business of confirming our misperceptions about it. What is there is truth, a reality which is far too fluid and dynamic ever to be replicated in stained glass.

There is a story about a scorpion who wanted to cross a stream. Scorpions don't swim, so he was stuck waiting until a turtle happened by. The scorpion asked the turtle for a ride across the stream.

"No way, Jose," said the turtle. "You're a scorpion . . . what's to keep you from stinging me while we are crossing the stream?"

"Now, wait a sec, amigo," the scorpion retorted passionately and with the toothy enthusiasm of a used car salesman. "Why would I do that? If I stung you, then I would drown, and I sure don't want to drown. If I can trust me, you can trust me."

The sincerity of this reasoning seemed to satisfy the turtle, so he agreed. The scorpion clamored up onto his back and they started off across the stream. But about half way across, the scorpion did what scorpions do . . . he stung the turtle.

"I thought we agreed that that would be a dumb thing to do?" remarked the turtle as he began to lose consciousness.

"We did," answered the now frightened scorpion. "But I am a scorpion, and stinging is my nature. Sorry about that."

As humans, we have learned to make deals with each other . . . you do this, and I'll do that, you don't do this and I won't do that. This deal-making is endorsed and encouraged in the interests of social stability; it is also the essence of being political, saying what we hope will bring the desired effect, and saying it whether or not there is any truth behind it, saying whatever needs to be said. The words "polite" and "political" are branchings from the same root word.

Once we commit ourselves to a "political" deal with another person, be it a marriage, a business deal, oaths of undying devotion, any sort of a quid pro quo arrangement, our egos are reluctant to recant when the fires of passion ebb, so we find ourselves stuck fulfilling a commitment that no longer makes sense. But we have learned that we must save face, so we continue the charade, even though we know deep down inside we are trying to live a lie, but ego won't allow us to admit it. When our true nature tries to express itself, we interpret it as something of a weakness, a flaw which must be eradicated.

Whenever we feel ourselves slipping away from the ideals we have been taught to accept, an appeal is made to something called will power, our (moral?) strength of conviction, our dignity and/or self respect. "Are you strong, or are you weak?" But even will power won't help us fulfill promises we can't keep, not without otherwise damaging us somewhere else.

It was the scorpion's nature to be a scorpion, regardless of the soundness of any logic he may have presented, and regardless of how strong his will power was. Willpower is a function of the ego, of the conceptual castle we have constructed around ourselves. It is praised as an outer show of inner strength and character.

But in every castle there is garbage that has to be taken out on a regular basis. If the walls are too secure, if there are no leaks in our rigid armor, no time out for housekeeping, then the garbage can't get out. It festers, poisons the air, spoils the other apples in the bin, and generally makes the inhabitants ill. Will power is the act of forging straight ahead no matter how deep and smelly

might be the garbage we are living in, and creating more all the while. Even though we are miserable, we justify ourselves as showing all the signs of having a strong will.

Other people aren't interested in our garbage, except maybe the shrinks who are handsomely paid to stir it for us once in a while. Fresh garbage isn't offensive if it hasn't gone bad yet, and makes excellent compost besides. But it is highly impolite to cart out our old garbage, showing it to friends to ask them where they take theirs; they probably hold onto it out of ignorance just like we do. If we can't get rid of it, if we are prisoners in our own castles and can't risk a trip out to the compost heap, then it builds up within. (Part of being "well adjusted" in society is pretending that you don't have any garbage. Nobody wants to be caught dead holding onto garbage, but nearly everyone is.)

When you have expectations about life or about other people, about how you expect to be treated based on your actions and motives, then you are setting yourself up for the inevitable disappointment which comes when your expectations are shattered. The turtle had an expectation about the scorpion, that the reason and logic behind his argument was somehow superior in the scorpion's thinking to his real nature.

The turtle's disillusionment came when the scorpion's nature overruled his rational arguments, as it always will in the long run. This is probably a good thing, because if our lives were dependent on our reasoning abilities alone, we wouldn't last a week . . . reason is not how we grow hair, or digest food, or do all the other things it takes to stay alive. Doing these things naturally, without thought, is our nature, and in the words of the margarine commercial, it's not nice to fool (with) Mother Nature.

If the other person injures you, you may forget the injury; but if you injure him, you will always remember.

--Kahlil Gibran

Disillusionment--life tossing a brick through the window--is always received with a certain sadness, like when spouses disappoint each other, when parents disappoint kids or kids disappoint parents, when role models turn out to be human after all. We feel that we have somehow failed, and we have, but not for the reasons we might suppose.

Our first response to a broken illusion is likely to fill in the hole as quickly as we can, to shop around for glass which is a little more resilient, maybe even shatter-proof. The problem with shatter-proof glass is that even if you could find any, the thicker it is, the less gets through it. It begins as a protection and very soon becomes a prison, and the quite natural process of ridding ourselves of the daily garbage before it goes bad is prevented altogether.

Being real means being real . . . being free from within and without to do the things one needs to do in order to be a conscious participant in life. It means being able to express your joy as well as

your sorrow, your delight as well as your anger; it means being free to take out the garbage. And when you are real, you find that you are burdening other people less and less, you are letting them do their thing without imposing yours. Garbage doesn't stink when it's fresh.

The urge to be safe and secure at all costs is part of the fear-driven hysteria so prevalent in society today. Because our egos are so fragile, and because Life has become so intimidating in so many ways, safety has become a universal excuse for imposing foolish and destructive limitations on people. When you fear for (what you think is) your life, then more control is the only apparent solution. Such efforts to control invariably result in conditions which require further controls, ad nauseum.

In my motorcycle days, I greatly enjoyed riding without a helmet . . . the wind streaming through my hair as I flew along a country road with the asphalt beneath me and the sky overhead . . . it was a wonderful experience. But then came the helmet laws, mandated on the basis of fear and the presumed likelihood of accident and injury. It is interesting that with mandatory helmets, actual head injuries are just about as frequent and severe as in the days before helmets were required; however, the incidence of neck injuries has skyrocketed, a twist that the experts didn't anticipate and therefore refuse to acknowledge, but also one which the medical profession silently adores.

When being safe is equated with stasis, with trying to make the world and its inhabitants unchangeable, then we have lost sight of who we really are and have become fearful of losing what can't be held onto anyway.

They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.

--

Benjamin Franklin

Freedom is an essential liberty . . . freedom from constraints imposed both from without and from within; freedom to investigate our lives, freedom to make mistakes, freedom to start afresh. As always, freedom includes allowing others the same latitude to be inconsistent or change their minds.

Liberty is the possibility of doubting, the possibility of making a mistake, the possibility of searching and experimenting, the possibility of saying "No" to any authority--literary, artistic, philosophic, religious, social, and even political.

--Ignazio Silone

The real failure we feel with disappointment is primarily that it shows us that we were wrong in trying to impose our expectations on some condition or person, including ourselves, and only secondarily in that that person has failed to live up to the promises we feel they made to us. We

have failed to devise and incorporate a section of stained glass which accurately represents reality. Life has demolished a part of our artificial, mental world.

At every trifle scorn to take offense.

--Alexander Pope

Rather than throw anger, anxiety, and antagonism through the holes (these are emotions which, because of having been suppressed and held inside, have begun to stink like garbage), and rather than rush to replace that broken section, it makes a whole lot more sense to use the opportunity to take a peek through the hole to see what the real world is all about, and let some of the garbage escape in the process.

The real world is real, while our windows are illusory. Our illusions appear more beautiful if they are consistent and non-self-contradictory. But beauty is never ultimately the result of artifice. Besides, the real world contains all contradictions . . . people who mean well but mess up anyway, people who have personal motives and will say whatever it takes . . . good people and frustrated people, what we call gems and what we call trash. Life is total and infinite variety. We can hold expectations if we want to, but we will pay a heavy price for them.

It may be temporarily more comfortable for our egos to believe that all people can, or ought to be trusted to keep their promises, whether those promises be implied or explicit; and of course we feel perfectly justified in punishing them when they don't. All people can be trusted to be who they are, like the scorpion, but their nature may not accord with their logic or their emotional persuasion, with the persona which they choose to present to us, or with the persona we have chosen to pin on them.

Most people haven't the slightest idea who they really are, so it shouldn't really be surprising that most people live inconsistently: their egos are at odds with their nature. Any consistency-based expectations we have of them are unreal and therefore illusory. They may behave perfectly well in public, but if they are not being who they are, they will not be happy people, and the conflict between who they would like to think they are, and who they really are (their nature) will erupt, outside and inside. The same goes for us, of course.

Life itself is constant variety. Nothing in nature ever repeats itself . . . there are never two sunsets, two storms, or two blades of grass which are identical, and there are certainly never two humans who are the same. Nobody has ever written a book on how to do you, because you have never been done before. Where can you go to find out how to do you?

You don't have to go anywhere, because you already are who you're supposed to be; the only challenge that exists to self-realization or happiness is to see that this is already the case. And since every situation in life is different, each must (if you would be honest) be handled according

to its own merits, not according to the past, and not according to the way in which it might vaguely conform to some artificial category, some symbolic thought.

But of course, this isn't just about dealing with other people; it's mainly about you. Who are you? What is your nature? In what ways are you trying to be different than your nature? Which of your stained glass pains did you get from other people?

People like to give us their beliefs, because our acceptance of their beliefs makes them feel more comfortable about their own situation, as though, since you believed them, they must really have it figured out. This is why fundamentalism has such powerful peer group persuasion . . . "I'm scared, and you're scared, but if we can both agree to have similar stained glass windows in our personal cages, then neither of us will be quite as scared." Missouri loves company.

When adversity comes, when we become disillusioned about people or situations, it is really Life saying to us, "Hey . . . you're getting lost in your ideas about life instead of working with what it really is. Here's a chance to see what it is, a chance to turn from your illusions back to reality."

The masters throughout history have realized this truth. Each one of us is a free agent to the extent that we are not being driven by our egos. To be who we really are is really the only choice there is in life. You can successfully be who you are, or you can unsuccessfully try to be someone else . . . it's really that simple!

If you try to be someone else, even your own idea of who you think you ought to be, then your life will be a roller coaster . . . the ups come when you are in fashion, and the downs come when you fall out of fashion. And fashion isn't up to any of us.

But if instead you learn to listen, to meditate, to love and forgive yourself, to come back into the awareness that who you are is not just a skin bag stuffed with meat and bones and emotions, then it gradually dawns on you that who you really are is infinite, unlimited, one with the whole world, that life wants you to be happy, and that everything life sends into your experience is ultimately intended to bring you back to your Self, which is the Self of the universe. When you cease to invest so heavily in illusion, you are less likely to insist that your word be law, you become less concerned about getting ahead, you are more willing to live and let live.

The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.

--Carl Rogers

Most psychotherapy doesn't work because people have lost touch with who they are, and also because psychotherapy works within a structure of understanding that only occasionally accords itself with what really the case. You have to keep going back again and again until the law of coincidence kicks in and the therapist hits on something that makes sense to your ego.

It is largely denial which keeps us from changing, denial that maybe we really don't know who we are and what's going on. We will resist admitting that we don't know, because our egos are strong, and they don't like to admit that they might be mistaken (a variant to this game is the plot where the ego's badge is that it is always wrong, the defeatist approach, and just as wrong-headed). This is precisely why it is so hard for people to change their thinking, even in small areas.

The more solid and concrete your ego is, the more arguments you will have with other people who see things differently. The possibility that they might be right causes you to fight all the more valiantly, if not violently, for what you believe, even if it means killing them or ruining their lives for their own good.

Only when you accept your nature, even though it remain ultimately unknowable, only when you accept yourself as you are however you are, only when you stop judging yourself and begin loving yourself without condition, will you be able to see who you really are. And only when you are working with what is will you have a prayer of changing it. You can't repair an airplane if you think it's a submarine, and you can't grow through disappointment if you think it's someone else's fault.

Man is ignorant of the nature of his own being and powers. Even his idea of his limitations is based on experience of the past. There is therefore no reason to assign theoretical limits on what he may be, or what he may do.

--Aleister Crowley

Loyalty to petrified opinion never yet broke a chain or freed a human soul.

--Mark Twain

In fact, all opinion is petrified. All opinion is based on the past, and the past is dead, it is over, it is petrified. The word petrified means "made into stone". Stone is practically inflexible, and its resistance to change only results in its disintegration. People who write things in stone are generally chiselers at heart. Being confined to a castle made of stone is not being free. Freedom is life in all its variety, and being one with life is being free.

The superior man does not set his mind either for anything, or against anything; what is right he will follow.

--Confucius

This is why the masters have always been unfathomable. They don't have the same walls around them as the rest of us have, they don't react to things the way the rest of us do, they can't be reduced to a system or a technique, there is no cosmic litmus test we can apply to them, and their area codes change frequently. They have learned to be vulnerable and open to life, they travel like the winds, and never on the well-trodden path.

This vulnerability, this "going through life without defense mechanisms" sounds like the height of lunacy to those of us who have been convinced that we are small alienated egos fending the ourselves against the cosmos. The masters recognized the prison that their egos created around them, and they found that the ego is not who they are. It's not who we are either, but we are still finding that out.

You are not separate from life, and life is not separate from you. Organized religion prefers to view the things that happen to us as just desserts: for having lived either in accordance with or at variance to some moral or ethical standards. This view, apart from being just another attempt to control behavior, is deeply tainted with overtones of sin and retribution, like a wound that's festered and hasn't been allowed to heal. Organized thought insists that the rational, worldly-wise, and cautious view of life is best, and when those deeper and more cosmically oriented parts of us begin to express themselves, we repress them as being, as Alan Watts once described, "intellectually gaseous".

We but half express ourselves, and are ashamed of that divine idea which each of us represents.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Just as the character in a book has no possibility of figuring out the intent or motivations of the author who wrote that book, so none of us has a holy ghost of a chance of figuring out God, or Life, or whatever you choose to call the world and everything in it. But then, there is no need to figure it out, because it is already the case. All we need do is to slow our minds and activities down enough to see what is already there.

There is a story about Buddha, when he and some of his followers were on a journey, during which Buddha was talking with one of his disciples about the natural clarity of a mind aligned with Truth. At one point they crossed a small meandering brook, and when they had crossed, Buddha sent the disciple back for some water. The disciple returned complaining that the water was all murky, not clear.

Buddha suggested that it was murky because of all the tromping around that had been recently done in it, and if the disciple was to gather clear water from it, he would have to sit quietly and wait for the mud to settle.

Our minds are like that brook. We have been convinced that we must continually think, and figure things out, but we spend so much time stirring up the gunk which has been collected there that real clarity has been reduced to an ideal, a concept. The only way to find the real clarity which is already there is to cease tromping around, to meditate and to clear the mind by not stirring it up with worries, concerns, logic, and rationalization. Leave it alone, and clarity will return, for that is its nature.

Chapter 30 -- Recreational Medicine

If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear as it is . . . infinite.

--William Blake

Recreation. We have learned to identify this word with physically involving ourselves with settings of outdoor adventure (via recreational vehicles perhaps), getting ourselves out of the usual ruts we spend so much of our lives in (by playing volleyball, or golf, or taking a trip to the ballpark), or just doing something different. Recreation generally means at least temporarily moving our attentions from the required to the preferred, from the depleting and exhausting to the revitalizing and restoring.

Recreation literally means to create again. Like the word wilderness (which to the Native American mind was a meaningless term, since what we call the wilderness he called home, and didn't become truly wild until the white man came), the mere existence of the concept of recreational retreat (!) is also an indication that somewhere down deep we recognize that our normal patterns of thought and activity are somehow bereft of spirituality, requiring moments of rejuvenation and regeneration--the re-creation of something which has been depleted.

By recreational medicine, I am referring to those generally natural substances which have the effect of at least temporarily restoring our naturally unified and unifying perspectives on life, of recreating and probing an understanding of existence which has been all but ignored in the mad rush for money, power, or even just existing in a setting which has become violently inhumane.

Most of this book has concerned itself with the knack of seeing through the illusion of self to the reality of Self. I have described some of the ways we have been fooled, and some of the perspectives which, when experienced, offer us an opportunity not only to discover this mysterious Self, but also to thereby realize (make real) the altruistic, the sublime, and the worthy experiences which are the true gifts of human existence. (Lemonade is good, limeade is better. Lemonade is sublime).

The ideals of brotherly love, community, altruism, honesty, and so on, are ideals to us only because our perceptions of life and our place in it have been truncated in the interests of business, government, and religion. Our natural condition implies all of these naturally; this world is already the land of milk and honey, but so long as we can be convinced that it isn't, we'll never see that the so-called kingdom is already at hand, already the case.

Recreational medicines are medicines, not diets. They exist to treat, not habituate. Recreational medicines, when properly used, have the much-needed facility of reorienting our perceptions of life from the artificial back to the actual, of realigning our senses of who we are and what we are here for, of cleaning off, even if only for a moment, the warpings and aberrations which

civilization and cosmic alienation have superimposed on our world views, of opening further the doors of perception.

Although you won't hear it in public very often, and certainly not from organized religions, recreational medicines make available certain perspectives and descriptions of life behind the veil which are uncannily similar to those recorded by mystics and prophets from all cultures, from the Tibetans and the Taoists to the early Christian mystics and nearly all indigenous cultures, descriptions which are far too similar to be dismissed out of hand.

The mystical state is the direct experience of reality without the filtering and objectifying processes of the socialized mind getting in the way. While this state seems to be available to the devotees only after years of meditation and/or other rigorous ascetic practices, it is becoming clear that there are other paths up that particular mountain.

How do we get beyond the curtain of maya ? What might we find if ever we should momentarily slip into an altered state of awareness? What does the world look like when brought out from behind the grids of knowledge and designation we have overlayed it with? In his marvelous little book, "The Doors of Perception", Aldous Huxley quotes the Cambridge philosopher C. D. Broad:

". . . we should do well to consider much more seriously than we have hitherto been inclined to do . . . the suggestion that the function of the brain and nervous system and sense organs is in the main eliminative and not productive. Each person is at each moment capable of remembering all that has ever happened to him and of perceiving everything that is happening everywhere in the universe. The function of the brain and nervous system is to protect us from being overwhelmed and confused by this mass of largely useless and irrelevant knowledge, by shutting out most of what we should otherwise perceive or remember at any moment, and leaving only that very small and special selection which is likely to be practically useful."

In referring to this state of all-knowing as Mind At Large, Huxley continues:

"Each one of us is potentially Mind at Large. But in so far as we are animals, our business is at all costs to survive. To make biological survival possible, Mind at Large has to be funneled through the reducing valve of the brain and nervous system. What comes out at the other end is a measly trickle of the kind of consciousness which will help us stay alive on the planet.

"To formulate and express the contents of this reduced awareness, man has invented and endlessly elaborated those symbol-systems and implicit philosophies which we call languages. Every individual is at once the beneficiary and the victim of the linguistic tradition into which he has been born--the beneficiary inasmuch as language gives access to the accumulated records of other people's experience, the victim in so far as it confirms him in the belief that reduced awareness is the only awareness, and as it bedevils his sense of reality, so that he is all too apt to

take his concepts for data, his words for actual things. That which, in the language of religion, is called "this world" is the universe of reduced awareness, expressed, and, as it were, petrified by language.

"The various "other worlds" with which human beings erratically make contact are so many elements in the totality of the awareness belonging to Mind At Large. Most people, most of the time, know only what comes through the reducing valve and is consecrated as genuinely real by the local language. Certain persons, however, seem to be born with a kind of temporary by-pass which circumvents the reducing valve. In others, temporary by-passes may be acquired either spontaneously, or as the result of deliberate "spiritual exercises", or through hypnosis, or by means of drugs. Through these permanent or temporary by-passes there flows . . . something more than, and above all something different from the carefully selected utilitarian material which our narrowed, individual minds regard as a complete, or at least sufficient, picture of reality.*"

* Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*, 1954, Harper & Row.

In other words, reality is infinitely more than our socialized and language-dependent concepts can possibly accommodate. The reason modern life has become such a spiritual wasteland is because, having depended exclusively on concepts and ideas--symbols--that our minds can understand, we have failed to live in accord with what those symbols claim to, yet fail to represent, i.e., the real world. The result is that because we don't really understand reality and our place in it, we mess it up, like trying to drive a stick shift car without using that mysterious pedal on the left.

As human beings, we are all searching for truth. Truth is not partial, like our intellects would like to presume . . . it is whole. If we are to perceive truth, then there is ultimately no choice but to at least temporarily distance ourselves from our concepts about life to see what it really is, to remove, in the safety of our own times and spaces, the blockages which keep us from seeing more of it. Recreational medicines are often helpful in this pursuit.

I am using the alternative term "recreational medicines" to refer to those substances which, for a variety of covert and self-serving reasons, officialdom has chosen to demonize, namely, psychedelic drugs, and most notably among these cannabis, mescaline, lysergic acid, and psilocybin. The aura of fear surrounding these I-openers is the result of nearly a hundred years of half-truths, exaggerations, and outright lies concerning the nature, uses, benefits, and applications of these medicines.

Those who corrupt the public mind are just as evil as those who steal from the public purse.

--Adlai Stevenson

The American government, with the full support of business and religion, has declared and steadily escalated a war against its own people, justifying this war (as all wars are justified) on the grounds of fear cloaked in largely imagined threats to social morality and freedom. The real threat

to the status quo is loss of control over people's minds, but you won't often hear that in public. The so-called drug war is a classic study in the intentional obfuscation of reality.

They D.A.R.E. not speak the truth about these substances because the truth does not even begin to justify the continued use of brute force, spying, confiscation, and legal chicanery which are so much a part of any effort at morality policing.

One of the supreme ironies of this war is that a nation so publicly concerned about sending a wrong message should be sending so many. We are told that America stands for freedom, but not the freedom to investigate your own life in the privacy of your own home. "Drugs are bad for you", but at the next commercial break we see a little scene in which the message is "When you get sick, buy these drugs . . .they're good for you!" Drug peddlers are bad, drug stores are good.

As soon as men decide that all means are permitted to fight an evil, then their good becomes indistinguishable from the evil that they set out to destroy.

--Christopher Dawson

All people are too serious and half-insane when they declare a war against other people.

--Lin Yutang

Leaving aside for the moment the ethical stature of this puritanical legacy, the psychology of the war on drugs seeks to associate the most benign with the most vicious of forbidden drugs, thereby doing a disservice not only to people who are genuinely interested in knowing the truth, but also to the credibility of those making such claims. You can credibly shout wolf only so many times. Despite all the shrill public rhetoric to the contrary, there is no similarity, for instance, between the effects of crack cocaine and hemp, or between heroin and mescaline. You might as well group cyanide and aspirin together, then claim that aspirin is bad because cyanide is lethal.

The more corrupt the state, the more laws.

--Tacitus

It is the old practice of despots to use a part of the people to keep the rest in order.

--Thomas Jefferson

All medicines, like all people, are not created equal. Some are good for your soul, some are not. Experience is always the best teacher, and yours probably has, and probably will, differ from mine in some respects.

We are concerned here with that class of substances called psychedelics, mainly cannabis, mescaline, lysergic acid, and psilocybin. These ought not be confused with that class of drugs called hallucinogens. Psychedelics, or psychogens as they are sometimes called, reveal some of the unlabeled aspects and uncommon dimensions of things that are already there in everyday

objects like chairs and apples and flowers and people, while hallucinogens show you things that aren't there, like pink elephants.

Cannabis, also called marijuana, hemp, grass, reefer, and a colorful bouquet of other regional or "hip" names, is a naturally occurring herb with a remarkably wide assortment of uses far beyond its merely psychedelic properties. It has been a social, economic, and medicinal staple for thousands of years throughout the world, rendering such commodities as paper and textiles (everything from silk-like fabrics to canvas, a word derived from cannabis); the seeds can be pressed for refinable oils, and the pressings used as a nutritious cattle fodder; hemp can be used as a building material of wide application, and since it contains over 400 medicinally active chemicals, its contribution to medicine in general would be profound.

Even the government has occasionally had to admit the value of cannabis, as when in World War II, when the Japanese captured the Philippine Islands and America's source of hemp (used for rope, canvas, and parachute rigging, Mr. Bush). National security thus threatened, the Department of Agriculture published and distributed a film entitled "Hemp For Victory". This instructional patriotic film encouraged American farmers to grow hemp to help the war effort, showing how to grow it, how to harvest it, and how to market it. There have even been times in our history when it was illegal not to grow it. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson rank as the nation's most prolific hemp growers.

As another small example of the misinformation which has been so widely propagated concerning this valuable plant, consider the facts concerning health risks. Alcohol and tobacco annually account directly for hundreds of thousands of human deaths, indirectly for hundreds of thousands more, yet these are both quite legal, mainly because they represent vested economic interests, members in good standing of the New York Stock Exchange. And yet, in the thousands of years of medical records up to and including the present, there is not a single record of someone dying from the use of cannabis. So much for credibility.

Mescaline is the active ingredient in the peyote cactus which is indigenous to the American southwestern and Mexico. It, too, has been used for centuries as a visionary tool, an aid to vision quests, and a sacrament of the highest order in many Native American religions. Popularized by the writings of Carlos Castaneda in the Don Juan series, mescaline opens rooms in our spiritual mansions which have much to offer us, rooms which are meant to be opened and investigated, but rooms which the present hysteria has made off limits. Spending time in these rooms takes our attention, often permanently, away from the frenzy and insanity of business as usual, so spending time in those rooms was outlawed for economic and religious purposes.

Psilocybin is the active ingredient in certain mushrooms which have been used by humans since before the dawn of agriculture. A thought-provoking theory put forward by ethnobiologist

Terrance McKenna holds that mankind has been ingesting psilocybin for at least the past several hundred thousand years, but that the end of the last ice age brought a drier climate and mushroom scarcity. The climatic changes forced these nomadic societies to settle down to the practice of agriculture, which was the major stabilizing influence enabling what we now know as civilization.

McKenna suggests that such human ideals as community, brotherly love, altruism, kindness, and so on, which are heightened and amplified under the effects of psilocybin, used to be universally experienced, but that with the drier climate, mushrooms grew scarce, and man was forced to develop a strong ego, leading directly to the concept of ownership, first of his woman and children, then his world. (See OMNI, May 1993.)

This is not an idea that can be dismissed lightly. Evolution takes place in harmony with prevailing conditions, and when the prevailing conditions include a moist climate, lots of ungulates like deer, antelope, and buffalo leaving field pies everywhere, with psychedelic mushrooms growing everywhere there are field pies, and where there are apes becoming people, these proto-people will incorporate the mushroom and its influences into their being, just as we now incorporate Big Macs and cough syrup into ours.

For hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of years, while our brains were growing and developing to their present form, we ate magic mushrooms. But since the end of the last ice age and the drying of large areas of the formerly lush world, the mushroom has grown more scarce. Also during this period we humans have experienced a growing alienation from the planet, from each other, and from ourselves, as evidenced by the relatively recent inventions of religion and state warfare. People who use psilocybin are, for the most part, quite peaceful in their dealings with life. There just might be a connection.

Lysergic acid, better known as LSD, is an alkaloid produced by ergot, a type of grain rot. First isolated in the 1930's by a Swiss chemist named Albert Hoffman, it was popularized through the research of Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert, and others. Though it promised to offer psychiatry an invaluable new tool to investigate the causes of mental illness, it was quickly banned by the government on the grounds that it was dangerous. It is, but not for the reasons given, for like other psychedelics, LSD offers a perspective on human consciousness which endangers the profits of war machines and Wal Marts everywhere. A simple, peaceful, and harmonious society is not the goal of consumerism.

I would characterize my own personal and largely occasional experiences with psychedelics as predominantly religious in tone, in the sense that they more clearly revealed the interconnectedness of all of Life than is normally evident. Psychedelics, in modest amounts and sensible frequency of usage, offer an existential (you have to experience it to understand it) perspective on who we really are and what this world is really all about. I have never had a bad

trip, and have met astoundingly few others who claim to have had one. Bad trips are generally agreed to be more a function of how out-of-focus your head is than of the drug itself.

But the economic powers of the world don't want us to get high, to elevate our consciousness, to learn our true place in the world. Getting high raises us above the fear and anxiety which have become such profitable by-products of modern economies. It's bad for business when your customer learns that he doesn't need your services.

The old notion is that a drug that makes you feel good, like booze, when you stagger around and say, "Hey, I'm great, I'm the best one on the block", that's not what we mean by feeling good or getting high. Getting high is that sense of union, wonder, revelation, merging with something that's bigger than yourself.

--Timothy Leary

The changes which are happening in the world today are happening in order to free future generations from the artificial, symbolic, and largely life-denying social practices which come to the fore in the past several centuries of human history. People do not exist in order to contribute their lives to some gross national product, to betray their natural dignity in the interests of sloganeers waving flags, to work like dogs all their lives just to accumulate little green pieces of paper, or to live under the domination of abstractions like countries or religions. We are here to discover, in new and never before experienced way, who each of us really is.

If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place.

--Margaret

Mead

It is not my purpose here to recommend the use of psychedelics, nor to discourage it. Rather, it is to affirm your unalienable right to make your own choices in life, and you can't make a choice if you're not given one, or if the information you are given on which to base that choice is heavily marbled with deceit. Psychedelics, liberated from the fear which has been caked on them in years past, can contribute immeasurably to our understanding of human life and our ability to get along with each other. If used sensibly, they open doorways which, though unacknowledged by society as a whole, are nonetheless real, doorways which lead to a deeper and broader understanding of just what it means to be a human being.

As one guru said after taking an enormous dose of LSD, it's good in that it gives you a glimpse of what's behind the veil, but with the drug you can't stay, you have to come back again. Psychedelics are not ends in themselves, any more than religious practices or chasing the American dream are ends in themselves. Rather, they are additional clues and hints as to what is already the case. You can find your way much more easily when you are familiar with the territory.

Finally, use is not the same as abuse, despite the frenzied rhetoric to the contrary. The slogan "Just Say No" is fittingly anti-life in a time when fear and anxiety dominate human experience. "No" denies, it excludes, and it leads ultimately to unconsciousness of reality. Instead of "Just Say No", the slogan ought to be "Just say Know", because however it may be cloaked, ignorance is never a good teacher.

Chapter 31 -- Getting Along with your Life

Benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and knowledge are not infused into us from without.

--Mencius

It is a little embarrassing to have been concerned with the human problem all one's life and find at the end that one has no more to offer by way of advice than "Try to be a little kinder".

--Aldous Huxley

Living your life kindly and with awareness is not a technique one must learn or a viewpoint that one must hold. It means living according to who you really are, learning to listen to your body and mind, learning how to respond consciously to the world around you. The sore areas of your life are sore because of how you are living. The answer is not some vitamins or smart pills, or a new religion. The answer is already the case, like the DNA in each of your cells which allows them to do their best. You already have everything you need . . . the trick is waking up enough to see it.

There is a story about a small single-seat observation plane which was left in the jungles after the war. The natives had never seen one before, and could make no sense of it, but they soon discovered that they could load the inside and drape things over the wings, hook it up to an ox, and use it as a cart.

One day a visitor came to the village. He had never seen an airplane either, but he knew something about engines, and soon discovered that the propeller served to move the strange cart under its own power. Finally, of course, someone came who knew about flying, and that was the last the natives ever saw of their fancy cart.

Our socialized minds are what keep us from seeing the airplane each of us is; we have been told that we are simply ox carts, so until our awareness is liberated and allowed to expand, that's all we'll see. The best way to expand that awareness is to look and see the world within and around us without judging it to be good or bad, right or wrong.

When you can look at your life without saying "it is good or bad", but simply listen to see what is, when you can look at the experiences which come into your awareness not as rewards or

punishments but as clues and hints as to how to proceed, when you can learn to become consciously part of the flow of life, which is really your true being, only then will happiness be allowed to happen.

Conserve your powers. Daily renewed sense yearnings sap your inner peace; they are like openings in a reservoir that allow vital waters to be wasted in the desert soil of materialism. The forceful activating impulse of wrong desire is the greatest enemy to the happiness of man. Roam in the world as a lion of self control; don't let the frogs of sense weakness kick you around.

--Sri

Yuktswar

By self here is meant Self, not to be confused with self, the ego, the feeling of self-independent-hood. Do not try with your ego to misunderstand this idea of Self control. Self-control (capitalized) is not control of the Self by the self, but control of the self by the Self, control of the role by the actor, instead of vice versa.

The renewed daily sense yearnings are all the personally oriented means of gratification, the substitution of pleasure for happiness, the exercise of power for the quick thrill it may give us. Materialism is simply materialism, and we all have a material body with must be nurtured. We are also psychological beings, but not just psychological; getting attached to these aspects of ourselves and thinking they're all there is, is what creates all the problems.

To live content with small means; to seek elegance rather than luxury, and refinement rather than fashion; to be worthy, not respectable, and wealthy, not rich; to study hard, think quietly, talk gently, act frankly; to listen to stars and birds, to babes and sages, to occasions, and to hurry never. In a word, to let the spiritual, unbidden and unconscious, grow up through the common.

--William Henry Channing

This is the grace and elegance of life as it is mean to be lived and experienced.

Sitting quietly in the childhood of our culture, perhaps resting on the smiling lips of a doll we haven't played with in years, there lurks one of the highest of all teachings which, like Humpty Dumpty, is masquerading as a nursery rhyme. Without proclaiming itself to be anything special, and therefore camouflaging itself from meddlesome tinkering by fanatic do-gooders, it nevertheless holds in its four simple lines a veritable guidebook on how to be who you really are, which probably accounts for its tenacious ability to hang around in the culture despite all of the high-tech competition.

If we consider that these bodies and minds we inhabit are like the boats we are presently using to navigate from day to day, and the stream is our individual lives, then suddenly this little rhyme

speaks volumes. It is the ultimate parable of what it means to be a human being. You may find as good, but you will never find better.

Row, row, row your boat . . .

Row your boat, do your life. Do "your" life, the real one, not the one given to you by other people. Each of our individual boats is equipped differently, which indicates that we are each here to row a different way, at a different speed and rhythm, in a different direction, and with a different purpose. Find out how your boat works.

What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.

--Confucius

Let every man mind his own business.

--Miguel Cervantes

Row your boat, but never try to row someone else's. As you begin to break down the conceptual limitations of why you think you are, you will learn more about what your boat is equipped to do. You see that it would be unthinkable that someone else might know more than you about your own inner workings and what you might be here to do. Generally, people who know how to live their own lives also know not to meddle in anyone else's. You never help another person by trying to impose your ideas on them.

Nobody has done you before, so there's nowhere you can go but within to find out why you are and what you are here for. By learning the feel of your boat, what kind of water it likes, how it handles, and so on, you are learning to row it in such a way as to be kind and considerate not only to your own boat, but also to the river around you and everything and everyone else in it. You are learning what it is for, what you are for, and how you fit in reality.

Row your boat . . . gently . . .

Most of us were brought up to be strong and willful, as though there is something inferior or wimpy about being gentle, considerate, and sensitive. We are taught to be impatient, ambitious, and strong-willed, to force things to happen on our schedule, even though they be out of season. This is a very aggressive, thoughtless, and ultimately unhealthy way to live. We learn when, after spending our first thirty or forty years tearing around like mad, we find in middle life that our oarlocks are falling off, our transom is sagging, and our paint scheme is wrinkled and scraped from a lifetime of bashing into rocks, reefs, and other boaters. This is why a male dominated society, like ours has been for centuries, has done such an extensive job of trashing the planet and its many inhabitants.

Man, in overcoming the world, has overcome himself. We are incessantly taught by society to be in a hurry, to row our boats as fast as we possibly can, because we have learned to believe that if we don't we will be left behind to wallow in the slack water of everyone else's wake. Nobody remembers who finished third, we're nobody unless we're first, so we learn how to make waves, how to make a splash in life, how to become the fastest with the mostest.

More men are killed by overwork than the importance of the world justifies.

--Rudyard Kipling

It's the old carrot-and-stick trick: the carrot is the promise of future rewards for present-day misery, and the stick is time. We are talked out of ourselves and into a frantic race for goodies, the production and marketing of which just happens to be the cornerstones of consumerism . . . a faster car, a new house, a larger stock portfolio. And only the smart, strong, clever, and informed get the best goodies.

An ambitious man can never know peace.

--J. Krishnamurti

Ambition is an interesting word. It comes from the Latin word *ambitio*, and means, literally, "going around". Ambitious people desire fame, fortune, respect, and power, and they will rush around the stream frantically to make sure that they have their names graffitied on more rocks than the next guy. Ambitious people want to be as close to the top of the heap as possible. In practical terms, ambition means getting the best of everyone else, seeking to stand on their faces to avoid having their own stood on.

Krishnamurti says that an ambitious person will never know peace because the root assumption of ambition is that "as things are, they are not good enough", or, "as I am, I am not good enough." And when this becomes an operating principle, then one never reaches the point when things are finally all right.

For who have started wars for us? The ambitious, the able, the clever, the scheming, the cautious, the sagacious, the haughty, the over-patriotic, the people inspired with the desire to "serve" mankind, the people who have a "career" to carve and an "impression" to make on the world.

--Lin Yutang

Ambition never allows a person to slow down long enough to ask if all this effort and struggle are really worth anything, because ambitious people never arrive anywhere, and in the meanwhile they spoil life for everyone else.

Attainment is in the future, but life is eternally here/now. If peace and order are possible at all, they are possible only to the person who has begun the search for the mysterious Self which is the center of all being. And not in the future, but in the present.

Let each man pass his days in that wherein his skill is greatest.

--Sextus Propertius

Each of us is here to do a different life. The equipment we find when we examine our bodies and minds are best employed in a way nobody else has tried before. Each of us is equipped to do something better than anyone else, and the signature of that something is that we feel good about ourselves when we do it, that we would do it whether we could get paid for it or not.

When you are doing your thing, there is a certain gentleness to it, a smooth, effortless flow, like the artist whose brushes effortlessly bring life to a canvas, or the athlete who glides around the arena while others jounce or rattle. To live life gently is to live with awareness, with consideration for all of life, finding love and rightness wherever you look.

Row your boat gently . . . down the stream . . .

Down the stream means with the flow. The streams of our lives are not mathematically simple and obvious, like a uniformly proportioned concrete irrigation ditch where all the water moves in the same direction at the same rate. The part of the stream where you find yourself today has never been navigated before, by anyone, because nobody has ever done you before.

And this is where consciousness becomes important. Since your life is not mapped out, and in truth cannot be mapped out, you can't refer to any guidebook to tell you about your part of the river. The river is changing constantly . . . the sand bar that might have been here last week is now gone, and there is a new one further downstream that wasn't there before. The only way to know what is happening now is to out down all the so-called guide books and learn how to observe the real river. In other words, you have to be there.

The other boats around you are also constantly moving in sometimes orderly but usually erratic patterns; running into other boats, or endlessly chaffing up against them, is painful for all involved. The frightened among us always want to make sure they can predict us, and control us, because control promises to save them the bother of being conscious and paying attention, of having to break with routine. Spiritual slothes demand predictability.

If you are going to know what your part of the river is doing at the moment, you have to be there, you have to become aware of the flow of the water, the rocks and the rapids, the shallows and the reefs, and the other boats, not only to avoid running into them, but also to avoid being hit by them unexpectedly. You also have to be flexible, because since all of life is in constant change, everything you learned about your river today will likely have changed at least a little by tomorrow.

Just when I figured out the meaning of life, they changed it.

--George Carlin

Life knows, and the flow of our lives down the stream is what we call growth and learning. Life wants us to be happy, and as we learn to work with it, Life automatically takes us in the direction of our own highest perfection and happiness.

The water of immortal life is always right there if you're following your bliss.

--Joseph Campbell

We are not meant to go upstream or against the flow, or we would have been equipped to do so. While time may flow in both direction at some level, it seems to flow from what we call the future to what we call the past (or vice versa, if you choose to look at it that way). Trying to go in the other direction won't get you anywhere, and will only wear you out.

Following your bliss--the things that really matter to you--is the only guide you can trust. Your bliss, your happiness, your contentment and feelings of well-spent effort, are aspects of your natural internal navigation system . . . learning to read them will be learning well spent. Of course, the messages also come from the world around you, because from the cosmic point of view (where the real you really is), there is no inside or outside . . . it is all of a piece. The outer world will reflect your inner world, and your inner world will learn from the outer. If you are aware.

Row your boat gently down the stream, Merrily . . .

Alan Watts once said that religion, in its purest form, is nothing more than "diggingness," a celebration of the wonder and spectacle of existence. If you are not enjoying your life, then you aren't doing it right. The happiness in life comes not from accomplishments, because those are in time . . . one moment they are not, the next moment they are, the next moment they are no longer. Happiness is that which is eternal, without beginning or end. Happiness isn't what you have or what you do, it is what you are.

When you are attuned to thoughts of worry and anxiety, then you will find these in your experience. The usual excuse for not being happy about life goes something like, "Well, look at my life, and at the world! What reason do I have to be happy?" Sometimes it's hard to grasp, but when you change the kinds of things you think about, your world will change too. You are a beacon, and the world around you, and your perceptions of it, will be colored by the light you are sending out. We are the creators of our experience, except to the degree that we have given up that right and put it in someone else's charge. If we have, then the only choice we have is to take it back again.

It is your right to be happy. Not that Congress will suddenly grow a heart and treat you like a human being by respecting that right. It is up to you to change the contents of your mind to those

which you want to experience. At first it feels like foolish play-acting, but the more you do it, the more reasons you will find for doing more of it.

You really can change reality. You're making it now; why not make it more to your liking? And if you're still skeptical, consider the punch line to this little gem:

Row row row your boat, gently down the stream, Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, Life is but a dream

When we dream at night, we are usually unaware that we are dreaming. We accept the premise of the dream, regardless of how outrageous to our normal sensibilities that premise might be, and we go for the ride. We often get so caught up in the dream that we awaken in a sweat, or sexually aroused, or frightened, or elated.

Occasionally we may experience what is called a lucid dream, which is a dream where we know that we are only dreaming. Flying dreams are often of this quality, and the feelings of freedom and rightness we experiences then are monumental.

The fact that we dream at night offers us something of a perspective on our waking life . . . "dreams are only dreams, but this is real!" But the this that we call waking life is no more convincing in its reality than some of the dreams we have had . . . we felt the same sort of fear, suffering, pain, anguish, elation, happiness, and so on, in our dreams as we have experienced in life.

But, you may say, we can wake up from a nocturnal dream, but how can we wake up from reality?

We can't wake up from reality, because reality is "being totally awake". We are, however, not at all awake; the lives we are leading are only relatively awake, which is what this little rhyme seeks to suggest to us. We only think we are awake because we can contrast this waking reality with our dreaming at night.

When a moment of insight happens, when we first perceive a new truth for the first time, there is an Ah-hah of recognition . . . we are now awake to something we were previously asleep to.

These Ah-hah's come with life, they are strewn along our paths in loving abundance. We normally don't see them because we aren't looking for them, our socialized personas don't have words or concepts to consecrate them as real. But when we stumble upon one, it has the effect of taking us to a new level of awareness, a level which makes where we were seem to us like we were asleep, but now we're awake. That's precisely what they are for.

The masters throughout time have sought to wake people up, which is difficult to do when people are dreaming. When you are dreaming, the dog licking your face becomes your dream lover, the alarm clock becomes your dream church bells. When life sends experiences into our lives to help up wake up, we are apt to translate them into the terms of the dream we are presently dreaming; we might call them adversity. This is the master's problem: to wake us up without becoming just another player in our dreams.

In the morning, when you awaken, the dream you dreamt, which seemed real while it was happening, now looks more like a dream. While you were asleep in bed, you thought you were traveling around the world having adventures; when you woke up, you realized that you had never left your bed.

In the same way, when we take this life to be our reality, we are like the dreamer who is rapt in his dream. Only when we wake up from this dream of mortality and suffering will we see that it was a dream.

But even the conceptualization that we are dreaming is an important first step. You can't break out of a prison unless it first occurs to you that you are in prison. In this case, it is a prison made of the belief that each of us is nothing more than puny little egocentric bag of protoplasm plopped down in a hostile universe to struggle for a few years and then die. It seems real until you realize that it isn't.

All of the masters, and all of the inspired literature down the centuries, have had as their sole purpose to awaken us from the personal dreams we are having. In Hinduism, there is a story which says that each of us is a dream in the mind of Brahma. Brahma is never in any real jeopardy, but his dreams are enticing to the extent that he forgets he is just dreaming. The deeper his forgetfulness, the more exciting and high stakes his dreams become. When you and I awaken to the reality of our true nature, then all this talk about the unreality of the personal ego, life and death struggles between the forces of good and evil, all of this will appear as it really is: a dream.

This is part of the transformation which is sweeping the world here in the late Twentieth Century. For the past fifteen thousand years or so, we have been learning to play roles which took themselves too seriously. As a result, we have been cruel to ourselves, to each other, and to the world in general. The world can't handle much more of this mistreatment, which is why today the people being born are coming in with a much clearer perception of their true place in the universe, a much clearer perception of what man really is.

As the existing social and governmental institutions break down, which they certainly will, people will be forced back into community, into the realization that I am not doing well unless you are doing well also, that a happy world will never result from the efforts of unhappy people. This is the great transformative change which is emerging today, and you, as you really are, are an important part of it.

Chapter 32 -- What's In Store for the Race?

Mankind's obligation is to make Earth a better place to live, and I'm optimistic about our chances.

--Kareem Abdul Jabbar

The course which civilization has taken for the past several centuries has all but proven itself a futile exercise in theoretical reality. The human race has been a race away from sanity. Capitalism, which is the de facto theme of all that calls itself progress today, is based on limitless economic growth in an arena of infinite resources. It is falling apart from within because the world's resources are not infinite, and the people taking part in it are not all driven by the same idealized brand of enlightened self-interest. The very successes of capitalism are proving to be its undoing, because the world was never intended to be homogenized.

The decade immediately ahead of us will certainly be one of profound and sweeping change. It is a good bet that widespread unemployment and economic collapse will soon bring the entire system to its hard-earned demise. But out of this apparent chaos, new things can replace the old, new ways of living can emerge which make more sense.

Foolishness and chaos lead to new forms. And new order. Closer to, probably, what the real order is. When you break down the old orders and the old forms and leave them broken and shattered, you suddenly find yourself in a new space with new forms and new order which are more like the way it is.

--Jerry Garcia

Anarchy is a dirty word in any political system because it conjures up images of headless chickens running around bleeding on everything. And yet anarchy is actually the way the world has worked since the Big Bang: there is no head, no boss. In nature all the earthly species coexist in a dynamic balance which automatically takes into account every tiny shift in the weather, solar wind, mutations, landslides, pollution, everything. Calling it the kingdom of nature overlooks the fact that it is structured from the bottom up, not from the top down. Everything is connected to everything else with an elegance and simplicity, and efficiency, which no human theory or computer program could ever hope to emulate, let alone control in a healthy way.

Anarchy means people organizing themselves in smaller groups, coming together in an ad hoc manner when something needs to be done, then disbanding when the work is done. Anarchy means that individual people will be answerable for their actions to other individual people, not to a faceless, bodiless legal structure which places itself about the interests and feelings of real people.

In the case of this nation and the world in the next couple decades, it is not so much that democracy or capitalism will be forcefully replaced by some other ideology; it is more that all such ideologies will fade from prominence as their supporting structures rust away.

But nature abhors a vacuum, so what might replace the way life is today? It is impossible to say beforehand with any degree of confidence what the next stages might be, but it is probably safe to say that different systems will evolve in different parts of the world and the country, systems dependent for their shape and texture primarily on what the people living there feel is important. Some will work better than others, but the ones that survive the unavoidable periods of chaos and adjustment will likely be those which respect life, which celebrate life's diversity, which learn to take what is and work with it in such a way that there will be as much left tomorrow as we found today, in short, those arrangements which learn to live and let live.

The point to remember is that you are an important ingredient in this world and in the ultimate directions it takes. Nobody can bring to it what you can bring to it, nobody else can do what you alone were born to do. Everything you say, think, and do matters, because everything is connected to you. You don't have to be in public office or the head of a company to play a meaningful role in the coming decades; being who you really are is the most powerful thing you can do to change the world.

The best way to assist the growth of peace and happiness in the world is to nurture these things within your own being, to realize that you are not the role but the actor who is playing that role, to realize that the consciousness at the very core of you is also the consciousness which is at the core of everyone and everything in existence. Your neighbor and your enemy are not your neighbor or enemy. In the immortal words of Pogo:

We have met the enemy, and he is us.

--Walt Kelly

We humans are already our own worst enemies; we have learned to doubt the divine inspiration which is our very being, we have learned to fragment ourselves into conflicting camps, both socially and personally. We have done these things because we have believed the promises of people who claim to be closer to the truth than we are, thereby deepening the supposed rift between ourselves and the world.

There are two kinds of people in the world: those who believe there are two kinds of people in the world, and those who don't.

--Anon.

There is a schism emerging between people with basically conflicting ideas about what life is about, a schism which will become all the more pronounced as time goes on. One camp will be composed of people who still hold the traditional views that the ego is real, that God, if there is

such a thing, is somewhere else, and that the world is intended to be ruled over by man. These are the people who divide life into pieces, then insist that some of the pieces are better than others.

The other camp, the one which is emerging like the Phoenix from the ashes of civilization, is comprised of people who are learning how to listen to their being, who are learning that mankind is no better and no worse than any other expression of the infinite, and that our horizons are only as limited as our minds. These are the people who see the unity underlying diversity, who refuse to judge others, who have learned that this is all one.

It is very likely that these two camps will find themselves coexisting in and amongst each other, but also that the limitations presumed by the one will not necessarily apply to the other. Or perhaps the breakdown of society will result in a low-level civil war lasting decades as the proponents of ownership and social privilege seek to subjugate others in an attempt to reassert the mistakes which have brought mankind to this brink.

I suspect, however, that this new beginning will be ushered in by the accompanying emergence of a harmony and connectedness which is too strong, too flexible, too allowing to be overcome any longer by the old ways of thinking. Disease will be more a function of one's own mental state than of local physical pathogens, happiness will be more a matter of resonance and celebration than of the pursuit of some materialistic or power-dependent existence, and peace will be more than just the present absence of armed conflict.

Nobody can tell you about the part you will ultimately play over the next decades; you yourself may not understand what you were doing until your life is nearly over. That may have been important in the old concept of meaning and purpose in life, but it is merely incidental in the new. The way to live your life, the job you are here to do, these are already the case, just as certainly as the fruit is in the seed; all that's necessary is that you give yourself the freedom to awaken to them.

There is nothing like living when you're not living with a direction, but just enjoying the glory of the moment.

--Joseph Campbell

If this celebratory mode of life is not the future of man, then there is not likely to be much of a future. We are entering a new phase of earth life, a step as profound and far-reaching as the taming of fire or the invention of agriculture. Human life will change with equal profundity as more and more people are forced, or led, by their own circumstances to find out who they really are.

Whether or not humans survive means very little to the ultimate health of the universe, but this realization makes our own happiness and the happiness of our loved ones no less important to

us. We are here in these forms to learn what these forms, and their many interactions with each other and the world, can teach us. Earth is really a magical workshop in which we learn happiness and delight in the mere fact of existence, celebrating the beauty and vitality of earthly expression. The result of all of this experimenting is that we have the opportunity to learn that our happiness does not depend on someone else . . . it is up to us to cultivate the gardens of our consciousness with seeds of the plants we like, not growing fear and hatred and suspicion just because someone gave us the seeds for them.

You are the keeper of your own mind and heart; nothing can grow there without your agreement and assistance. If you find things growing there which are not pleasant, stop nurturing them. You can't always pull the weeds out by the roots without running the risk of damaging a plant you like, but then, that isn't necessary. When you give your attention to something, you are nurturing it; when you withdraw your attention from it, it will still live for a while, pleading with you to attend to it. That's habitual. If you don't like it, don't think about it. It will eventually fade.

The coming months and years will require drastic change in the ways we live our lives. Don't be afraid of the changes, but welcome them with the same innocence as that with which you watched your first rainbow or thunderstorm. Life is infinite, and you are Life.

We are shifting paradigms in the world today, and you are not here in this time in this body by accident. You are needed just as surely as the sunlight and the rain. Be who you already are, and let the magic begin.

The End of the Beginning