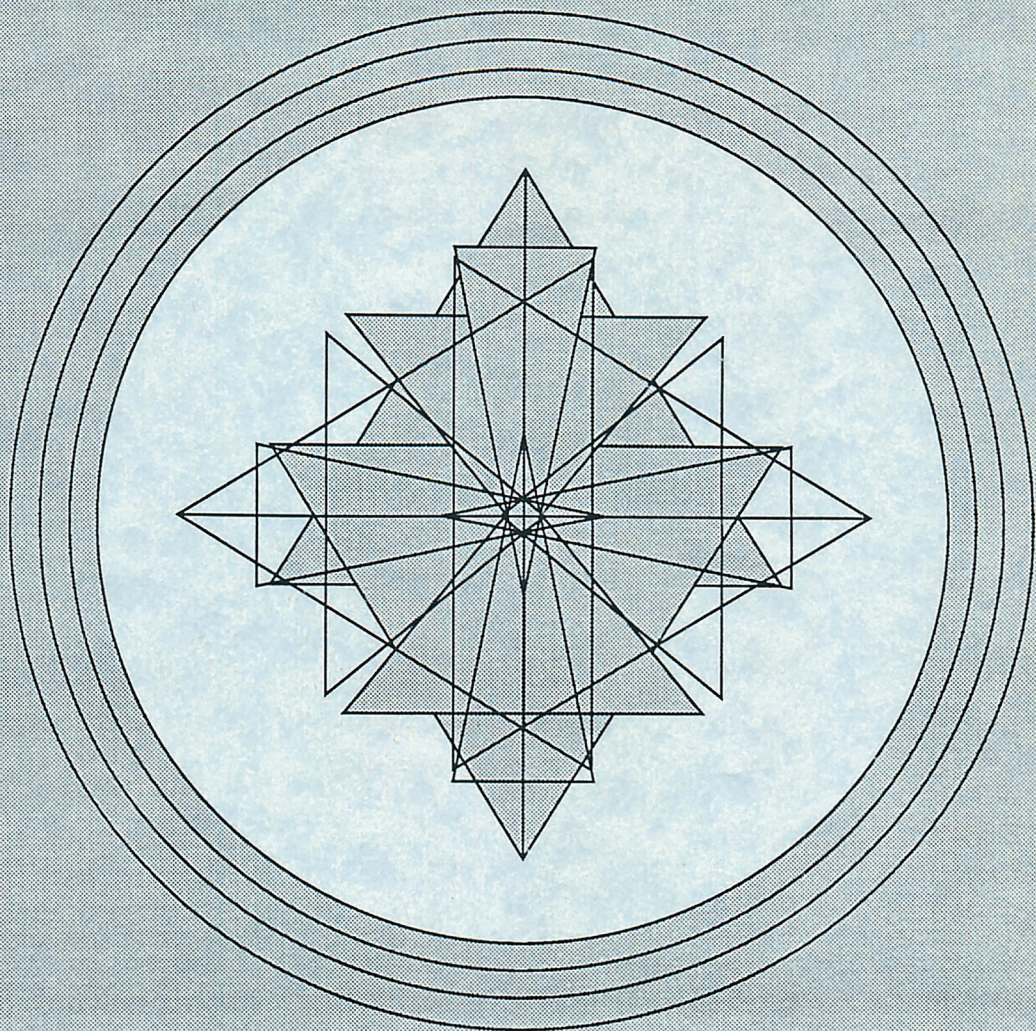




Eastern Philosophy for Western Minds

A Search for the Jewel in the Lotus

Craig Fletcher

Preface

I have spent most of my professional career working as a physics teacher at Polytechnic School in Pasadena, California. That, in and of itself, has been an honor. An additional honor was graciously bestowed on me by the class of 2023-24 when they gave me that year's Teacher Appreciation Award. One of the duties that goes along with receiving that award is the opportunity to speak at the class of 2024-25's year-end dinner. I am pointing all of this out because for that event, I created two speeches. (I talked about this in Chapter 54 of my autobiography.) The speech I didn't give had a nice summary of the origin of the E.Phil class from whence this book came. You will find that summary below

I arrived at Poly in 1978 to teach physics to seniors. Ten years earlier, the Beatles had gone to India to meet with a guru named Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. They exited that visit after he made a pass at one of the women in their entourage, suggesting he wasn't the spiritual teacher he purported to be. Nevertheless, this was a time when there was an enormous explosion of interest in the eastern philosophies in the western world and, specifically, on college campuses.

When I got to Poly, I was completely unprepared for what I found. Yes, the seniors I dealt with were smart and motivated, but they were also genuinely nice human beings. I was fully aware that they would be going to college that next year, and that they would find themselves in the middle of that explosion. Because I knew that some of the meditative practices that were being pushed on campuses at the time were dangerous, I was worried about their safety. They would be arriving with absolutely no background in eastern thought, and I didn't want to see them harmed.

My solution was to take an hour a week, every week, to sit down with whichever seniors were interested, and talk about some aspect of the eastern philosophies and their metaphysical underpinnings. I tried to build for them a framework from which they could view and understand those philosophies and, along the way, life. I wasn't trying to convince them that a particular view was better than any

other. I was just providing information (mini-classes like those carried no academic credit and were called "activities"). I talked about meditation. I talked about gurus, both the reputable ones and not-so-reputable ones. I talk about *avatars*, which is the Sanskrit word for world teachers. I talked about the animal kingdom and our younger brothers, and about the plant kingdom and the devic world. I talked about death. I talked about the after-death states and *devachan*, which is the Sanskrit word for *heaven states*. I talked about thoughtforms and *the inner worlds*. I talked about what a human being is, and why we are here. I talk about why the religions of the world seem to be so different, given that each claims to reflect the reality of this place. I talk about the principle of *once human, always human*, and about reincarnation and karma *in that light*. I talked about human relationships.

In short, I talked about everything imaginable, all from an eastern perspective. I did this for twenty-five years. Each year, around half the senior class would participate. That means that when I ended the run, somewhere around a thousand Poly alums had participated in the activity.

At some point during the twenty-five years the activity was offered, I began having students agitate for something they could take with them when they left Poly and went to college. They understood the presentation of information was pretty much novel to me, and they realized there weren't books *out there* that framed the ideas as I had. That request was what motivated me to write this book.

The writing was spectacularly low tech. For an entire year, I would position a tape record in the middle of our circle to record what I had to say during a given meeting. That next week, I would transcribe the tape, clean up the language, sometime add little bits and pieces of information I hadn't had time to discuss, and make that one chapter of the book. In other words, what you have in this book is a relatively accurate display of all I talked about during an entire year of gatherings. It was written for my students (the book cost the students what it took to make the book--I made no money on the proposition), though I did have adults read it (one of our history teachers who had a degree from Fuller Seminary, and the CFO of our school, for two) who seemed to find it worthwhile. I hope you also find it of use.

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Chapter 1

ONCE UPON A TIME . . .

He who would be what he ought to be must stop being what he is.

Eckhart

(from Meister Eckhart by Franz Pfeiffer—1857)

The best way to start is to start. We'll begin with a story.

Around 600 years before the time of Christ in a small, mountainous region lived a king who was not particularly powerful in relationship to his neighbors, but he was an honest, fair, kindly man. In his early years, his greatest source of worry was the fact that he had no heir, so you can imagine his elation when he found that his youngest wife was pregnant. All the signs pointed toward a son, and when the time came, to his great relief, the child turned out to be a fine, healthy boy.

As was the custom, the tiny prince was formally presented to the realm in a short ceremony. People came from all over the kingdom to pay homage to the king's first-born son, and with them was a gray haired saint named Asita. They say that when the saint saw the child, he bowed low and was visibly shaken. The watchful king was hardly expecting such a reaction from so venerable and honored an individual, so with respect but no little trepidation he stopped the saint as he was leaving and asked, "Why have you acted this way? Is there something the matter? What do you see?"

"There is nothing to fear," replied the old man. "I am sorry my life is so near its end. I would like to have seen in which direction the prince will go."

"I don't understand?" protested the king.

"This child will grow up to be one of two things," continued the saint.

“He will either become a great leader of men or he will become a great teacher of souls—a holy man.”

Becoming anxious, the king demanded, “What will determine the path taken?”

“If the prince sees *disease*, *old age* and *death* before he comes of age, he will take the spiritual path. If he sees none of these things, he will follow in your footsteps and become king with your death,” was the answer.

The king was horrified. Holy men were accepted and honored within the culture of the land, but they were usually ascetics who had renounced the world. They often lived their lives in the seclusion of mountain caves. The king needed a son, an heir, someone to follow him and take up the reins of leadership when his time came to step across the line into the other worlds. So in desperation, the king decided then and there he had to insure his son’s choice; he had to guarantee the prince never came in contact with *disease*, *old age* and *death* before he matured.

The king’s plan was simple. He began by creating a world for his son that was so pleasurable, so enchanting and wonderful, that only a madman would ever want to leave it. A luxurious palace—a small city unto itself—was built. Inside those walls, the prince’s every want was satisfied. His days were happy; his companions were young, bright, entertaining, full of life. The young royal grew up in a nurturing atmosphere completely unfettered by the pressures and tensions of the outside world. It was the perfect fantasy; there was nothing imaginable in the way of possessions or earthly expectations that could have made the prince’s earlier years more contented.

Still, there *was* one privilege he was not afforded. Under no circumstance was the prince allowed to travel outside the walls of the palaces. In that way, his father’s watchful eye and careful planning never allowed the prince to come into contact with *disease*, *old age* or *death* during his younger years. Sadly, that didn’t last with time for as the prince became older, he became more and more interested in knowing about the outside world. “After all,” he reasoned, “If I am to be king some day, I need to know about my people.”

Arguments followed—first little ones, then big ones. It was so silly, thought the prince. Why can’t I go outside the palace? The king was definitely on the spot. He couldn’t explain the reasons behind the ban, but neither did he dare lift it. So in desperation, he called a meeting of his closest advisors and asked for suggestions. At the meeting, one of the

more worldly of the group suggested, “How better to snare the heart and clip the wings of a man than through the love of a woman. The prince needs a wife!”

It was brilliant—a bit sexist, but brilliant nonetheless. The search began immediately. The king required a noble-born woman, one of beauty, modesty, virtue, culture, kindness. And, lo and behold, he found her—a princess of such grace and beauty that upon meeting, the prince’s heart was hers. Having fallen deeply in love, they married and within the first year she bore the prince a son.

With the change in situation, the king began to feel more secure. And when the prince next asked his father for permission to tour the city, the king granted his son’s request. Still, the king was no fool—he wanted no part of the holy man’s prophesy. So a few days before the big event troops were sent to scour the city and remove the old and infirmed to the countryside.

On the appointed day, the streets were gaily decorated. Young, healthy, happy people lined the route as the prince left the palace for the first time and rode in his great chariot through the city. All went well until out of the crowd, seemingly from nowhere, stepped a leper, all distorted and scarred and consumed with hunger. Hollow eyed, emaciated with bulging stomach, he stood before the chariot to the horror of all. The prince turned to his trusted charioteer and demanded to know what he was seeing. And although the charioteer knew of the prophecy and didn’t want to say, he had no choice but to explain *disease* to his master.

Bewildered, the prince demanded to be taken back to the palace. He brooded for days, but he finally came out of his depression with clear resolve. He wanted to see more of the outside world . . . he wanted to visit the city again.

The king was understandably beside himself throughout the episode and quite displeased with his son’s reinvigorated desire to go exploring once again. Unfortunately, the king’s ministers believed it would do grievous psychological damage to the prince if he were denied. So under duress, the king relented.

Just as before, the troops scoured the city for days before the prince’s sojourn. When the prince rode his chariot through the gates for the second time, there were only beautiful people waiting for him just as before. And just as before, the trip went well until, as if out of thin air, there stepped what looked like a century-old man. The entourage stopped as the prince stared. “What is this?” he demanded.

It was then that he learned of *old age*.

The second revelation upset the prince even more than the first. Back to the palace he went, deeply depressed. He stayed that way for months. He ate little; he slept little. There were long periods when he would go into deep meditation, ignoring his wife and child and all the luxuries around him. His health declined and he became progressively more obsessed with the state of affairs outside the walls. He wanted to see more; he wanted to know more; he wanted another trip into the city.

It surely was no surprise that the king refused. He loved his son and he could see the sincerity of his son's desire, but he deeply feared his son's loss. In the end, it was the prince's wife who interceded. She, too, was deathly afraid of losing her beloved husband, but she saw no alternative. "He is in such a depression," she said. "If you don't do something soon, I fear he will die."

The king realized there was only one way he would be able to keep his son. He had to face the fates. If he let the prince go into the city one more time, and if he could beat the prophesy during that trip, his son would be his. It was a gamble, but the king knew he had no other choice.

As could be expected, the preparation before departure was feverish. The day came; the journey began. Within a few hundred yards of the great gate a young lad stepped out from the crowd, clutched his throat in agony and proceeded to die right there on the spot. The charioteer struck his forehead with his palm, invoking the age-old gesture that says, "I don't believe this is happening," and the prince learned that day about the last of the three scourges named in the prophesy. That day he came to see *death*.

The prince returned to the palace, not so much in shock as had been the case before, but more in deep thought. He considered the encapsulated world in which he had grown up, all the luxury and happiness and lack of anything, and he began to see what an illusion it all was. Everything would some day change—his beloved wife and child would grow old, possibly become sick, and at some time would die. And it wasn't just his world that was so threatened. It was in the same for everybody. The more he thought, the more he wondered: How can I continue to mindlessly live in this world of luxury and fantasy when I know that all around me is pain? For the sake of his loving wife and son, his family, his people, for all mankind, he decided he had to learn the cause of *pain*, *suffering* and *sorrow*, and he had to find a path that would lead to the cessation of those terrible specters.

The guards at the gate were doubled and the alert was on: the prince was not to be allowed to leave the palace. Yet the die was cast. On the

night of his departure, the prince tenderly kissed his sleeping wife and child. He and his charioteer then carefully made their way to the south gate where, mysteriously, the guards had all fallen fast asleep. The two opened the huge door—a gate that normally thundered when moved. It swung effortlessly and without a sound that night . . . or, at least, so the story goes.

The prince and his charioteer rode deep into the countryside before stopping. Once there, the prince got down from the chariot, removed his fine clothes, and put on the attire of a beggar. After an emotional farewell, he alone went by foot into the forest and far away from his father's domain.

As a conventional mendicant, the prince's presence was notable. He began his search by visiting a local guru. His question was simple: "What is the cause of suffering, and what is the path to the cessation of pain and sorrow?" He mastered the ideas of that first teacher in no more than a few days and, seeing the old saint had no real answer, moved on. The prince visited guru after guru. None of the venerable sages had a complete answer for him. With time, he came to realize that if the answer was anywhere, he would have to find it on his own, so he took up the path of asceticism.

His regimen was severe—only a few grains of rice per day for the body and seclusion and endless meditation on his state of being for the soul. So harsh was his discipline that other ascetics came from all parts just to watch and marvel from afar. After five years of this, just about the time his body was ready to succumb, the prince came to realize that even the path of total self-denial was not taking him where he wanted to go. He broke off the effort and crawled up to a nearby road where a milkmaid found him and, taking pity upon him, fed him.

The prince lived. He strengthened himself and, when he was finally able, did what he had come to know he had to do. He sat down in a comfortable, shaded spot, and went into deep meditation.

It is hard to know the kinds of things that went on in that meditation, but like Christ in the desert, it is believed that Temptation presented itself in every way possible. As Sir Edwin Arnold said in his book, *The Light of Asia*, "Mara (the personification of Temptation, also referred to as the Prince of Darkness) sent his mighty legions against (the teacher to be—our prince)."

As the story goes, the coalesced presence of Fear enshrouded the steady-minded prince and, having probed with all its might, fell away unable to find a foothold within the prince's Being. Then came the terrible

specter of Hatred, immense in its power and proportion having been fed by the thought-energy of every human who had ever exercised that most destructive of forces. No foothold did that terrible specter find.

Those having failed to shake the prince, others came, each in its turn: beguiling Pride, then Insecurity, Vanity, and Arrogance; the Sin of Self—"the 'I' that sees only itself" (Arnold); Self Righteousness and its brother, Self-Righteous Anger; Doubt. They all came, each searching for that one unclean motive through which it could attach . . . all failing.

Last came—Kama—the king of Passion:

. . . and round him (the prince) came into that lonely place bands of bright shapes", says Arnold, "with heavenly eyes and lips singing in lovely words and praise of Love to music of invisible sweet chords, . . . for who hath grieved when soft arms shut him safe, and all life melted to a happy sigh, and all the world was given in one warm kiss? . . . Yet nothing moved the mind of our prince. (Arnold)

It is said that only after all else had failed, Mara presented the prince's lovely wife who came with tears in her eyes, pleading that her love might give up his impossible task and return to her lonely arms. But the prince saw that in returning, he would give up the one and only gift that was worthy of her, the understanding of the cause of suffering and the path to the cessation of pain. He stood firm in his effort and the figure vanished.

Once Mara was defeated and his legions had fled the meditation, the prince came into insights that were quite beyond the perceptions of this small universe.

(He) saw those Lords of Light who hold their worlds by bonds invisible, how they themselves circle obediently round mightier orbs which serve profounder splendor . . . Depths and heights he passed transported through the blue infinitudes, marking—behind all modes, above all spheres, beyond the burning impulse of each orb—that fixed decree at silent work which wills evolved by wordless edict the darkness to light . . . the dead to life to fullness void . . . Having none to bid, none to forbid, this is past all gods immutable, unspeakable, supreme, a Power which builds, unbuilds, and builds again, ruling all things accordant to the rule of virtue, which is beauty, truth, and use . . . (Arnold).

Becoming *One with the Mind of God* is the way some might put it. But however you say it, the prince went to the heart of All and found the answer to his question. He saw the source of pain and suffering, and he came to know the path to its cessation.

The last temptation Mara put in the way of that enlightened one was quite straightforward. “You are a fool if you go into the world and teach,” Mara said. “Humanity is low. Men are wrapped up in their own little worlds. They will never understand the depth of what you have seen. Don’t waste your time. Go and enter the bliss of nirvana. You have earned the right . . . take it!”

Indeed, there was nothing between the prince and the gates of nirvana . . . the enlightened one had won the right to merge with the All, the Mind of God. But as his insight sounded the personal minds of men, our prince saw once more the need that was there. So in the deepest of compassion, he said, “I will teach. Let those who can understand, understand.” With that, Mara’s vanquishment was complete and the Enlightened One proceeded down the road to the Deer Park in Sarnath—outside of Benares—where he gave his first sermon.

The man’s name?

In the West, we call him *the Buddha*.

The word *Buddha* is not really a name. It is a title much like the Greek word *Christos* from which we get the title Christ. Both are generic terms used to honor those who have achieved a particularly advanced state of spiritual awareness.¹ If the traditions that exist within the East are correct, the world has seen many Buddhas . . . Jesus among them.

Siddhartha Gautama was born in his father’s kingdom at the base of the Himalayas in India around 600 BC. Only seventeen words were written about him at the time of his life . . . a simple notation about the birth of a prince. His teachings were originally passed down from teacher to student by word of mouth but were later put into written form (*The Chataka Tales*, for instance, are stories about Siddhartha’s earlier lives; the *Dhammapada* is a collection of the attributed sayings of the Buddha, etc.). The Buddha, Siddhartha, held the energies of an Avatar² for thirty years. His work was amongst a people who, though not saints, had a tradition of

¹ Technically, the word *Christos* translates as “the anointed”.

² The Sanskrit word *Avatar* means “world teacher.”

meditative contemplation and a deep reverence for the holy man. His presence was not construed as a sign from God that his people were somehow chosen to be above others; neither was it believed to have political significance—to be a sign that it was time to throw off the bonds of a conqueror as was believed to be the case with the Jewish Messiah. To his followers, the Buddha's presence was accepted simply as an opportunity to grow and evolve spiritually.

His message was centered on the cause of pain and suffering and the path to the cessation of pain and suffering.

The hope is that in reading the story of the Buddha you will have gained a more sympathetic feel for the motives that underlay the Buddha's efforts along with a deeper insight into the origins of modern-day Buddhist beliefs.

More important, if the Buddha saw to the heart of suffering and sorrow, and if he understood the path to the cessation of suffering and sorrow, the question arises: What did he say about those things?

It would certainly be easy enough to give you the skeleton of those teachings. I could, for instance, present what the Buddha called *the Four Truths*. The problem is that if I did, they could easily seem cold and harsh. Why? Because westerners don't generally have the cultural, historic, and philosophic background needed to really understand what his words were meant to convey.

In short, the teachings of the Buddha are extremely benevolent—they just don't seem so from a Western perspective. And therein lies the problem. To be able to truly understand the teachings of the Buddha, not to mention all the other exotic Eastern topics that have come into the West in the last few hundred years, one needs bits and pieces of information upon which to build a perspective from which one *can* understand the East. Our next five or six gatherings will be dedicated to providing that information.

Chapter 2

A NIP HERE, A TUCK THERE

Religion is the path to God, but a path is not a house.

*Ramakrishna
(from the book The Life of Ramakrishna
by Romain Rolland—1947)*

A chapter of preliminaries:

Why are the Eastern philosophies so different from Western religion? That is, if the Buddha really saw to the heart of reality, why was his message so different from the teachings of Christ—another individual who is believed to have seen to the heart of reality.

Aside from the possibility that one or both were wrong, there are some interesting possible answers to that query. The following stories will highlight a few of those possibilities:

I met a fellow in the mid-seventies who had spent two years of his earlier life doing missionary work in India. He knew I was interested in Eastern philosophy and we talked about it occasionally. Fairly early on, I found he had an absolutely terrible dislike for the Hindu faith. In pressing him on the matter, he told me the following story.

It seems that while in India, he acquired the habit of taking early morning walks. One day he came over the crest of a small hill just in time to see a child being swept down river in the Ganges below. There was an apparent holy man sitting on the edge of the river. The old man had come out of his reverie to notice the flailing child, but as the young girl washed passed he made no move to help. Appalled, the missionary raced down the

hill, dove into the water and saved the child.

Having returned the youngster to her village upstream, the missionary went looking for the mendicant. Finding the man still sitting in the same spot, the missionary angrily inquired, “How can you just sit there while that poor child was screaming for help, and don’t say you didn’t see her. You were going to let her drown . . . WHAT’S THE MATTER WITH YOU?”

The mendicant seemed unmoved. He simply replied, “It was the child’s karma to be in the situation she was in. It was not my right to interfere with her karma.”¹

From that single incident, my missionary friend’s perceptions of India and its people were completely blackened. He came away believing that Hindus were cold and unfeeling, that they had no respect for life, and that they adhered to a truly barbaric concept—the Law of Karma.

It was obvious at the time that my friend didn’t really understand the ideas behind karma. Even more unfortunate, the old fellow sitting on the bank evidently didn’t understand them either.

In its original form, karma was never meant to be used as a rationale for doing nothing in the face of another’s distress. In ancient times, it was called *the teaching law*—a universal mechanism devised by the Divine Mind (God) to insure that evolving consciousnesses like your self and my self might be afforded the possibility of experiencing and choosing and, from the consequences of those choices, might learn and grow in a spiritual sense. The old man was right (at least from an Eastern perspective); it was karmically appropriate for the child to be in the situation in which she found herself. But it was also karmically appropriate for the old man to be in a situation in which he could help. That fact he chose to ignore.

There *are* modern-day Indians who teach their children the *ancient* beliefs concerning karma. The problem? That isn’t the norm. Most contemporary Hindus view karma as did the old man.

Why are we discussing this? Because it is an excellent example of a situation in which a perfectly sensible doctrine has, over time, been *unintentionally changed* from its original form as followers have attempted to deal with the doctrine while additionally dealing with the vagaries of life. It’s an example of *doctrinal change* over centuries due to emotional and

¹ Briefly, the Law of Karma states that one’s actions will always elicit from the universe a response that is appropriate, given the motives that animated those actions. In the case of our story, the fellow on the bank was essentially saying that the child must have made choices and taken actions at some earlier time the consequences of which put her in the situation in which she found herself that day.

psychological attrition.

Doctrines change in other ways. Consider, for example, the history of the practice of *suttee*.

Suttee was the practice of burning the widow of a deceased Hindu man on the man's funeral pyre. It was a tradition that had been in India for centuries before the English arrived, being honored as a religious rite by the freely accepting participants.² The British were scandalized over the practice, concluding that it was just one more barbaric ritual performed by the Hindus, and they set about to stop it. In her book, *Caves and Jungles of Hindustan*, a Russian noblewoman traveling in India just before the turn of the century commented on the problem and the British solution. The woman, H.P. Blavasky (an interesting character who has been much maligned for all sorts of reasons), said this (pg. 260):

The story of how Professor Horace H. Wilson caught the Brahmanas distorting the text of the *Vedas* and practicing deception is most curious. For long centuries they cruelly burned the wretched widows, appealing for justification to a certain *hymn* of the *Rigveda*, and claiming to be rigidly fulfilling the institutes of Manu, the interpreter of their revelation. When the British government first declared its intention to suppress the burning of widows, the whole country, from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas, rose in protest under the influence of the Brahmanas. "The English promised to uphold the policy of non-interference in our religious affairs, and they must keep their word," was the general outcry. Never was India so near revolution as in those days. The English, seeing that things were bad, did nothing. But Wilson, the best Sanskritist of the day (the *Vedas* were written in Sanskrit), did not consider the battle lost. He searched the most ancient manuscripts (manuscripts that until the arrival of the British were only accessible to the Brahmanas), until he became convinced that the alleged precept did not exist anywhere in the *Vedas*, though in the *Laws of Manu*,

² You might think it hard to believe that women would willingly follow such a practice, but it is not at all unusual for people under societal pressure and religious fundamentalism to be maneuvered into doing things that would seem from a distant observer unthinkable. Example: There is no way you would have gotten me up in a kamikaze plane during World War II, but Japanese pilots did it willingly.

the infallible interpreter of the “revelation,” it seemed to stand out clearly as translated accordingly by H. T. Colebrooke and other Orientalists. The affair was becoming embarrassing. An effort to prove that Manu’s interpretation was wrong would have been tantamount, in view of popular fanaticism, to attempting to reduce water to powder. So Wilson set himself to study *Manu*, comparing the text of the *Vedas* with the text of the lawgiver. And this was the result of his labor: the *Rigveda* orders the Brahmana to place the widow side by side with the corpse, *before* the pyre is lighted, and then, after certain rites have been performed, *to lead her down from the funeral pyre* and loudly to sing to her the following verse from the *Rigveda* (X, 18,8):

Rise up, woman, come to the world of living beings, thou sleepest nigh unto the lifeless. Come; thou hast been associated with maternity through the husband by whom thy hand was formerly taken.

Then the women present at the burning rubbed their eyes with collyrium, and the Brahmana addressed to them the following verse (*Rigveda*, X, 18,7):

May these women (the widows), who are not widows, who have good husbands, who are mothers, enter with unguents and clarified butter: without tears, without sorrow, let them first go up into the dwelling.

It was precisely the last few words that were distorted by the Brahmanas in the most cunning and subtle manner. The original reads thus:

arohantu janayo yonimanger

which literally means: “first let the mothers enter into the womb of the altar” (*yonim agre*—within the altar). Changing one letter of the last word “*agre*,” which they altered to “*agneh*” (fire), the Brahmanas acquired the right for centuries on end to send the hapless Malabar widows into the *yonim agneh*—the “womb of fire”.

Not only did the *Vedas* never permit the burning of widows, there is even a passage in the *Taittiriya-Aranyaka* (VI, 10, 2) of the *Yajur-Veda* where the younger brother of the deceased, or his disciple, or even a trusted friend in case no other relative existed, addresses the widow in the following terms: “Arise, Oh woman! do not any longer lie beside the lifeless corpse; return to the world of the living, far from the deceased husband, and become the wife of the one who holds you by the hand . . . “

If Blavasky’s account was accurate, the Brahmanas had altered the doctrine *intentionally*. Why would they do such a thing? According to Blavasky, it was a clever way of eliminating two thorny problems (problems, at least, in the eyes of the Brahmanas) that arose upon a man’s death. Specifically, a widow was a societal inconvenience³ and, more important, a considerable portion of a family’s wealth went to the temples only after the widow herself died.

In short, *suttee* provided the priests with a mechanism to separate a widow from her wealth and, secondarily, to eliminate an individual who was deemed socially untouchable. In solving *the problem*, they managed to make Hinduism look completely inhuman.

Peripheral observation: One really does have to be careful not to make judgments about a philosophy or religion by looking at the way followers follow that belief system. If you look at *suttee*, or if you look at the way the fellow at the river’s edge wielded the idea of *karma*, in both cases you get the feeling that Hinduism is barbarous. The problem in both cases is that doctrines have been either intentionally or inadvertently twisted to such a degree that their altered form in no way reflects the attitudes and motives behind the original beliefs.

Shoe on the other foot: What would you conclude about Christ if all you had to go on was the way Christians followed Christ’s teachings. You may come to conclude that Christ was a very benevolent individual after learning about Mother Teresa and her administering to the sick and dying in Calcutta. On the other hand, you could conclude that Christ thought killing and warring was OK as long as the cause was righteous. Look at *the Spanish Inquisition*—Christians killing other Christians over doctrine;

³ An unmarried woman was considered as useful as a two-wheeled bullock cart with only one wheel. A *widow*, deemed unmarriageable and without any social standing whatsoever, was considered *beyond* useless.

the Crusades—Christians warring on and killing Moslems over real estate; the *Salem witch trials*—Christians killing just-plain-folk for believing in ways that didn't follow the standard Christian line; and the twentieth century fiasco in *Northern Ireland*—Christians of one sect killing Christians of another sect for political reasons.

Killing in the name of Christ is a complete denial of the teachings of the Prince of Peace, yet people who believe themselves “good Christians” have been doing it for over sixteen-hundred years.⁴

This is not to single out Christians. The problem is universal. You simply need to be aware that the problem exists.

So back to our original question. Does it seem strange that the Buddha's teachings and Christ's teachings seem so different, given the fact that both are credited with seeing to the heart of reality?

The answer to that is *no*. In fact, the teachings of Christ and the Buddha may have been closer to one another than you have ever dreamed.

These are obviously fighting words for many Christians, but consider the thinking before taking a stand: Each of the ancient traditions were tailored to the people they served. The Buddha, for instance, dealt with a people who already revered the idea of *mankind treading a spiritual path*. As a consequence, they had a deeply meditative tradition. Certainly, India had its warriors, but by-and-large the people the Buddha worked with were quietly peaceful.

Christ dealt with a people who certainly had a tradition of wisdom, but who were not at all happy about the situation in which they found themselves. The Jews of Christ's time were angry and frustrated, having for hundreds of years endured internal strife and the bondage that comes with being a conquered people. Pontius Pilate was, if you will remember, a Roman *military* governor.

The tone of the Buddha's teachings, given the philosophic predisposition of his audience, would hardly have been appropriate for the fiery, intellectual Jews that Christ inherited. But does that mean that the two

⁴ I remember going to church when I was young, listening to the sermon entitled *Love Your Neighbor*, then leaving the church only to find that a fight had broken out between two of the parishioners in the parking lot because the owner of one car had parked in such a way as to partially block the other's car. These two muscle-heads had listened attentively for an hour to nice church talk about compassion and love and peace, and thirty-seconds after stepping out the door were ready to kill one another.

The way one animates one's *philosophy of life* or *religion* in everyday life is not necessarily indicative of the way the philosophy was originally intended to be followed.

Teachers necessarily saw different truths?

Absolutely not. It means the Hindus the Buddha came to serve were not the Jews for whom Christ came.

Of course, people still look at the teachings of Christianity and Buddhism and say, “No way close!”

Why? For one reason, even if Christ had *not* been the *only son of God* but rather *one of the many* world teachers that have come to serve mankind, such a highly evolved Being would certainly have had *something* to say about *reincarnation* if it had been a reality. But he didn’t.

. . . Or did he?

What do you know about Jesus Christ?

If you are a Christian you probably learned about your religion in the same way I did, from attending that most dreaded of institutions . . . Sunday school. I remember the experience well. Every Sunday morning I’d grudgingly drag myself out of bed at the crack of dawn, put on my best suit and trundle off to religion class.

What I learned there was relatively straightforward: the *Bible* is the word of God, having been written by divinely inspired men; Jesus Christ is the only son of God; only through Christ can anyone enter the kingdom of heaven; He (Christ) was born of virgin birth, did miracles to manifest his divinity, and died on the cross for you and me (having come to *take away the sins of the world*).

The information was all nicely presented over the years by a number of kindly old gentlemen, complete with prayer and hymn. They gave the best they knew, and due to their deep beliefs and convictions we students accepted the teachings as . . . well, gospel truth. Unfortunately, what they never bothered to give us was any sense of church history—I had to dig that out later.

When I finally did, I was amazed. In a doctrinal sense, all hell was breaking loose within the church during its formative years between 200 and 500 AD, and one of the many free-for-alls had to do with whether Christ taught about *after-death states* and *reincarnation*.

Case in point: In Head and Cranston’s *Reincarnation, the Phoenix Fire Mystery*, the following was said about one of the early church fathers, a man named Origen:

Origen was “the most distinguished and most influen-

tial of all the theologians of the ancient church, with the possible exception of Augustine,” writes the noted German theologian Adolf Harnack in his article on Origen in the *Britannica*. “He is the father of the church’s science; he is the founder of a theology which was brought to perfection in the fourth and fifth centuries, and which still retained the stamp of his genius when in the sixth century (the church) disowned its author.” At one time Saint Jerome considered Origen “the greatest teacher of the Church after the apostles,” while Saint Gregory of Nyssa called him “the prince of Christian learning in the third century.”

Why was this “prince of Christian learning” excommunicated two hundred years after his death? Among other reasons, because he taught that *reincarnation* was a part of Christ’s teachings.

“But that’s ridiculous,” most would say. “Nowhere in the Bible does Christ say anything *about* reincarnation.”

Surprisingly, that is not surprising. The Bible was originally nothing more than a set of manuscripts written about Christ anywhere from fifty to two-hundred years after His death. They recounted His teachings and His life, and they were written by people who never knew Christ personally.

The church, governed by a priesthood that didn’t at all like the idea of reincarnation, was the keeper of all those manuscripts. In a number of instances between 400 and 600 AD, it is known that they removed and destroyed all of what were called “heretical writings”—which is to say, any text that did not conform to the church’s version of the gospel.⁵ It is quite conceivable that if there *had* been writings connecting Christ and reincarnation in the Bible, they would have been removed at that time.

Yet even with all the church’s efforts at editing, there still seem to be echoes of the idea of reincarnation in today’s *Bible*. The most often quoted verse comes from John, IX: 1,2:

As he (Christ) passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked Christ, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

If the man was blind at birth and the blindness was due to his own sins, then the man had to have had a previous life in which to have commit-

⁵ See Head and Cranston’s Reincarnation, The Phoenix Fire Mystery.

ted that sin. Christ's disciples were clearly alluding to reincarnation, yet Christ did not squash the idea with his reply⁶—something you might have expected if the possibility had been totally out of the question.

There are a few other quotes to be found: books like Manly Hall's Reincarnation, and Head and Cranston's Reincarnation, the Phoenix Fire Mystery, do an excellent job of quoting and discussing them.

But where you really find the teachings of Christ associated with reincarnation is in the writings of the Gnostics. They were said to be in possession of the mysteries of Christianity, alluded to in Mark IV: 11, where it says:

Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parable.

And in Mark IV: 33,34:

With many such parables he spoke the word to them (the populous), as they were able to hear it; . . . but privately, to his own disciples he explained everything.

As Head and Cranston query, "In the New Testament we have the parables, but what happened to the inner teachings?"

The Gnostics, "possessed of a Gnosis (knowledge) superior to the simple faith of the multitudes," as Smith and Wace put it in their Dictionary of Christian Biographies, are believed by many to have been the guardians of those teachings. Yet where do we find the *Gospel of Thomas*; the *Gospel of Philip*; the *Gospel of Truth*; the *Gospel of Mary*; The *Pistis Sophia*; or the *Apocryphon of John*? These were all Gnostic writings dating from the second century AD, and they all spoke of the teachings of Christ. But with the exception of a few scraps found here and there in history, those texts were not available until the mid 1940's when a large earthen pot containing leather bound Gnostic manuscripts was found near the town of Nag Hamadi in the Egyptian desert. Those manuscripts have considerably changed some scholars' views about the authenticity and role of Gnostic beliefs in early Christianity.

Why weren't these manuscripts available to the world before the

⁶ If you read on: . . . *before Christ gave the blind man his sight back, he said, "It is not that this man has sinned ..., but that the works of God might be made manifest in him ..."* That response in no way diminishes the disciple's original allusion to reincarnation.

twentieth century? Because the early church had labeled Gnostic writings heretical and, as such, had ordered every Gnostic manuscript it could lay its collective hands on burned.

And what have scholars been able to deduce about the Gnostics' view of Christ from the Nag Hamadi scrolls? On November 18, 1989, the Religion section of the *Los Angeles Times* newspaper ran an article titled SCHOLARS PUZZLE OVER JESUS THE PROPHET AND JESUS THE SAGE. Excerpts follow:

RESEARCH: Claremont Graduate School professor says that Jesus was originally viewed as a teacher, not as the Messiah. That title, and others equating Jesus with divinity, came later, James M. Robinson says.

A leading biblical scholar says the oldest sources for the Jesus movement in the Holy Land portray Jesus as a teacher of divine wisdom—not as a foreboding figure with titles of divinity himself . . .

. . . Robinson has emphasized in recent lectures that the New Testament in its final form is a selective collection of Gentile-oriented books and letters written primarily in what is now Turkey and Greece. Relatively little was written in the Holy Land.

'The early Galilean beliefs tend to be lost in the New Testament because they are (obscured by) later apocalyptic views' . . .

. . . A persistent question nagging New Testament scholars is how much the authors and their religious communities cast Jesus according to their own expectations, putting words on his lips and adding titles of deification.

Jesus was "Christ" to the Apostle Paul, an early convert whose letters preserved in the New Testament date from the 50's. But nowhere in Q, written about the same time, does the title "Christ" appear, scholars say. Nor is Christ, or any other honorific name, used in the Gospel of Thomas."⁷

⁷ The following is more from the article: . . . Two sources have been increasingly valued by scholars like Robinson for what Jesus of Nazareth most likely said and how the first generation of believers spoke of him: the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas, unearthed in 1945, and a never-found collection of sayings which scholars call "Q" for *quelle*, the German word for source or origin.

The existence of Q has gradually won favor as the most logical explanation for the sim-

If Christian writers close to the time of Christ attributed to Jesus titles and qualities that he himself did not claim, imagine what the later church fathers might have been willing to do to bolster the church's standing amongst the faithful (read the following footnote *after* finishing this section).⁸

ilar sayings used by the Gospel of Matthew and Luke when writing episodes of a teaching Jesus, such as the "Sermon on the Mount." Otherwise, many scholars say, the two Gospels relied primarily on the Gospel of Mark to tell the story of Jesus' ministry, trials and crucifixion.

The discovery of Thomas, a compendium of sayings without an accompanying story, helped to persuade most scholars that Q is not a theoretical invention. Thomas' earlier version, some analysts say, probably appeared about AD 60, prior to the writings of the New Testament Gospels.

Thomas and Q have many of the same proverbs and parables, and "share the oldest layer of sayings attributed to Jesus," Robinson said.

... Contributing to the shifting views of the historical Jesus, the Q seminar (run for the last five years—a 30 member seminar on Q for the Society of Biblical Literature, the world's largest professional group of biblical scholars) reached a consensus that the sayings source went into at least two editions. In the first, the sage-like Jesus spins out aphorisms, including pithy critiques on conventional society and piety. In the second edition, additional sayings, many thought to have been put on Jesus's lips, portray him as the Son of God who laments unrighteousness in Israel and warns of future calamity. The scholars consider the first version to have a higher percentage of authentic sayings.

⁸ What is sad, and a wee bit frightening, is that the beliefs of many within the Christian world are based on Biblical translations that are inaccurate renderings of the original text. How could this be? There are all sorts of possibilities, but the King James version of the Bible, translated between 1604 and 1611, has a historical root. The work was done by a committee of fifty or so men of letters—deans, Bishops, priests, and scholars. There was nothing malicious in their efforts. In fact, many of the Biblical passages were translated by a number of different members. Each wrote his best translation; the most apparently accurate and poetic was chosen by the committee for entry. In other words, these translations were not pristine. The individuals who wrote them were undoubtedly moved by unconscious, preconceived notions accumulated from their own particular religious training. That said, it is likely that at least some of their errors, which were many, came as a consequence of their unfamiliarity with the colloquial and regional terminology of the first and second centuries AD—the period during which the Bible was written.

The consequences of this have been far reaching. For instance, there are a number of Christian sects that ardently believe that the end of the world is at hand. I personally know one young man who quit his aerospace job in the 1970's so that he could devote all his time to saving sinners before the cataclysm occurred. The genesis of that belief was found in Matthew 24:3-7:

3 And as He sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him privately saying, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"

4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, "Take heed that no man deceive you.

A shocking thought? Not really, especially when it comes to the idea of reincarnation. In fact, it is easy to empathize with the distress the church fathers felt over the Gnostic beliefs along those lines.

“Only through Christ can man reach God.” That was a not-yet established but definitely desired early church doctrine. Why? Because if the church was accepted as “the skin of Christ”—the intermediary between Christ and God’s children—anyone wanting to approach God would have to do so *through the church*. Things were bad enough, given the fact that God had not seen fit to inform three-quarters of the world’s population that the Christian church existed at all. How could the church possibly support its claim to the exclusive access to God if it admitted that a *Christian today* could be born a *Buddhist tomorrow*? Such a revelation would considerably diminish its influence over the acts of its flock, and that was a totally unacceptable scenario. And what of salvation and eternal heaven or hell?

In short, the church fathers weren’t stupid. They could see the danger of reincarnation, and they fought it successfully during the formative years

5 For many shall come in my name, saying I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

6 and ye shall hear of wars, and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

7 For nation shall rise before nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilence, and earthquakes in diverse places.”

That family’s rational was simple. “Right now,” we are seeing famines and pestilence, earthquakes and wars, and so the end must be upon us.

The problem with this is that according to modern Biblical scholars—individuals who are thoroughly familiar with the customs and even the Aramaic slang used during the time of Christ—the third line in the above texts is a mistranslation. Instead of reading, “the end of the world,” it should have read, “the consummation of the age.” I realize that the *consummation of the age*—the end of the age—could indeed mean *the end of the world*. But with the re-translation, another possibility arises.

Many of the Eastern views believe that the spiritual evolution of man is something that will take an enormous amount of time. As such, this evolution is often framed in terms of *ages*—great periods of time during which the tone of man’s spiritual progress is modulated in esoteric ways. If Jesus was speaking from that point of view, the *consummation of the age* would mean exactly what it implies—the end of one age from which will grow another.

Whether you agree or disagree with this “heresy” is unimportant. The point is that there is a segment of the American public that is absolutely sure that the end of the world is coming. In fact, their belief is so firmly rooted that one of their number, former Secretary of Interior (under Reagan) James Watt, was willing to instigate national policies that would recklessly squander America’s national resources without any thought of conservation for future generations. After all, he rationalized, why conserve when the end is imminent?

Whatever the case, it is interesting and important to note how profoundly their unintentional inaccuracies have affected the thinking of at least some modern-day Christians.

of Christian doctrine. But it is interesting to imagine what Christianity would be like today if the Gnostic belief had won out. In that case, you and I would live in a society where Christians accepted the concept of reincarnation as readily as they do the idea of the virgin birth. It would simply be an article of faith.

Did Christ so teach? Who knows? What is interesting is that if He did, one of the great stumbling blocks that currently lies between Christianity and the East would in reality be nothing more than an illusion contrived by early Christian leaders to solidify their claim that “only through Christ (and the Christian church) can one get to God.”

Chapter 3

A BIGGER PICTURE

I cannot imagine a God who rewards and punishes the object of Its creation, whose purposes are modeled after our own—a God, in short, who is but a reflection of human frailty.

*from Albert Einstein's obituary,
N.Y. Times, April 19, 1955*

My first trip to Europe was a delight for many reasons, but it held an additional, unexpected treat that wasn't on my itinerary. As my Rome-bound flight cruised at 35,000 feet through crystal clear skies over the Atlantic, I looked out my window at the horizon and was surprised to see *the earth's curvature*. It was ever so slight, but it was there . . . and it really surprised me.

Why? Because by extending the curve in my mind's eye, I could *feel* the enormity of the great circle that bounds our planet. In a very first-hand, personal way, I realized what most people only know intellectually: that in comparison to the six-foot high creatures that strut upon its surface, the earth is big.

After some time, my mind switched gears and I began to look at the situation from a whole new perspective. As amazing as the earth is, what with life practically screaming its presence out into the universe, the earth really is only a middling size planet, one of nine (now eight with Pluto's demotion) relatively minuscule chunks of *stuff* that orbit our star, the Sun.

Now the sun, that's big!

. . . sort of. It would take 110 earths to span the Sun's diameter, requiring over 700,000 earths to fill it. Yet as stars go, *it* isn't all that spectacular. For instance, the constellation Orion (the Warrior) has in its left shoulder a star named Betelgeuse. Betelgeuse is a red super-giant whose diameter varies over a three-year period from 400 to 600 times that of our sun. That means that if Betelgeuse were at the center of our solar system,

we'd be *inside it*. It's tough to believe, but our sun is really a pretty tiny star, just one of the approximately *two hundred-billion* (200,000,000,000) or so that reside within our galaxy, the Milky Way.

Now the Milky Way, that is big. It takes light traveling at 186,000



miles *per second* approximately 110,000 years to go from one side of the Milky Way to the other. But how *special* is it?

Well, . . . it isn't. The Milky Way is a normal size galaxy, just one in the *hundred-billion* galaxies that are in range of the Mt. Palomar telescope.¹

I do believe human life—all life for that matter—is wondrous, but as I hurtled toward my European adventure, I came to an unwitting conclusion: What we're really talking about when we discuss *mankind in relationship to the cosmos* is an itty bitsy creature that exists on an absolutely *minuscule bit of nothing* (the earth) that orbits a so-so size star (the Sun) that is one of the *approximately 200,000,000,000 stars* in a galaxy that is one of the *100,000,000,000 galaxies* that we know exist.

Having made those observations:

—Does it make sense to expect a Creator with the wherewithal to generate such a minutely complex, yet monumentally immense structure as a universe to pick the highly imperfect residents of one tiny planet to be the pinnacle of Its creation?

—Would you expect a Being of such depth to be so shortsighted and wasteful as to arbitrarily choose a tiny subset of its creation on that planet to be “saved,” warts and all, while mysteriously condemning the rest to the suffering of hellfire and damnation? In fact, would you expect a Consciousness on that level to be so ill tempered and impatient as to damn *any*

¹ The Palomar telescope uses a 200 inch, *seventeen foot* reflecting mirror and can pick up the light of a single candle at *ten thousand* miles. Scientists used it to count the number of galaxies that reside in sections of the sky, then extrapolated to get a number for the whole celestial sphere.

of Its creation for improprieties enacted during one, short, often difficult lifetime?

—Can you envision such a Being as being impotent in the face of what we humans rather pathetically call evil?

—Would you expect It to be swayed by prayers that amount to special favors for personal gain?

—And above all, does it make sense that such a Being would go to the trouble of creating a universe like ours *without a damn good reason*?

It is hard to imagine any Being with the juice to generate the 10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 plus stars (give or take) that exist within the universe to act in any of the above-mentioned ways, yet many people apparently so believe.

What's more, it is not at all uncommon for humans to intellectually acknowledge a God that is *just* and *all powerful* (assuming one believes in God at all) while *emotionally* approaching that Being the same way primitive societies treated their tribal deities. God is something we pray to for help when we need it; we try to make deals with God when we want something that seems out of our reach; we even demand that God forgive us our sins and grant us eternal salvation regardless of whether we deserve it, all the while expecting It to smite those who sin against us.

In short, people's beliefs about God often carry so much confusion and emotional baggage, at least in the face of the immensity of creation, that it is no wonder so many young people have turned away from the old beliefs and taken up instead the banner of atheism.²

So let's look at atheism. After all, until now we have said, "God is . . . " The atheists in the crowd have been politely attentive, but all the while they have undoubtedly been thinking, "Yeah, but *does* God exist?"

To address that question, the best place to start is . . . *in the Beginning*.

In the Beginning (the theme of the movie *2001* should swell appropriately here), as far as western science is concerned, there was *absolutely nothing*. What existed was a vacuum devoid of structure or time or even

² After reading the *first* version of this section, a friend of mine left the following note in the margin: "At this point, some 30-40% (minimum) of your readership decides to use your book for heating fuel . . . I see your point, but I think your presentation may seem to many to be a bit too harsh and hard-hitting a criticism of Christianity." My response? This isn't aimed solely at Christianity (I thought I had been relatively generic in my discussion—he evidently didn't agree). Most major religions maintain that their followers are especially privileged in their relationship with the Creator; it isn't just Christians who believe themselves *the chosen*.

radiation (i.e., darkness throughout).

Except actually, we've already fudged a bit. There was *one* thing that did exist in the beginning. It was energy—the energy wrapped up in the vacuum. And what about that energy?

On the surface, the energy in the primeval void seemed to be evenly distributed, but down at the super, super microscopic level there were random, quantum mechanical upheavals³ constantly going on.

This may seem innocuous enough, but what you need to realize is that according to Einstein (and substantiated in physics labs all over the world), energy and matter are two forms of the same thing. It is possible to create a laboratory vacuum in which there is nothing, irradiate it with just the right amount of energy, and out of nowhere will be created two bits of material—a particle and its anti-particle (example: an electron and a positron). You start with nothing and end up with something. This process is called *pair production*.

And it goes the other way, too. Put a particle and its anti-particle together and you get what is called *annihilation*. The particles explode, but not like a normal explosion where the particles break into still smaller pieces. Electrons are elementary particles—they aren't made up of smaller pieces. After the explosion, there is nothing physical left. The particles have ceased to exist, not because they have been blown to smithereens but because they have literally converted themselves from matter *into pure energy*.

It is fortunate that nature is made that way. Every second the sun takes 657,000,000 tons of hydrogen and fuses it into 653,000,000 tons of helium. What happens to the 4,000,000 tons that are lost in the fusion process? It is turned into pure energy—the energy that bathes our planet in the life-giving radiation that allows us to exist.⁴

The bottom line: If you have energy and the right conditions, you have the possibility of creating matter. So going back to “the beginning,” the theory holds that an unusually large, radical, quantum mechanical energy fluctuation occurred by freak chance—a trillion-trillion-trillion-tril-

³ Quantum Mechanics is the study of the dynamics of very small systems—systems at the sub-atomic level. Quantum Mechanical phenomenon is very peculiar. One of those peculiarities is that within extremely confined volumes, energy can fluctuate over a short time interval in ways it could never do in the macroscopic world.

⁴ As I point out to my astronomy students, if you fused one gram of hydrogen into helium, you would lose .007 grams of matter to $E=mc^2$. That would liberate enough energy to boost 350 four-thousand-pound Cadillacs *a hundred miles into the atmosphere*. Mass conversion through fusion generates a serious amount of energy! The sun converts 4,000,000 TONS of hydrogen via this process EVERY SECOND!

lion-(etc.)-to-one shot—at this super, super microscopic level. The energy content of the fluctuation was so great that it triggered the creation of a bit of matter. The presence of the matter warped the geometry of the region and, in turn, drew fantastic amounts of free energy to the point. That energy was converted to matter, drawing still more energy. In a rapidly escalating reaction, all that would eventually become our physical universe gushed forth in one nearly instantaneous, gigantic BIG BANG.

As described in a 1985 *Astronomy* magazine article entitled “In the Beginning . . .”:

. . . So we are left with the remarkable possibility that, in the beginning, there existed nothing at all, and that nearly all of the matter and radiation we now see emerged from it. This process has been described by University of California physicist Frank Wilczyk: “The reason that there is something instead of nothing,” he said, “is that ‘nothing’ is unstable.” A ball sitting on the summit of a steep hill needs but the slightest tap to set it in motion. A random fluctuation in space is apparently all that was required to unleash the incredible latent energy of the vacuum, creating matter and energy and an expanding universe from quite literally nothing at all.

If the theory is correct, by 10^{-36} seconds after the Big Bang the then viewable universe was 10^{-29} centimeters across, all of the stuff inside today’s event horizon spanned a distance of 2.0 meters out from that point, and the universe’s average temperature was ten billion-billion-billion degrees Kelvin.

By 10^{-10} seconds (one ten-billionth of a second) after the Big Bang, the viewable universe was 6 centimeters across and the stuff that would eventually become our modern-day universe was found inside a radius equal to the distance between the sun and Pluto. The temperature of the universe had fallen to around one million-billion degrees Kelvin, and all of the subatomic particles (electrons, quarks, etc.) had come into existence.⁵

One second after the Big Bang, the universe we currently know had a radius of 200 Light Years and a temperature of ten billion degrees Kelvin.

⁵ Interesting note: The nuclear accelerator at Cern can generate the energies we believe existed as early as 10^{-12} seconds after the Big Bang. Theory predicts that at those energies, subatomic particles called W-bosons should be produced via pair production. In fact, according to experiments done at Cern, they do. Pretty impressive results!

At approximately *ten minutes* after the Big Bang, all of the nuclei that would ever exist had been formed. It took another 380,000 years for the universe to cool enough so that electrons could combine with those nuclei to form atoms, and 140,000,000 years before first-generation stars were formed.

At this point, the universe has existed for 13.6 billion years, is 2.4 million-billion-billion miles in diameter (that is 2.4×10^{24} miles), is populated by third generation stars and has an average temperature of 3 degrees Kelvin.

Exactly how stars came into existence is a small point of contention within the scientific community, but generally the idea is simple. As the outward rushing atomic debris from the Big Bang cooled enough to allow gravitational attraction to become a significant player within the realm of cosmic forces, enormous areas of stellar gas began to coalesce into increasingly compact units of material. As the gasses collapsed inward, temperatures at the core skyrocketed. At 10,000,000 degrees Kelvin, hydrogen fusion “ignited” and began to produce helium and enormous amounts of radiated energy . . . and a star was born.

The life-cycle of today’s third generation stars is much like that of their first and second generation counterparts. After millions to billions of years of hydrogen fusion (the actual time depends upon the size of the star), the supply of hydrogen in the core slowly diminishes leaving mostly helium. In the process, the fusion reaction slows and the core begins to cool and contract. The contraction produces non-nuclear heating. This initiates hydrogen fusion in the shell *just outside the core* which, in turn, makes the outer region of the star expand outward.⁶ When the core temperature reaches a little over 100 million degrees Kelvin, *helium* fusion begins.

Helium fusion follows a cycle similar to that of hydrogen fusion with helium fusion producing carbon and oxygen.⁷ Sooner or later the helium

⁶ This expansion produces a star that is around 100 times the diameter of the original star. Called *red giants*, these stars put out more energy than before (hence their luminosity goes up), but because their surface area has increase to such a degree, the amount of energy released per unit area goes down (translation: their surface isn’t as hot as it had been).

⁷ You might wonder why no beryllium, lithium or boron is produced. In fact, it is, but the output of each has a half-life that is very short which means that as the star “burns,” these atoms go away fast. So where do those atoms as found on earth come from? When large stars supernova (die by blowing up at the end of their lifetime), high energy subatomic particles are accelerated to such high velocities that when they collide with carbon, which

in the core begins to exhaust. Nuclear burning slows, the core contracts causing non-nuclear core heat-up. If the star is large enough, the core hits 600,000,000 degrees Kelvin and carbon begins fusing to make still larger atoms.

For the biggest stars, this process can go on all the way up to a core of iron.⁸ No star core fuses elements larger than iron because iron fusion requires energy *input* instead of providing energy release. Such a process would extinguish the star.

Stars with cores greater than 1.4 solar masses die by exploding in what is called a supernova. As it occurs, the outside of the star blows outward producing a supernova remnant.⁹

Aside: Before we can continue, we need to consider a few minor notes and some general information about the way our universe physically works:

- 1.) An atom's nucleus is made up of protons and neutrons.
- 2.) The number of protons determines an atom's *kind* (e.g., all *hydrogen* atoms have 1 proton, all *helium* atoms have 2 protons, etc.)
- 3.) As protons repulse protons, the neutrons are there to spread the nucleus out diminishing a proton's repulsive effect.
- 4.) The number of neutrons of a particular kind of atom can vary (e.g., carbon with 6 protons can have 6, 7 or 8 neutrons).
- 5.) Atoms with varying numbers of neutrons are called *isotopes*.
- 6.) Atomic structures tend to migrate toward situation in which the energy required to hold the nucleus together is a minimum.
- 7.) Atoms whose proton to neutron ratio generates an energetically unstable situation are said to be *radioactive*.
- 8.) The *half-life* of an atom marks the amount of time it will remain as it is (that is, it gives us an idea of how quickly it will radioactively decay into something else). Radioactive atoms have a

is abundant in stars at that point, they can actually knock one, two or three protons out of the carbon nuclei . . . leaving boron, lithium or beryllium. That means the boron you get when you buy a box of the cleaner Boraxo at the supermarket were once carbon atoms inside a star that were "destined" to become something other than carbon when the star died by supernova.

⁸ Interesting, whereas a large star takes ten million years to exhaust its hydrogen supply, it burns so furiously at the end of its life that it only takes *one day* to produce its iron core.

⁹ The Crab nebula is a remnant that was created by a supernova that was observed by the Chinese in 1054. The explosion put out 2,000,000 times the normal energy output of the star and was visible *in daylight* for two weeks.

short half-life.

- 9.) The way radioactive decay works is interesting.
- a.) A proton is itself made up of a two *down quarks* and one *up quark*.
 - b.) A neutron is made up of two *up quarks* and one *down quark*.
 - c.) When an energetically unstable nuclei radioactively decays, rearranging itself into a hopefully more energetically acceptable state, the *up quark* of one of its neutrons turns into a lighter *down quark* while ejecting a high speed electron, called a *beta particle*, along with a neutrino. This is called *beta decay*.
 - d.) But when an *up quark* turns into a *down quark*, the neutron turns into a proton.
 - e.) And as the number of protons in an atom determines the *kind* of atom it is (iridium has 77 protons, platinum has 78, etc.), *beta decay* motivates an atom of one kind to become an atom of an entirely different kind.
 - f.) So, for instance, if an iridium atom were to beta decay, the end result would be a platinum atom.

So why are we talking about all of this?

During a supernova, enormous numbers of free neutrons are generated which can combine with atoms (elements) already present in the star. Super-neutron-rich elements are not stable, so they radioactively decay via beta-decay. As was said above, this produces *new elements*. That is, each time the atom beta decays, it loses a neutron which becomes a proton thereby metamorphizing into the next higher atom on the Periodic Table. This process continues in a given atom until the resulting atom is *stable*.¹⁰

Called the *r-process*, this is how the elements that are larger than iron (i.e.: gold, silver, etc.) are produced. In other words, with the exception of the hydrogen and helium, all of the atoms that make up your body and quite literally *everything around you* were created as the consequence of the life or death of a star. We are, in short, *star stuff*.

¹⁰ As an example, iridium 208 (this is an iridium atom with 77 protons and 131 neutrons) will, on average, beta decay FIVE TIMES in a forty-five minute period. After that time, the atom will have become a *lead* atom with 82 protons, and will have a half-life of 5.2×10^9 year (the age of the universe is 13.6×10^9 years . . . This, being a long time as far as we are concerned, is a *stable* atom!).

While the outside of the star is being blown outward, the core of the star is being compressed inward. If the structure has a mass between 1.4 and 1.8 solar masses, electrons will be forced into the nuclei of their atoms, combining with protons to make neutrons. With all of the *space* within the atoms removed, what stops the implosion are neutrons jammed up against neutrons.

These structures are called *neutron star*. They have a mass density equivalent to compressing 1000 Nimitz size aircraft carriers to the size of a marble. Along with being monstrously compact, the *conservation of angular momentum* motivated them to spin REALLY FAST, like upwards of 700 revolutions per second (think about it—an object that is 15 miles across spinning 700 times a second!!!!).

This is some kind of serious cosmic action.

Stars with cores that are greater than 1.8 solar masses *never* stop imploding, generating what are called *black holes* (that is, structures that are so gravitationally massive that not even *light* can escape them). It was Einstein's Theory of Relativity that predicted these.

So again, why are we talking about all of this?

When I was a kid, science was so pleased with itself over this theory that it could hardly stand it. Why? Because within it, science has accomplished one of its most cherished goals: the presentation of a neat, clean, mechanical model that explains where the universe came from . . . all without the apparent need for a Creator.¹¹

¹¹ This is a fairly gutsy statement considering we live in a nation populated primarily by God-fearing Christians. Richard Dickerson, an evolutionary molecular biologist who is also a Christian, spoke about this problem of “no need for God” in an article entitled “Letter to a Creationist” published in *The Science Teacher* magazine (September, 1990).

The main thrust of the article was to refute Fundamentalist Christian claims that one's stand on God must either be that “the Bible says it all and it's literally correct,” or “science has the last word on everything and it says there is no God.” His contention was that there are moderate positions between those extremes. Specifically, he suggests two alternative ways a Christian scientist could treat the dilemma. The first maintains that God created the universe; that the first two chapters of Genesis were meant to be taken figuratively; and that the universe is inherently logical, being God's handiwork, so that any understanding gained by studying it will not probably be grossly wrong. The second maintains that issues about God are private and don't belong within the domain of scientific speculation. Dickerson went on to say that he knows of no scientists who belong to the “science is all” point of view, and that almost all Christian scientists he knows adhere to either of the two alternatives presented above.

The article was great if you happen to find Creationist Theory irritating, but it ignored one important point. Although I'm sure there are scientists who are also devout Christians, the general tone of *most* scientific endeavors had historically bred an atheistic, “I don't need

Unfortunately, there are two problems . . . big ones . . . that science has not been able to satisfactorily address: (1) how to explain the *apparent precision* of the universe and (2) how to account for the circumstances that *led* to the Big Bang.

The first difficulty—the precision problem—has two sides to it.

Background: Although it's not something the public is concerned with, physicists in the last eighty years have made remarkable observations concerning the fundamental mathematical constants that intimately relate the natural laws that govern this place.

Light energy, for instance, is something we cannot exist without. But light is very strange. Under certain circumstances, it acts like a *wave* doing things that waves can do but that *particles* could never accomplish (Young's experiment demonstrated this side of light in 1803). Under other circumstances, light acts like a *particle* doing things that particles can do but that *waves* couldn't possibly accomplish (Einstein received a Nobel Prize in the early twentieth century for showing that the photoelectric effect was just such a phenomenon). What this means is that light can act either as a particle-like bundle of energy or as a wave-form of particular frequency, depending upon the situation.

Early in this century, Einstein (expanding upon work that Planck did) suggested that the energy (E) of a light particle's bundle and the frequency (ν) of its wave-form are directly proportional. In equation form the relationship is $E=h\nu$, where h is called Planck's constant.

What is interesting is that all of the major physical constants, Planck's constant included, were fixed randomly during the Big Bang, or so it would seem. What is amazing is that if Planck's constant had been set just a tiny bit bigger or smaller, the universe would have evolved in an entirely different way. Stars, for instance, either wouldn't have evolved at all or would have evolved in a highly restricted manner.

In addition, many of the elementary constants, though not physically dependent upon one another, nevertheless act together to effectively support not only the universe as we know it, but the universe that needs to be if we are to exist. As explained by P.W.C. Davies in his book, The Accidental Universe:

God for anything" attitude.

The numerical values that nature has assigned to fundamental constants, constants such as the charge on an electron, the mass of a proton, the speed of light, the Newtonian gravitational constant, etc., may be mysterious, but they are crucially relevant to the structure of the universe that we perceive. As more and more physical systems, from nuclei to galaxies, have become better understood, scientists have begun to realize that many characteristics of these systems are remarkably sensitive to the precise values of the fundamental constants.

More intriguing still, certain crucial structures, such as solar-type stars, depend for their characteristic features on wildly improbable numerical accidents that combine together fundamental constants from distinct branches of physics.

Recent discoveries about the primeval cosmos oblige us to accept that the expanding universe has been set up in its motion with a cooperation of astonishing precision.

Please note that the optimal phrases in this eloquent commentary is *wildly improbable numerical accidents* and *cooperation of astonishing precision*.

The problem: “Where did all the precision come from?”

This *apparent-precision* problem becomes even more evident when one looks at life. For example, how did the human body get to the state it is in now, given the fact that there was no life on this planet at the start?

According to one theory,¹² things began a billion and a half years ago when electrical storms and intense ultraviolet radiation allowed the predominate chemical compounds in the earth’s atmosphere—nitrogen, hydrogen, water and methane—to interact and create complex chemical structures called *amino acids*. Within a few hundred million years, the amino acids had combined to form even more complex molecules—DNA molecules—that were able to act as chemical templates for the replication of themselves (this is similar to the ability of crystalline structures to grow).

The first life form—a virus—was nothing more than a DNA molecule

¹² In fact, there are a number of competing theories out today, some more likely than the one about to be presented. That is all right. Whether this is *the true scenario* or not is not important. All we are concerned with here is the GENERAL TREND in scientific thinking concerning the evolution of life.

surrounded by a sack of organic molecules called proteins. Over more time, random variations in the coded DNA produced additional proteins called enzymes which, in turn, allowed the first primitive cellular structures to form. Advanced cells developed as these primitive cells coupled with viruses and began to coexist in a symbiotic relationship. Natural selection took things from there.

Mammals appeared approximately two hundred million years ago; Homo Sapiens (early man) came a quarter of a million years ago.

As things stand today, the human body is made up of somewhere around 60,000,000,000,000 (sixty trillion) cells,¹³ each of which carries the DNA plan for the entire complex. Each cell knows exactly where it fits into the blueprint, which is fortunate. If that were *not* the case, skin cells on your hand could mistakenly follow the blueprint for cells used in tooth enamel and you would end up with a hand as hard as a rock.

There are 75,000 miles of capillaries, veins, and arteries in the body's blood transport system; the heart muscle pumps the equivalent of 500,000 tons of blood in a normal lifetime.

The lungs are made up of 250,000,000 tiny air sacks, and the body's bone marrow produces 1,000,000 red blood cells *every second*.

There are 125,000,000 rod cells per eye with each cell containing 30,000,000 molecules of light-catching pigment. The eye can transmit 1,500,000 signals simultaneously to the brain, which contains 30,000,000,000 neurons. Each neuron can be connected to as many as 80,000 other neurons at once.

The body's DNA provides the immune system with the capacity to produce over 1,000,000,000 antibodies allowing the body the potential to fight off diseases that don't even exist yet. The liver can perform over 500 tasks, some of which cannot be duplicated today within our finest chemical laboratories, and produces over 1,000 different enzymes. Without its services, we would not be able to detoxify such poisonous materials as nicotine, caffeine, alcohol, and the myriad of other "food products" we human seem to indiscriminately ingest on a regular basis.

As each body part is enormously intricate within itself, when laced together into "the system," the living machine we end up with is absolutely beyond belief. Through the agency of a number of very sophisticated

¹³ How big is sixty trillion? If you had sixty trillion dollars and wanted to spend it, you would have to spend around \$350,000 every hour, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year for 2000 years to get rid of your money. That is, if you started at the time of Christ, you'd still have around twenty-four billion dollars left to spend as of January 1992 when this book was written.

systems (the nervous system, the digestive system, the lymph system, etc.) the body has the ability to coordinate the activities of its very different, very independent parts (the liver, kidneys, brain, not to mention the astronomical number of individual cells that work together to make up these parts) in such a way as to allow it to survive *without any conscious effort on your part*.

It would take a large library to catalogue all we currently know about how the body works. It would probably take a city of libraries to catalogue all we don't know.

With all this in mind, think now about that nice, clean, tidy theory of evolution science has lain before us. Noting that nature doesn't appear to migrate toward complexity on its own—science suggests that, if anything, it tends toward disorder (thermodynamic entropy)¹⁴—what are the odds against something as remarkably complex as a human being evolving by pure chance from nothing more than *four molecular compounds and some lightning*?

A mid-1980 *Science News* article announced the revised results of two university professors who had calculated the odds that humankind could have evolved to its current point from scratch, so to speak. The old estimate? It was calculated to be one-chance in 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 (that is, one in one-trillion-trillion).¹⁵ By doing some clever assuming, the professors had gotten it down to a more respectable *one chance in 100,000,000,000,000* (one-hundred-trillion).¹⁶

¹⁴ Think about your room at home. It starts out sort of clean on Sunday. By Wednesday, is it cleaner? Not likely . . . Entropy!

¹⁵ That is probably surprising, given the number of stars that exist within the universe, but not all stars are in a position to handle life-bearing planet. Planets in binary and trinary star systems (i.e., solar-type systems that have two or three stars in them) don't have the temperature stability required to support life (the temperature of a planet in such a system will be dependent upon where the planet is at a given instant, relative to the stars in the system). Of the single-star system, not all have planets. Of those with planets, not all have planets the appropriate distance from the star (planets that are too far away would freeze; planets too close would have their atmosphere boiled away). Of the systems with planets at the appropriate distance, not all of those planets have atmospheres. Of those with atmospheres, not all have the right proportion of gasses. You get the idea . . .

¹⁶ What is interesting is that if those same mathematicians had calculated the odds that *psychic phenomena* might be a reality, and if they had found it to be one chance in a million, they would surely have condemned as insane anyone who, in the face of those odds, still professed a belief in psychic phenomenon. Yet in perfect sincerity, scientists preach the

Put another way, you'd have a better chance of taking a cargo plane to 10,000 feet, dumping a half million bricks and five tons of mixed concrete out its bay doors, then expect to find the bricks landing *by chance* in such a way as to construct a completely finished, two story, old-English style home, complete with patio and Jacuzzi appropriately situated in the back yard.

Bottom line: As impressive as the aura of knowledge and rightness is around most scientific theories, science's *evolution by chance* scenario is so fantastically improbable that it ranks right up there with the literal version of *God made the world in seven days*.¹⁷

The *second major drawback* to science's Big Bang theory takes considerably less explanation but is potentially much more damaging.

The *energy* that supported the primeval vacuum . . . where did it come from? We know how the energy was stored—in the nothingness that existed before time and space came into being. But for the life of us, we don't have a clue as to where all that initial energy came from in the first place.

In short, we really haven't *explained* the beginning at all.

What does it all mean?

For the atheists in the crowd: The Big Bang most probably happened; Darwin's theory of *natural selection* and the mechanism for evolution espoused by modern-day biologists are probably on-target. But for life to have evolved as it has, given its complexity, the odds are that there was more than *random chance* acting.¹⁸ It is almost certain that there had to be

belief that mankind evolved by chance from practically nothing . . . *hundred-trillion to one odds against* and all.

¹⁷ Footnote not in original text: It is interesting how modern scientists have gotten around this problem. The current theory acknowledges that it is beyond unlikely that everything could have fallen out in just the right way for our universe to have come into existence as it did, unless, of course, our universe is just one of an infinite number of universes that have come into existence over "time." If there have been an infinite number of attempts, sooner or later the right combination would pop up and voila, here we would be. What isn't stated (or even noticed, apparently), is that proving something like that is impossible, which is to say that accepting that there have been an infinite number of universes requires the same kind of thinking that is required of someone who maintains that God made the world in seven days. It's all based on faith, and that's not a good look for science.

¹⁸ Again, it is interesting to note that observations like these have drawn a considerable number of young scientists from the ranks of atheism to the ranks of agnosticism. That is, they aren't willing to say that God exists, but they are equally unwilling to say that God doesn't exist. In short, they are bright and honest enough to realize that they just don't know.

an impetus, a plan, a Creator involved.

And for the religious folks in the crowd: Considering the power and insight required of a Creator able to put together something as immense yet minutely complex as a universe, the chance that that Being is *anything at all* like the God Western religions believe in is highly unlikely.

In other words, I've probably managed to irritate just about everyone.

Chapter 4

CREATION

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . .

*from the Bible:
John 1:1.*

Last time we talked about God. This time we will continue, albeit in a way you would probably not expect. Sit back and enjoy! We'll start with a story.

It seems an English reporter in the early part of the twentieth century was sent to India on assignment by his paper to dig up anything he could on the occult. For years the British in India had been alternately horrified and fascinated by what seemed to be amazing psychic feats displayed by various of the indigent gurus and fakirs. Our young man was to ferret out the truth of the matter and report back to his paper.

According to the story, while wandering through a bazaar in Madras, he was approached by an old man who hippered up to him and said, "I know why you are here, and if you will give me ten pounds I will show you what you want to see."

The journalist, being a seasoned traveler, bargained the man down to a few shillings, then said OK. The old fellow hurried off and came back within minutes carrying a large, red gas can. Opening the can he bade the reporter to smell the contents. The Englishman took one whiff only to gag on the unmistakable aroma of gasoline. Satisfied with the paroxysmic coughing of his prey, the old fakir proceeded to douse himself from head to foot with the contents of the can, then politely requested a match. Our reporter hesitated at first, then figured the old fellow wasn't crazy and wouldn't do anything stupid. Pulling out a box of matches, he offered the old guy his pick.

The fakir took one match, stepped back, struck the match, and with a horrifying whoosh went up in flames. The reporter was so dumb-struck by this turn of events that he just stood there, watching what he knew would soon be the charred remains of the old fellow blazing away right before

his eyes.

It was just at that point that a very large mosquito, one of those bombers India seems to specialize in, landed with a thud on the reporter's neck. Though it certainly wasn't the main focus of his attention at the time, the reporter acted out of reflex and smacked the monster, giving himself a fairly good whack upside the head in the bargain. The impact so jarred him that the illusion before him vanished. The flames around the fakir instantly disappeared, and there before our reporter stood a very sheepish conjurer, soaked from head to foot in . . . water!

The reporter was able to garner the following information from the fakir as they talked after the fact: It seems that from the time he was four years old, the fakir's father had made him practice various yogic disciplines designed specifically to train and focus the mind. Using that training, the fakir had developed the ability to project such a completely focused, realistic series of mental impressions that those he directed them toward "saw" the illusions he'd created with his mind. The smelling of the gasoline in the can; the sight, sound, feel, and smell of the fire consuming the fakir's body, they were all mental illusions. The journalist had stood dumbfounded in their grip until the mosquito landed and, with the slap of the hand, the overall illusion had been broken.

That was the Englishman's first introduction to the possibility that *thought* could be projected forcefully and coherently, and that *thought* had a kind of energy associated with it that could physically effect something like his own mind.

The Englishman didn't believe the fakir. Being a skeptic, he believed that the fakir had somehow hypnotized him in the few moments between their first words and the first illusion. That suspicion was torpedoed just a few weeks later when the reporter happened upon another fakir doing the famous *Indian rope trick* in an open-air square.

In that illusion, a rope is seen to uncoil like a snake from a basket and rise upward twenty or thirty feet into the air by itself. A boy then climbs the rope and disappears out of sight at the top, only to be followed by the fakir. At the end, both come back down the rope and that is that.

The reporter arrived on the scene halfway through the illusion—the boy was already partially up the rope. There were several hundred people watching including British soldiers. At the back of the crowd were a number of civilian Englishmen, two of whom were preparing to take a picture of the proceedings. After the boy had climbed up the rope and the fakir was in the process of following, they took their shot.

Interested in the outcome, our reporter introduced himself and said he

would like to see the final picture. The photographers were glad to oblige. Upon completion of the developing, he was invited to examine it. What he found was an excellent picture of the market area, the back of several hundred heads (the camera was at the rear of the area), the fakir *not* climbing the rope but rather standing on the ground next to *the boy* who had supposedly already up the rope, and the basket out of which the rope seemed to have come. In addition, he *didn't* see the rope extending thirty feet into the air . . . in fact, the rope was laying on the ground next to the basket.

As far as the reporter could tell, the whole scene in the square had been nothing more than a giant mental illusion that the fakir had projected at the crowd. It was as though the conjurer's thought had permeated the market place as light permeates a darkened corner. Having walked into the affair by accident, the reporter distinctly saw the rope in place and the fakir climbing up (no time for hypnosis—he just walked around a corner and there was the sight), but the photograph did not lie. What he saw was *not* what was really there. Just as had been the case with the earlier fakir, the whole thing had been a mentally projected illusion.

What is to be made of all this?

Aside from the fact that we are talking about things scientists would find absolutely aberrant (i.e., the possibility that there may be abilities dormant within humans that science knows nothing about), the tendency of most people when reading a story like the one above is to assume that someone is pushing a hoax.¹

¹ Try as I might, I've not been able to find the book from which I read this tale, so I can't quote chapter and verse, thereby giving skeptics the chance of finding the source and manufacturing ten thousand reasons why the account couldn't have been true. There are accounts of similarly unusual happenings mentioned in Henry Olcott's Old Diary Leaves and Ernest Wood's Seven Schools of Yoga, not to mention numerous other books written by travelers in India as late as the 1930's. I would imagine all such authors are considered questionable sources by skeptics, but for the life of me I can't tell if the stories are suspect because of the authors or the authors are suspect because of the stories. In any case, try as the skeptics will to discredit anything along these lines, there is a considerable body of personal recollection that tends to support at least the chance that such things are possible.

(Footnote not in original book): In Chapter 56 of the autobiography, I talked about Blavatsky's travels through India (this, recounted in her book The Caves and Jungles of Hindustan). At one point, one of the members of her party was a rather stuffy, arrogant Englishman (ah, the English . . .) who boasted that nobody could possibly project thought at him that he wouldn't recognize as bogus. With that, the man proceeded to paint a landscape of an island the group was about to cross over to, except what he painted wasn't the distant shoreline everyone else was seeing (this didn't become apparent until he was finished and everyone looked to see what he had done). Rather, his painting turned out to be a very nice likeness of the summer home of the Rajput prince (the Master KH, as I remember) who

Did it actually happen?

The only honest answer anyone could possibly give to a question like that is, “Who knows?”

What is important is that the East fervently believes that such things are possible—that *thought* has energy (i.e., the ability to do work), that it can affect matter, and that thinking produces substantive thought-forms that do not cease to exist once formed. In short, *thought* is believed to have a reality of its own.

If the East is correct, some interesting prospects arise from this line of reasoning. Assuming conditions are correct, Western science has found that it is possible to create matter in a vacuum by simply irradiating the void with the right amount of energy. In other words, energy and matter are two forms of the same thing (Einstein even facetiously called matter *frozen energy*).

The East goes even further. It maintains that a focused, trained mind can form the mental matrix of the understructure of a physical object so completely that the energy residing in that thought can effectively clothe the matrix in material substance. In other words, it believes that human thought has within it the possibility of materializing physical form.²

You need to realize that this is considerably different from what western science believes is possible with the manipulation of energy. To begin with, the creation of matter in a physics lab is on the *subatomic level*.

was traveling with them (nobody knew who he really was except Blavasky). Having been on the periphery of the boastful conversation of previous hours, the Master had projected that image into the mind of the Englishman and that was what he saw . . . like it or not. I’m sure the fakir in my fake-fire story was not a Master, but he did have a trained, focused mind and he *could* do what normal people like you and me would categorize as “amazing things” with it.

² Minor point: A common misconception amongst Westerners and Easterners alike is the belief that if someone has the ability to do phenomenal things, the individual must be terribly spiritual. Nothing could be further from the truth. There are said to be Dhugpas—members of one of the many orders within the red-hat Tibetan Buddhist tradition—who are very powerful along these lines but who are very dark in their actions. Their powers come from years of severe mental disciplines; their goal is to have and exercise power over others.

The really responsible Teachers in the East do not steer their followers toward the accumulation of powers. Powers are *not* a sign of spirituality.

(Footnote not in original book) The “responsible teachers” I’m speaking of in this case are the Brothers which, if you’ve read the autobiography, you will be well familiar with. The chapter of quotes from things they said to our group during the “small meetings” makes it very clear what they thought was important.

What's more, *two* particles come into existence with mass creation—a particle and its anti-particle. That is wholly different from creating a macroscopic object *la the East*. Nevertheless, who is to say where the bounds of man's knowledge ends and his ignorance begins. Maybe there are aspects of the mass/energy relationship about which we do not yet know.

As far as the East is concerned, such things are possible.

Are there instances in history where evidence for such a possibility might exist?

Clearly the best-known historical example of the supposed creation of *something* from apparently *nothing*, at least within the Western world, is Christ's creation of the fishes and loaves mentioned in the *Bible*. It is a touchy example to cite because there are Christians who derive their spiritual security from the belief that Christ was the *only* Son of God—a belief they support by pointing to His ability to do miracles. Not surprisingly, individuals in those sects of Christianity are not generally appreciative of any suggestion that Christ's miracles were anything to the contrary.

What they unfortunately ignore is the fact that history is full of stories about remarkable individuals who were able to do things deemed miraculous. Appolonius of Tyana, for instance, is reputed to have vanished into thin air before several hundred witnesses at the conclusion of an audience with the Roman Emperor Domitian around 90 AD. His prominence was so great that it drove early Christians to suggest that he had been sent by the devil solely to confuse and shake the faith of later Christians, even though the quality of his demeanor and works suggests he was a very benevolent man.³

It is quite possible that miracles seem miraculous because we don't understand the phenomena being animated. That doesn't mean such phenomena are beyond the natural laws that govern the physical world; it may mean we simply don't know all there is to know, or for that matter, understand fully the little of which we think we are familiar.⁴

³ See G.R.S. Mead's book *Appolonius of Tyana*, or Manly Hall's *The Phoenix*.

(Footnote not in the original book) Appolonius of Tyana was, indeed, a member of the Brotherhood. He was also an initiate of the Greater Mystery Schools. This was a very highly evolved being, at the very least a high chela but possibly even a Master (I don't remember the Brothers being specific as to which).

⁴ This sentiment is not solely Eastern. St. Augustine said, "Miracles do not happen in contradiction to nature, but in contradiction to that which is known to us in nature."

Skeptics nevertheless object to the idea that man's thought has the ability to affect things, much less actually materialize objects. "If it's possible," they demand, "Why can't *I* do it?"

It is a good question. It can be best answered with the help of the following exercise. Take a few minutes to read the following, then try it.

- a.) Close your eyes (don't cover them) and visualize blackness.
- b.) Once you have a completely steady darkness, create a point of light at the top of your mental field. Hold it steady for approximately half a minute.
- c.) After successfully completing step "b," use the lighted dot to slowly draw the three sides of an equilateral triangle.
- d.) Hold the lighted triangle steadily in place for five minutes.
- e.) Do this once a day for a month.

It is amazing the number of people who aren't able to complete this exercise. Either they can't visualize the black backdrop, or they can get the backdrop but can't make the dot sit still. If they can get the dot to cooperate, they can't get it to form the equilateral triangle. If they can get the triangle, they can't stop the blasted thing from dancing, bending, and swaying. And if they *can* accomplish all they are supposed to do in the first sitting, the chances are excellent they will not be able to settle their mind enough to successfully reconstruct the visualization in subsequent days.⁵

Why? Because most of us simply don't have that kind of control over our minds.

What is surprising is that this exercise is child's play in comparison to some of the meditations that exist within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. The Tibetans have extremely intricate, symbol laden religious paintings called *mandalas*. In the old days, it was not unusual for a Tibetan monk to meditate for long periods of time on these mandalas (in fact, they still do today though no longer in the seclusion of Himalayan monasteries). Each was expected to train his mind to the point where he could begin blacked out, then proceed to mentally create bit by bit an entire mandala in his head. Once created, the finished product was to be held absolutely steady

⁵ I realize this seems contrary; we will talk more about meditation and mental disciplines later.

while the monk meditated upon the significance of the various parts of the design. (The photo to the right is of a *thangka*, or painted mandalas on silk, that I bought while I was in Nepal in the 1980's—they don't come framed, I did that out of ignorance as its original form had nothing more than a piece of silk to cover it, and it probably should have stayed that way. In any case . . .)



The purpose of the training was to help each monk in his attempts to better understand himself and the universe. And although it had the potential to bring powers, it was (and still is) considered an inferior use of the mind to use it for the projection of phenomenal powers. Their tradition nevertheless serves to give Westerners an inkling of what is meant when the East talks of a focused, steady mind. It additionally answers our skeptical friends' questions about why they can't play too, along with providing an explanation as to why everyday people aren't mentally swamping one another with palpable thought-forms (not to mention materialize physical objects at every turn).

Relatively ancient disciplines within the East do exist that help an individual train his or her mind, but the disciplines are extremely difficult and not emphasized by truly responsible spiritual teachers. People, it is said, have bigger and better things to worry about, cosmically speaking, than developing powers they probably wouldn't be able to handle, ego-wise, if they had.

And as for those who say, "I could do so much good with that kind of power," the suggestion that comes out of the East is "Think again." You and I could do "so much good" with the powers of reason and kindness that we already have at our disposal, but how often do we exercise those qualities purely for the benefit of others without strings attached?

There is an excellent chance that there is more to living than meets the eye. There is an even better chance that if mental powers do exist, humanity doesn't yet command them for a very good reason.

One last thing: It's time to talk about God.

“In the beginning was the Word (the *utterance* from the Aramaic *miltha*⁶), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” says the *Bible* (John 1:1). And what is an utterance? It is the manifestation of *thought*.

The ancient Greeks during their Golden Age suggested a similar possibility. Anaxagoras was a Greek philosopher of the time who was known to be an initiate of the Eleusinian Mystery Schools.⁷ In his writings he alluded to God as *Nous*—the Greek word for *MIND*.

And in the very ancient Vedic tradition out of India, it is said that the *Divine Mind*—a single, all powerful, all-inclusive Being—*thought the worlds into existence*.

The idea is not without merit, as you will soon see. “But thought?” you say. “What are the odds that something as ephemeral and wispy as *thought* could be the substance that upholds our universe?”

Have you ever had a dream that was so clear and vivid and totally involving that while you were in the experience it *was* your reality? If so, what you were so totally immersed in was a thought (or a series of them). The idea of *thought* creating apparently substantive worlds isn’t as bizarre as it sounds.

So what is the East suggesting? It is believed that the thoughtful meditation of the Divine Mind (God) not only: 1.) generated the *blue-print* for the mechanisms from which creation and evolution were to come, complete with the *astounding precision* Davies wondered about in the last chapter, but also 2.) provided through the very quality of Its thought the *energy* that was to become with-a-bang the *stuff* of the physical universe.

...;

How does this relate to you and me?

When it said, “God made mankind *in Its image*,” it is probably that

⁶ New Testament books are written in Greek with other early translations in Syriac, Coptic and Latin. Some scholars recognize the shadows of Aramaic idioms in Greek as is the case here.

⁷ The Mystery Schools seem to have been deeply secretive philosophic and spiritual centers of learning within the ancient world. Although there is not a lot known about them for sure (and there is controversy about what we *do* know), many of the renowned figures of antiquity were evidently members. Mystery schools were known to flourish in Greece, Persia, Egypt, and Britain, and some believe they also existed in India and the Americas. We will talk more about them later.

(Footnote not in original book) The Mystery Schools was where the Brothers could be found if you had the karmic background to find entrance there. Their presence wasn’t obvious to everyday folk, but they were the backbone of what was called The Greater Mysteries.

the *Bible* didn't mean that there is some giant guy flying around out there, happily creating universes, who just happens to look like you and me. If the East is correct, the God-like quality that is imaged in humankind is wrapped up in our ability to *think creatively* (that *is* what sets humans apart from the other animals). According to the East, what Beings at the human level are learning to deal with on this planet is how to exercise the creative forces of *thought*—the very same forces (obviously, to an infinitely lesser degree) that God animated when it *thought the worlds into existence*.

Put another way: This belief maintains that you and I are constantly creating whole universes as we think. They don't manifest in ways that are noticeable, thank God, because we are so mentally scattered that they can't. But they are there and they are ours. Furthermore, we are *responsible* for our creations. Why? Because only through taking responsibility will we come to learn to deal with *freedom of will*—that other characteristic that must be available to any Being that would be truly creative.

Bottom line: If this view is on target, humans are learning to deal with *the freedom to create in a cosmic sense through their ability to think*. And if that be the case, it shouldn't be surprising to find instances where individuals have foreshadowed the powers of creation through thought that lie dormant in humans, even if it is only in the form of a little old man apparently going up in flames in an attempt to amuse an Englishman.

Chapter 5

THE WORLD IS A STAGE ... AND ALL THE ILLUSIONS ARE ACTORS

*I died from mineral and plant became;
Died from plant and took sentient frame;
Died from beast and took human dress;
When, by dying, did I e'er grow less?*

*Jalal Al Din Rumi
(a Sufi poet; 1207-1275)*

Probably a crab would be filled with a sense of outrage if it could hear us class it without ado or apology as a Crustacean, and thus dispose of it. "I am no such things," it would say: "I am myself, alone."

*William James, from his
"Varieties of Religious Experiences"*

[Preliminary note not found in the original book: The next two chapters came from gatherings during which I tried to explain to the students what this eastern view believes is going on with Consciousness and the evolution that brought human Beings to the state they are in today. As these are not typically western ideas, some of this may seem obscure. If it makes sense as you go, great. If not, don't let it throw you. As I tell my students, the ideas will become more and more clear as we proceed farther and farther into the class (and book). Also, most of the rest of the book should be more fun and less difficult, just so you know.]

More bits and pieces.

There is a very funny Gary Larson FAR SIDE cartoon in which a group of cows are standing on their back legs in a field discussing some terribly deep philosophical question when a look-out cow yells, “Car!” The next frame has the cows down on all fours, eating grass, doing what we would expect cows to be doing when out to pasture.

The humor here is in the idea that cows could have a secret life we humans don’t know anything about, but there is another point of order that is not so obvious. Larson wanted to show his cows as something more than mindless farm animals, so he made them appear human-like. In doing so, he underscored a belief most of us unconsciously hold dear . . . that the only *meaningful* existence is *human* existence.¹

We are about to delve into the idea of consciousness, Eastern style. In doing so, we will be examining a view that does *not* consider mankind to be the end-all, be-all. That is, human consciousness is considered to be important, but there are levels of consciousness believed to exist both above and below the state we humans find ourselves in that are *just* as important.

There was a Renaissance philosopher named Descartes who tried to build a logical argument for God. He began by questioning, “What do I know for certain?” He then proceeded to show that from his own point of view, everything *could* be an illusion² . . . everything, that is, except one thing. It was *he* who was wondering and doubting, which meant *he had to exist*.

Although he went on from there, his observation about *awareness* is what is important to us.

Have you ever stopped and thought about how remarkable it is that you are aware?³ The first time I thought about such things was when I was driving through the Arizona desert going back to ASU during my college years. I was not a particularly thoughtful young man, but I remember being absolutely stunned at the sight of a sun-drenched butte standing a number of miles from the road. As I drove by, it struck me how remarkable it

¹ We don’t, for instance, factory farm *human* babies for food, but we are more than happy to factory farm *cow* babies (veal) for food. Most of us simply don’t view animals as being as important as humans.

² Even his *loved ones*, he argued, could be nothing more than players in his own, gigantic, personal dream.

³ A corollary to this question would be, “Have you ever thought about how remarkable it is to be conscious of your existence?”

was that I was *intimately sensing* that beauty when, in fact, it was wholly out of my reach—when it was literally miles away. Until then, I had never recognized my *ability to be aware* as being at all extraordinary.

Of course, scientists are quick to point out that our ability to sense physical structures *out there* would not exist if our eyes were missing. In fact, science adamantly maintains that you and I are aware *only* because we have bodies with sensory organs like eyes and ears, etc. Without a body, the assertion goes, nobody would be aware of anything.

The problem is, *that might not be the case*. Certainly, mechanisms for sensory awareness exist within life forms. It would be non-sensical to have a physical body, whether created by design or blind evolution, that *didn't* sport eyes or ears or at least some kind of mechanism to sense physical stimuli around it. Nobody is going to argue with that.

But there may be more . . .

As much as each of us associates *our-self* with *our body*, India's Vedic tradition suggests that, in fact, the *ability to be aware* is a reflection of the only thing that is truly *real* and *lasting* within us. And even though they acknowledge that Consciousness is inextricably woven into the experiences of the physical body—so much so that during life we don't readily recognize it as a separate thing—the tradition maintains that *being conscious* is what does not cease to exist with the death of the body.

If we really are formless Consciousnesses—Awarenesses, Beings animating and experiencing through a physical body—questions arises. “Why,” for instance, “do we exist, and from whence have we come?”

Although it may not be immediately obvious, these questions are related to an even more important question concerning *the nature of God*. Specifically, “Why did God create the universe in the first place?”⁴

To answer that, consider *a line* in Euclidean space.⁵

Although you have dealt with line *segments* in math and physics classes, a *real* line is an altogether different matter. It is a geometric structure that extends to infinity in both directions, never looping or crossing, never erring in its straight path. A line is a perfect, infinite, one dimen-

⁴ As pointed out two chapters ago, a Being with the power to create something as minutely complex yet potentially immense as a universe would surely not do so without a damn good reason. If we had some ideas as to what that reason was, it *would* be easier to understand where humans fit into the scheme of things.

⁵ Euclidean space is the kind of geometry most people identify with in their everyday lives. In Euclidean space, the lengths a and b of the sides of a right triangle will be related to the hypotenuse c of the triangle by the relationship $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$.

sional entity.

Now mentally *pin your line at a point*, then ever so carefully *rotate it about that pivot*. In doing so, you generate *a plane*. What is interesting is that a plane is a perfect, infinite, two dimensional entity. In other words, our perfect line has within itself the possibility of generating an even more advanced kind of perfection, a plane.

In the Vedanta tradition of India, God is believed to be a lot like that. *Within the Divine Mind's infinite perfection*, the argument goes, *It must have within Itself the possibility of growing and becoming more perfect. If that were not the case, It would be static—and static states stagnate.*⁶

From this perspective, the One Self is believed to have created the universe *out of the stuff of Itself* (i.e., out of Its own Thought), then sent highly developed *fingers of Its own Consciousness* down into that physical universe. Why? Because by seeping into the myriad nooks and crannies of experience-in-matter, It creates the possibility of growth within Itself.

Life on earth is one of those crannies, and humankind—you and I—are believed to be tiny specks of Awareness, baby Consciousnesses, that are evolving as the Divine Whole evolves. Human life may be unique in its existence, but it is not alone or especially blessed. It is one of many cosmic experiments, a delicate contrivance the aim of which is to allow fledgling Consciousness to learn to deal with *existence in matter* through *immersion in matter*. And as Consciousness grows from it experience, so grows the Mind of God.

As far as the Vedic tradition is concerned, that is *why* we exist and *from whence* we came. For now, we will take it as a working hypothesis.

If this is true, Consciousness existed in some form or other at the beginning of this solar evolution. So what might it have been like for Consciousness at that time? To consider that, momentarily switch gears and entertain the following scenario.

You have been chosen by NASA to go alone to Planet X to carry out a very important mission (you have been asked to build by hand a precision, highly intricate scientific devices at an outpost on this planet). Just before you arrive, you are told by your pilot that the planet has some idiosyncrasies. For instance, without warning, gravity can change directions (you

⁶ Stating that something already perfect can become *more perfect* is certainly paradoxical, but is not at all surprising that the East would use such phraseology in talking about God. Why? Because answering with a paradox an enormously complex and subtle question, especially one that may be beyond human understanding, is a favorite tack within Eastern metaphysics. The reason why will become evident later when we talk about meditation.

may be standing upright one moment and the next be hurtling toward the east wall). There are other little problems, but your pilot doesn't have time to fill you in on all of them before you land. As you leave the transfer ship, you realize you don't really know what to expect.

In this situation, how are you going to deal with this totally foreign environment?

Most probably, you are not going to begin by doing anything too ambitious—no ballroom dancing on the *holodeck*, no exotic gymnastics, no power weight lifting. You will probably tether yourself to a desk; be observant; move slowly and carefully; generally get a feel for the situation before trying anything fancy.

At the beginning of the *life cycle* of this planet, that is exactly what it must have been like for completely formless Consciousness as it began to immerse itself into what it surely perceived as a truly foreign environment—*existence in matter*. Consciousness at that level⁷ and at that point was absolutely pure (allegorically, *Garden of Eden* time?), but its purity was that of an innocent—a purity born of inexperience. The prospect of *existence in a living body* was probably as strange and scary to it then as *existence without a body* is to us now. Nevertheless, the task of Awareness was to overshadow living, physical form and, in doing so, to learn to exist responsibly in matter. As such, it had waited within the “inner worlds” for the time when the planet was ready to support life.⁸ When the time was right, it infused itself into the appropriate life-form vehicles.

And what kind of life-forms might that have been?

When we think of life, we think of human life. When we think of Consciousness, we think of human Consciousness. But let's face it, the kind of existence we experience is filled with emotional and psychological complexity that would hardly be appropriate for Consciousness that was just beginning to learn about existence-in-matter. Consciousness on that level needed gentle experience, experience that was not psychologically harsh. And the form that fit the bill? Consider, for a moment, the life-ex-

⁷ Tradition maintains that true fledgling Consciousness first experienced on the level of the mineral kingdom for countless eons of time before moving to a point where experience through *life-forms* was appropriate. The Consciousness referred to in this section is Consciousness that has moved to that life-form point. See Footnote 10.

⁸ The *inner worlds* are believed to be levels of existence where pure *thought* has form and substance. The idea will be expanded upon later when we talk about death, after-life, and before-birth states.

perience of plant-forms.⁹

Consciousness overshadowing a plant?

Don't be fooled, oh followers of Gary L. Fledgling Consciousness could learn and observe a great deal about selfless service to the whole of life through animating plant forms. After all, the plant kingdom is an integral part of the biological hierarchy of life, so much so that higher order life forms (i.e., animals) would not be able to *exist* on this planet without it. Plants and trees are the primary living organisms that convert energy in the form of sunlight into chemical energy in the form of sugars that can be used as food by animals, humans included. In the process, plants and trees convert carbon dioxide to oxygen producing almost all of the free oxygen available in the atmosphere (hence, practically all the oxygen we breathe). They are constantly cleansing the atmosphere of both human and natural pollutants; are a source of healing agents for animal forms (most of the drugs being produced by drug companies these days are chemical compounds that were found through plant research); stabilize the land by diminishing the loss of top soil due to wind and water erosion; and are instrumental in maintaining regional climatic stability. In short, the plant kingdom is very deeply involved in the selfless support of the kingdoms above it, and that tone of selflessness has been characteristic of it since the beginning.

As far as most humans are concerned, plants do all this mindlessly, following the nature of their specie. But if Consciousness exists, and if It *had* to feel Its way into what surely must be perceived as a very foreign form of existence (i.e., life in a body), what better way than through the plant kingdom? Put another way, if Consciousness in its primal, baby stage had to be gently introduced to *existence in matter*, doing so through a vehicle in which there was not the personal and psychological stresses we

⁹ This is where some people become incredulous, which brings us back to the Gary Larson cartoon. Ask your average man on the street whether he thinks higher animal forms are conscious and he might . . . maybe . . . nod toward the possibility that they are. His rationale? Experience! Look into the eyes of, say, a dog, and you'll find there's contact between it and you. The animal will either wag its tail in friendly recognition or view you as a danger and try to tear your arm off. In both cases, there is no question whether the animal is aware of your presence.

But take that same man and ask him if he thinks plants are conscious and he will either look at you blankly or poke you in the shoulder and say, "You're joking, right?"

Why? Because for the most part, life-forms that don't think and act in ways that at least resemble the relatively sophisticated ways of humans are assumed not to be consciously experiencing on *any* level.

The East believes that that is dead wrong.

humans deal with daily would be paramount. Consciousness just starting out would need an environment in which personalized goals and interests were absent. Unemotional, selfless service to the rest of life would be ideal, which is exactly how the plant kingdom is oriented. In short, if Consciousness *had* to expand into matter as a life-form, there is no more appropriate way for it to have started.

In reality, I've painted a relatively simple picture of the vehicle-forms we call "plants," at least as far as it is depicted in the Vedic tradition. If their view is accurate, plants have a number of levels of Consciousness working through them. There is the primitive Awareness associated with their atomic structures.¹⁰ There is the Awareness that comes with the cooperative efforts of the cellular units. There is higher Consciousness that overshadows and animates the whole. In Sanskrit, these more evolved Awarenesses, these overshadowing Consciousnesses, are called *devas*, and they make up and support what is called the *devic kingdom*.¹¹

Consciousness on this level acts a lot like Emerson's *oversoul*. It is *undifferentiated*, a truly whole self. There are billions and billions of petunias, for instance, all over the world. The Consciousness that animates one could—most probably does—animate all. And because this level of Consciousness is just beginning to immerse Itself in matter, Its link to the Whole of life has not diminished . . . It is still in oneness with the Divine Mind.

With time, that Consciousness will begin to differentiate. The part,

¹⁰ Atoms being conscious? It could be worse: The first time I heard someone claim that people from India believe rocks are alive was in my seventh grade history class. The idea seemed preposterous and, being a typical twelve-year old kid, I derived a considerable amount of mirth from the thought.

Though I wasn't at all aware of it at the time, neither my text nor my teacher were particularly enlightened when it came to understanding Eastern traditions. *Of course rocks aren't alive*. They don't breathe; they don't reproduce; they don't do any of the processes scientists require of living things. But that misses the mark completely. What the Eastern tradition really maintains is that rocks have a level of *conscious*, associated with them. And although that probably sounds just as weird, it isn't.

If God *thought the worlds into existence*—this being the stuff of its own Consciousness in action—then there is nothing that is not a part of God's Consciousness. If that is true, there is nothing that is not conscious on some level. The Awareness wrapped up in the existence of a rock is not anything like the developed Awareness wrapped up in a human being, but that doesn't mean Awareness in its seedling form doesn't exist there. It is likely that it mean we just aren't together enough to recognize it.

¹¹ A belief in the devic kingdom is not restricted to India. One of its most graphic depictions comes from the American Indians when they called the consciousnesses of nature *Nature Spirits* . . .

for instance, associated with the petunias in just South America, they will begin to focus more into the specific experiences that are available to them in South America. And as that differentiation begins to happen, each of the parts of the self will begin to recede to some degree from the Whole. Thus begins the path to experiencing of individualized pieces, each a unit unto itself.

There is a limit to the experience Consciousness can accrue from its association with plant forms. The next logical step would be to move into vehicles that could allow It a more evolved “awakening” into matter. That, as far as this scenario is concerned, is exactly what animal forms do. Fitted with limited brains, instincts, mobility, and providing an immense range of embodiments from the one celled amoebae to the mammal that acts as companion to humans (Marmaduke and *el pussy gato*), animal-forms allow Consciousness to expand even further into existence and experience within matter.

On the lower animal levels, Consciousness-when-in-matter still acts like an oversoul, experiencing simultaneously through large numbers of physical vehicles at once. But as It grows into the necessity to experience in more complex ways, Consciousness begins to compartmentalize. It does so by naturally dividing over time into individualized units, each of which concerns Itself with the rich experiences of fewer yet more-highly-ordered animal vehicles apiece. And as each narrows its focus, at least while in a body, each draws Its immediate awareness *away from all else*. It begins, in other words, to feel *separate* within the Whole.

Up to this point, Consciousness has animated and experienced through forms that do not question or dispute the natural forces that shaped their existence. It has acted like an observer, growing in awareness as It rides through life. Its presence has been the light within the eye of the form, but It has not been the form nor has it become so absorbed in the experiences of the form that it has *completely* forgotten Its link to the Whole.

When it becomes time for Consciousness to step through the gateway separating animals from humans, all that changes. It has differentiated to the point where the kinds of experience It needs to continue to grow require isolation. Now, when animating a body, a part of Itself must be allowed to so completely meld with its single vehicle that It all but forgets its link to God.

We’ll talk more about what humankind is shortly. There is one last

parting shot, though. In this view, the consciousness we associate with ourselves is not at the top of the ladder. All we have talked about so far has been Awareness that is considerably less immersed in matter and, hence, considerably less evolved in the ways of existence-in-matter. What is important to understand is that just as there is Consciousness at these relatively less developed levels, there are believed to be Consciousnesses that are so far beyond anything we could even imagine that it would boggle the mind to try.

Example: Many ancient peoples believed that the Sun was a great Being. Modern science naturally scoffs at such primitive ideas. After all, we know a lot about the Sun's composition and the fusion process that allows it to provide our world with energy, etc. But ignoring science for the moment, does it make sense to automatically assume there is no Consciousness at the heart of that body?

We can answer that by answering another question: If a Being were given the task of overseeing and nurturing the development of an entire evolution of "lesser" Beings—Beings like ourselves—would one expect that Being to embody a physical form that was man-like?

The answer to that is surely "no". Our body-type is excellent for the kind of experiences we seem to be learning to deal with here on Earth, but for a higher Being with truly cosmic responsibilities, human form would surely be too limiting.

Put in an altogether different context, a very ancient context, if there is a purpose to life—if there is a God or Divine Mind or whatever—and if there is a spiritual evolution going on in the universe in general and our solar system in particular, would you not expect to find a guardian at the center of that evolution—a nurturing, supporting Being that was One with that infinitely loving, creative, always expanding Consciousness we call God?

And when that great, benevolent Being took up physical embodiment, one that would allow It to bathe Its charges in the Light of Its presence, what kind of a form might It take?

As an ancient Egyptian-inspired poem suggests:

*Even as the Sun, the eternal, shines forever,
From His Light grow the worlds;
So the lighted soul reflects that mighty One,
Whose Light shall create and renew the lives of men.*

Without our star, we would not be here. Neither would our planet,

nor any of the others. Our world and our presence exists by the grace of our star. It upholds us completely.

Are stars the embodiment of Beings far beyond anything man could imagine? Who can say? But you can see why many in the ancient world might have thought so. And if they were right, what a wonder the night sky reveals . . . all those stars . . . all that Consciousness. How immense the mind of God.

Chapter 6

SLEEPING GODS

*When the “I” speaks of the “I”, it speaks of nothing.
But when the “I” speaks of the whole of which it knows itself one, it speaks
of all things.*

unattributed

*Let all things speak to you of the wonder and care of the creative minds
that are a part of the whole universe.
Become mindful of the upholding love that makes your being possible.
Become mindful of the search and the struggles that exist in others.
Become mindful that beyond the weeping of the lesser self, there is a great
and beautiful universe.*

unattributed

In the previous gathering, we discussed the evolution of Consciousness. Continuing on . . .

When Consciousness steps from animating *animal forms* to that of *human form*, it moves into a world that is as different as day is from night. Until that point, Consciousness has acted like an observer riding in a vehicle (the animal body) governed almost entirely by the primal impulses of *instinct*.

Animal instincts do exist within the human complex (after all, human bodies *are* animal bodies), but along with them are the mental tools necessary for the generation of one's *own* instincts. How so? *Humankind can think creatively*. In fact, at least part of the reason for this stage of experience in the physical world is to allow Consciousness to learn to deal

responsibly with the creative energies of *thought* (literally the creative energies of God) and with the associated *freedom of will and choice* that goes with that power—all *within the context of existence in matter*.

How does this all happen? An educated guess suggests the following human-Consciousness evolution: By the time nature developed the animal-form we associate with human to the point where it could be used as a vehicle, the Consciousnesses that were ready to animate those forms began to overshadow them just as they had done with lesser animal forms.¹ At first, each responded to life primarily through the genetically inherited instincts provided by their human-animal vehicles, but they did more than that. The Consciousnesses animating those forms also began to use the mechanism of *thought* to create an inner world over-and-above instinct. In doing so, each Awareness created within its composite self a kind of advanced psychological complex wrapped up in what could loosely be called *an extended personality*.

This personality was not the Consciousness Itself; it was more like a temporary facade erected on the outskirts of Its awareness. But while in a body, Consciousness poured Its attention through that personal edifice so completely that It came to associate Itself with the *mental and emotional world It had created* (i.e., the psychological complex) and the *body form It had inherited*. In turn, because the *personal complex* was created from the stuff of thought, that contrived complex began to take on a life of its own.

In other words, what we've called Consciousness became a parent—a Higher Self—supporting a self-created child.² That *child self* was to grow with experience in succeeding lifetimes to such an extent that we now see only a small part of its overall complex emerging during a particular life. Nevertheless, it is that bit that we normally identify with when we use a word like “me.”

This situation took an enormous period to develop. As things stand now, we see life—we *live* life—through this “personal” child-self. It (we) experiences, chooses, and deals with the consequences of choice . . . sometimes acting like a true child with wildly escalating wants and desires, sometimes acting like a responsible adult. What is important is that the

¹ In fact, it is probable that in preparing for the jump from animal-type experience to human-type experience, some of those Consciousnesses actually animated the animal predecessors to the human form.

² This is important. It means there are two major Awarenesses within every human—the Higher-self (the parent) and the lesser-self (the child). The Higher-self grows by acting as parent to the child; the child grows by virtue of the experience afforded it while in-body on the physical level.

lesser side of the child-self, the part of the self that often identifies solely with “me,” it isn’t real in the sense that it doesn’t tend to build into itself qualities of lasting substance. That part of the self, the lesser side of the child (or what is sometimes called *the personal self*), is completely self-involved. Its primary concern is for its own security and welfare—often becoming involved in the accumulation of power or wealth, or the maintenance of beauty or relationships it feels it needs in a particular lifetime (all things that are substance-less in the sense that they can be here now, then gone in wink). Yet as unreal as its constantly changing, constantly fleeting world is, this *personal self* (what you call “I”) maintains a fierce belief in the illusion of itself *as a reality*.³

The cumulative illusion of substance-where-there-is-none . . . a Being, separate from the rest of life, that sees itself as the center of all that is important . . . exists for all but the most advanced humans. The *personal-self-complex* has to appear solid and real if it is to take itself seriously in this great cosmic play. It must be allowed to make choices in constructing the mental and emotional environment it uses to affect the world, because only in that way will the consequences of its choices make any difference to it . . . and dealing with the consequences of its actions is very important.

Real and imagined needs begin simply enough, then tend to grow by leaps and bounds. If wants and desires get out of hand, they become a major part of its world. The child’s efforts to satisfy those self-oriented ends ultimately brings pain . . . a sure sign that something is amiss in the way it is dealing with the world.

Having free will, the child can ignore the signs or acknowledge them depending upon how awake it has become. But sooner or later, the realization will dawn that it has built within itself attitudes that are not particularly useful or constructive, and it will have to tear down the old thought-forms and rebuild anew using the creativity inherent within its ability to think. Of course, it can fight this need to change for eons, but there will come a time when it decides the world it has created for itself is not right. When that time comes, it will effect change.

I’ve simplified the scenario considerably. Rarely do events follow in such a plop, plop manner. Nevertheless, there will come a time when the child’s attitudes and actions will begin to build and maintain qualities

³ [Note not in the original text: The Brothers once summarized this situation by noting that we had no idea what we really were, that in reality we are “sleeping Gods.” This sounds heretical, but it isn’t. It was just them letting us know that there is much, much more to being a human than is superficially obvious.]

within itself that have reality *above and beyond*. Its choices will ring with strength and loving compassion and its presence will be a blessing to all who come near. Humanity doesn't come across Beings at this level often, so it is not surprising that when such an individual is identified, words like *saint* are used to describe the quality of the Being. Yet in all cases, the extraordinary power such a Being wields is not found in Its affiliation with a particular church or mosque or synagogue, it is in the Being's resonance with the tenor and motivation of the One Self. It is a *child-self* that is becoming *real*.

Put in a different way, after many lifetimes, the child finally grows from a purely self-focused, instinctual entity to a Being that fully and completely cares beyond itself. When that happens, we find a curious situation. The overshadowing Consciousness has learned about existence within matter from first-hand experience, just as was expected. But in the process, It has succeeded in parenting what began as an empty facade, a personality complex totally devoid of any redeeming qualities in a spiritual sense, into an Awareness that has life and a *basis in reality*. Consciousness has created and nurtured from nothing something worth keeping, quite literally an extension of itself . . . *a new Being*. And in doing so, God grows greater.

From a human perspective, the culmination of this feat is embodied in the enlightenment attained by those who are called in India *Buddhas*.⁴ When that state is earned, the walls that had separated the personal complex from the Whole dissolve away forever (at least from the standpoint of human time) and the illusion of separateness is no more. It is said that when that rare event takes place, when a human has grown to the point where It can strip the veils from Itself and exist in the world as a fully enlightened Being, a thrill of joy sweeps through the universe. The great

⁴ As was mentioned earlier, most Westerners incorrectly associate the word *Buddha* with a single, historic individual, Siddhartha Gautama. Siddhartha was, indeed, a Buddha, but he was not the *only* one.

[Note not in original text: Language gets confusing here. The Buddha was an Avatar, a World Teacher. This is a situation in which Consciousness that is so immense the only word we might use to describe it is "God" overshadows a completely pure Being, a Master (the highest of the Brothers) and moves to set humanity back on track, so to speak. Christ was an Avatar. So was the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama). The term "Buddha" in popular culture is used to identify, not an Avatar but rather a Being who has moved to a point of enlightenment where the Being has learned all there is to learn from this place, has balanced all his or her previous karmic debt and is no longer in a state that requires that they reincarnate. As I said, this is confusing because "the Buddha" was one of these enlightened ones, but he was much more.

devas of the forests, the creatures of the land and sea, even the Artificers that plan, support and maintain the evolution of lesser Consciousnesses like ourselves, they all feel the moment. It is a time when one of God's children has returned home.⁵

There is a concept within the East called *karma* that fits into all of this, and although we will discuss it more later, a word seems appropriate now.

In simplified form, the Karmic Law essentially states that action will ultimately lead to consequences that are appropriate, given the tenor and general motivation prompting the action. In practice, there are two versions of interpretation in popular use these days.

The version currently accepted by a fair portion of the Hindu population is something of an *eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth* version. If you're good, you'll get a reward. If you're bad, God will punish you.⁶ It isn't unusual to find people who hold this view saying things like, "Oh, well, if something horrible happens to you it is due to *bad karma*. You must have done something awful in your last life."

The second view is typically found amongst Buddhists. It maintains that when you do something that isn't good, you are basically signaling the universe that you just don't understand how a human ought to be dealing with life. Karma, in conjunction with the Higher Self, draws experience to you (the child self) that is appropriate, given your state of ignorance, and from which you will hopefully begin to learn. One consequence: a kar-

⁵ The question arises, "Where does this grown up child-self go at the end of this evolution?" After all, there were *two* Beings involved in this process—the parent and the evolving child. The answer: At some point in the future the new grown-up will become parent to a new child and the process will continue on.

We started with the assumption that completely inexperienced Consciousnesses existed at the beginning of this solar evolution and awaited appropriate vehicles through which to experience and grow in the context of *existence in matter*. That was not entirely true. There certainly was Consciousness at that level, but there were also Beings that had evolved in earlier evolutions—that had been child-selves, had grown just as you and I are growing, and had developed to the point where they were ready to experience in matter as parents to new child selves. In other words, things were considerably more complex than I have made them out to be.

⁶ I have had Hindu students tell me that this is not the way they were taught about karma. In fact, that is not surprising. Though accepted by many Hindus today, the view I've outlined above is probably considerably twisted from its original form. There are still Hindus who hold the older view—that view (I'll state it shortly) is now generally associated (at least by me) with the Buddhist version of karma.

mic response that brings physical or emotional pain is not seen as a punishment. It is seen as an opportunity to awaken.⁷ Another consequence: Experiencing an uncomfortable event doesn't necessarily mean someone has previously done something bad. It could simply be the testing of an individual's resolve on some basic principle, or the prodding needed to awaken an individual into a deeper understanding of life.

In other words, the idea of Karma, from the Buddhist's point of view, is that of a teacher. They even call it "the teaching Law." It is not a punishment.⁸ It is not an unloving God that says, "You've been bad so I'm going to make your life miserable." It's exactly the opposite. It is a mechanism within a loving, benevolent universe that says, "Here is experience that will hopefully allow you to better understand what you ought to be."⁹

Reincarnation also fits into this scheme. The word says exactly what it means. Incarnation is defined as *being born into a body*; re-incarnation is the possibility of being born into a body more than once at different points in time.

Hinduism's views about reincarnation parallel the modern-day Hindu views about karma. The belief is that if you accumulate *bad karma*, you will reincarnate into a lesser position in life. This is part of the idea behind the caste system. If you are a warrior and you abused your power, you are liable to come back next time in a lesser caste (and if you are good you will come back at a higher station, possibly at the priest level). The belief further maintains that if you have been really bad, you could come back as a non-human lifeform like a donkey or even an insect.

Given the assumptions we have already made about God (i.e., that God is interested in the growth of Its parts), the Buddhists suggest what

⁷ They say that if you want to get a donkey to cooperate, you have to kick it first to get its attention. People are the same way. You might be a raving ass, but if everything is nice and warm and pleasant in your life and you're happy, why bother changing? From this view, the belief is that if you so act, karma will sooner or later bring you experience that, if need be, will get your attention through pain. If you are at all awake, the pain will motivate you to think more deeply about how you are dealing with life.

⁸ Note not in the original text: There is another responsibility karma has that is associated with the need to *balance energy* in a cosmic sense (I say considerably more about this in the autobiography). The problem is that when balancing happens, life is often difficult. Although this isn't what's going on, for many, the child-self sees *difficulty* and translates that into *punishment*. I think that is where the Hindus got the idea that karma was a *carrot and stick* affair.

⁹ The idea of Karma is a lot more complicated than I've made it out to be. Understand that! We will talk more about it later.

may to many be a more appealing version of reincarnation. The pressures and experiences that Consciousnesses at the human level need if they are to grow and unfold into spiritually responsible Beings are available only within the human domain. It would make no sense for an errant Consciousness, even one that has acted in ways that are particularly bad, to reincarnate into the body of a lower animal form.¹⁰ From the Buddhist perspective, “Once human, always human.”¹¹

There is a lot more to say about the idea of reincarnation; we will get to that later. For now, you need to realize that when I use of the word “reincarnation” I’m using it in the Buddhist sense.

It is now time to set the stage for a look at the teachings of the Buddha. To do so, we will begin with a true story:

I went to San Marino High School. When I was a senior, there was a kid named Mike Benson who was a sophomore (I’ve actually changed his name because this was a real, live person, and this experience really happened). I didn’t know him very well, but he was a good looking fellow, very intelligent, very athletic, very popular . . . an all-around fine guy. He had a sister who was a sophomore. She was bright, popular, and absolutely beautiful.

Their parents were pillars of San Marino society, such as it is. Papa was a millionaire businessman with a pleasant smile and lots of friends and

¹⁰ Actually, there is one exception. The Sanskrit word *Aviche* alludes to what the Vedantan tradition maintains is the deepest of the hells. It is a state of complete isolation. If the personal complex of a Consciousness has so completely in-turned on itself that it has cut all ties with its Higher self—the Consciousness that created it—and if the child’s actions so completely concrete this selfishness into itself that nature deems it a total loss, then that Consciousness will be stripped of what it has accumulated in the way of growth as an *Awareness in matter* and will have to begin over again either in the mineral or plant kingdom (depending upon how extreme the situation). This is not a punishment; it is simply that nature can do only so much to cleanse a Being that has moved in negative ways. Once the Being has dug a hole into the *dark side* that is so deep it couldn’t possibly extricate itself on its own, nature steps in and cleanses in the only way that will give the Consciousness involved a chance in the future. Nevertheless, *Aviche* is a state of complete isolation—a being totally alone with itself for what seems an eternity—a complete hell if there ever was one. Adolf Hitler is probably in *Aviche*.

It is possible that this exception was the circumstance from which the Hindus generated their view about Beings reincarnating as lower life forms if they’d been destructive in life.

¹¹ [Note not in the original text.] It is possible for a Being, through its actions, to so completely cut itself off from its Higher Self, that the only way forward would be for karma and life to strip the Being of all it had accumulated through all of its incarnations, and make it start over again. In Sanskrit, the word for this state is *aviche*. So in that sense and under that circumstance, a Being *could* move “backwards” and out of the human realm.

connections. Mama was artistic, athletic, even more beautiful than Mike's sister, ran her own business, and was constantly involved in civic minded projects. They all lived in a big San Marino house; life couldn't have been rosier for them all.

I left for college. When I got back for Christmas vacation, I was talking with friends when one of the guys said, "Did you hear about the Bensons?"

I said, "No." My friend proceeded to tell me this story.

It seems that about two months after I left for college, the family ran into some trouble. It happened on a Friday. Things began normally—everyone was up early in the morning to prepare for the day. The family had breakfast together; dad took off for the office at 7:45 AM; Mike left soon after for school. The only thing that was unusual was that the daughter had some kind of appointment in the city of Newport that day, and afterward she and her mom intended to see friends in San Clemente. As such, the two jumped into the young girl's new Volkswagen Beetle at 9:00 AM and made for the beach.

All was well until Mr. Benson received a phone call around 3:30 PM from the Laguna Beach police department. The officer on the line was very matter-of-fact: "Mr. Benson?" he said. "I'm sorry to inform you that the VW bug your wife and daughter were driving was pushed over the center line of Pacific Coast Highway by a gust of wind and crashed headlong into a large truck going the other way. Your wife and daughter are both dead."

That morning, Mr. Benson's world was the picture of contentment and success. By evening, it had completely crumbled down around him.

We are obviously looking at a man who was in an enormous amount of psychological pain at the time. So having set the stage, let's consider the teachings of the Buddha. After all, it was the Buddha who saw to the heart of suffering and sorrow, and who came to see the path to the cessation of suffering and sorrow.

The Buddha's "Four Truths" were:

- 1.) To exist as a separate personality predestines suffering and sorrow.
- 2.) The greatest cause of misery is the desire to possess and the desire to preserve things possessed.
- 3.) Freedom from suffering is obtained by the slaying out of all de-

sire, save the desire for right action.

- 4.) The way of liberation and to the cessation of all opposites is the Noble Eight-Fold Path, the way of immortality.

In light of the Bensons' story, most people who read the Four Truths come away thinking the Buddha was one cold character. Why? Because it looks as though the Buddha's teachings say that the only way Mr. Benson could have been spared the pain of his loved one's deaths was to have never loved in the first place.

Although this is a fairly common interpretation of the Buddha's teachings, even amongst Buddhists, *that was not his message*. He never maintained that the path to the cessation of suffering and sorrow was to extricate oneself from life, or that one should shun interaction with other humans. These are complete misinterpretations of the Buddha's teachings.

So what *was* the Buddha really saying?
We will talk about that next time!

Chapter 7

THE EMPTINESS THAT IS FULL

There is an Indian song that is worth remembering, called “The Lesson of the Tree.” It says:

*It endures all the heat of the sun and gives to everyone
the coolness of its shade.*

And we, what is it that we do?

Gandhi

Thinking back, we learned that the Buddha’s quest was to understand the cause of suffering and sorrow and to find the path to the cessation of suffering and sorrow. To that end he taught The Four Truths quoted below:

- 1.) To exist as a separate personality predestines suffering and sorrow.
- 2.) The greatest cause of misery is the desire to possess and the desire to preserve things possessed.
- 3.) Freedom from suffering is obtained by the slaying out of all desires, save the desire for right action.
- 4.) The way of liberation and to the cessation of all opposites is the Noble Eight-Fold Path, the way of immortality.

The question is, “What do these sentences mean?” Is the Buddha telling us that the only way we can step away from pain, suffering and sorrow is to renounce the world, or was he saying something entirely different?

When I first began to studying Eastern thought, I was frankly confused about the message of the Buddha. How I came to understand that message is educational and worth recounting.

I have a group of friends that I eat with every evening. Each person has their own night to cook: I cook on Friday; Cathy cooks on Sunday; Bryan cooks on Thursday; etc. Everyone in the group is relatively like-minded in their philosophy of life even though the range of ages is from thirty-two to seventy-five and the professions range from psychologist, MD, acupuncturist and chiropractor to novelist and physicist (the latter being myself). We are not a commune . . . we don't live together . . . but our eating group has been intact for over eighteen years. It's a lot like an extended family.

Just a few years after the group formed, one of our members (Kay) had a close friend die. I knew she generally accepted the Buddhist version of reincarnation, so although I was sorry about the death I took the news in a relatively off-handed way. I even went so far as to joke about it, saying at one point something to the effect of, "Ho hum. You come in, you go out. No big deal. On with the show."

I wasn't *trying* to be rankly insensitive. Death, I reasoned at the time, was nothing more than a transition from one state to another . . . like crossing over a line. It wasn't as though Kay's friend had ceased to be. He was just somewhere else. Sure, she couldn't talk to him anymore, but if reincarnation was a reality, that wasn't necessarily a permanent situation. It never occurred to me that she would take his departure in any other way.

As intellectually sound as my reasoning seemed, it turned out that my attitude weighed heavily on her. She never complained, but she was taking things hard and I wasn't helping. When I finally realized that, two thoughts came to mind. The first was, "Geez, Fletch, you *are* a clod!" The second, no less on-target but certainly more thought provoking, was "Why is she having so much trouble dealing with this?" I had never had anyone close to me die, so I really didn't understand.

Fortunately, one of the blessings I seem to have inherited from life is a talent for stumbling into illuminating situations that clarify things that I hadn't previously understood. I had only to wait a few months before the beginning of the potentially enlightening circumstance was to land at my feet. It came in the form of a cat.

Another of my friends, Cathy, loves cats. When her kids were young, they'd bring home strays and she'd take them in. I say this by way of establishing that I wasn't particularly surprised to notice, one fine June day a

few months after Kay's ordeal, that Cathy had added another feline to her burgeoning menagerie of eight.

"It wasn't my fault," she protested as I began to chivvy her about the newest arrival. "One of my cats was missing so I went to the Humane Society to see if she had been turned in. I was walking down one of the aisles in the room where the cat cages are when I was brought up short by an enormous paw that reached out from one of the cages and stopped me. I looked and saw a huge, gray, longhaired cat—pretty well beaten up—peering out at me in a very dignified manner. I asked the attendant about the cat and was told that he was supposed to have been put to sleep earlier that day but hadn't been because they weren't able to find his paper work. So what could I do?"

What, indeed. Gray became a part of Cathy's household, and that was that.

The poor fellow did have problems. A few months after Cathy found him, it became evident that one of his eyes had to be removed. I have a strong rapport with animals, so during that period I spent a considerable amount of time sitting quietly with him. Although I didn't intend it to happen, he evidently took it personally and attached himself quite strongly to me.

Three months after his operation, I made the mistake of going out and leaving my back door open (I was renting the place next door to Cathy's home at the time). When I got home I found Gray all curled up in the corner of my living room cleaning himself. For those of you who know anything about cats, you know that kind of activity means the cat is feeling comfortable, secure, and at home. Put another way, he adopted me.

A few months later I had to move out of my house (the owners wanted to sell it) and I ended up in a small apartment in South Pasadena (I still ate with the group but was no longer in the neighborhood). The move really upset the cat, so although I hadn't to that time allowed him to sleep on my bed at night (I'd made him his own bed), I let him do so that first night because I didn't want him to be frightened. Of course, that was all it took. From then on, the bed was his whenever he wanted it.

As I got better acquainted with him, Gray turned out to be a very special cat. For instance, every evening just after I'd gone to bed he would come in, hop up on the bed, plant himself sphinx-style on my chest, then proceed to purr until I'd fallen asleep. He did it every night. He'd stay only as long as I was awake; as soon as I was asleep he'd get up and leave (I know that because a couple of times I woke up shortly after dozing off and he'd be gone). One of his catly duties, as far as he was evidently con-

cerned, was to purr me to sleep at night.

He had other characteristics that were unique. He was very patient, for instance. I'd be sitting at my desk working when I'd suddenly get the feeling that I was being watched. I'd swing around and there he'd be, sitting at the kitchen door, patiently waiting for me to realize that he was hungry and that I should feed him. There was no meowing, no nudging things off my desk, no nipping at my heels. He would just sit there stoically, waiting for me to notice him.

He would occasionally do things that were quite special. I used to get horrendous headaches. I remember going to bed one night with a small throbbing only to awaken around 2:00 A.M. with a really big one. I got up, took two aspirin, then crawled back into bed anticipating the usual, painful, forty-five minute wait that normally preceded the aspirin taking effect and my drifting back off to sleep. Gray was in the living room asleep on the couch at the time, and when I went into the bathroom I must have awakened him. Within a minute or so of my getting back into bed, he came padding into my room, jumped up on the bed, walked around to my face (I was on my side facing the wall), lay down in his customary sphinx-like position next to me, *butted his head up against my forehead* and, holding that position, started to purr.

My headache began to recede almost immediately, and within five minutes I was fast asleep. I have no idea what was in his mind when he did it, but as far as I was concerned it was one of the nicest shows of affection I had ever experienced.

I'm telling you all of this because I want you to understand that the animal was quite special to me. He was like a companion; I depended on his presence in my life. I didn't think about the attachment at the time, but it was there and it was strong. Unfortunately, he was quite old when I got him. Within a few years, his kidneys failed and I had to have him put to sleep.

He lay in my lap as I drove him to the vet that day. I was naturally upset but was determined to keep a stiff upper lip. When I arrived at the animal hospital, there was one thing I wanted to be sure about: I wanted his body cremated. I didn't want him thrown in a freezer after I had left, only to be sold to some biological supplies house for sale as a high school dissection lab.

I took Gray into the surgery. Everything was fine until I tried to quiz the vet about the cremation. As soon as I opened my mouth to speak, it was all over. Uncontrolled tears and sobs. The vet was horrified, having

absolutely no clue as to how to deal with a full grown male tearing mightily all over the office. I finally got my question out and the vet gave me an acceptable answer, so with the cat in my arms he gave Gray a lethal injection and the cat dropped off immediately.

My emotions calmed two minutes after I left the vet's, but I really did not understand why they had crescendoed in the first place. I loved my cat and wanted the best for him. He'd had a good life with me and it was time to go. If his small self did continue to exist, he was certainly in a considerably more peaceful state "on the other side" than he was in his decrepit, painful body here. There was no reason for me to be so upset.

As I usually do whenever I'm thoroughly confused, I spent time that night reflecting on the happenings of the day. I began by thinking about Gray, projecting gratitude toward him for his friendship; apologies for my occasional thoughtlessnesses in his regard; blessing him for the efforts he had made as he attempted to deal with life. And although I surely couldn't prove it, for a short period of time I had a genuine feeling of Gray's contented presence. In fact, as I sat there in silence, I distinctly heard the sound of a cat purring. It only lasted for a minute, then was gone, but it was definitely there for a while. After it left, I continued my quiet meditation.

I should mention here that meditation can be a very strange experience in the sense that it can take you places in your mind that you would never have expected to go. It's as though the plodding, step by step, intellectual mind goes to sleep and something much more powerful takes over. Great leaps of understanding come as ideas that previously seemed disconnected fall into place and deep insights open themselves to you. It is a whole *other way* of thinking.

So as I sat there that night, reflecting upon the emotional knot I had experienced earlier that day, I was surprised to find myself drawn into a contemplation of the teachings of the Buddha. I had previously studied Buddhist beliefs and hadn't had a lot of luck making sense of them. What was remarkable was that during that meditation, in an instant, everything came together and I saw in myself what the Buddha was talking about in his teachings.

What became evident follows:

We've said that Awareness focuses into experience through the personal complex we call the child self. In the process, that personal self takes on a life of its own which we, as Awarenesses, totally identify with when in a body.

The problem is that at humanity's current stage of development (on average), the child we each sport as ourselves is very much a mixed bag. It has (we have) developed within itself some qualities that are noble, selfless, and in harmony with the benevolence of God. This is the higher side of the child.

Unfortunately, we have also developed a lesser side to the child that is almost totally devoted to nothing further than itself. It is that part of the self that incessantly cries: I want to be secure; I want to be liked; I want to be wealthy; I want to be respected; I want to be fulfilled; I want to have fun; I want to have power; I want to do damn well whatever I please.

I want; I want; I want. That's its battle cry.

In short, if you look around today, you will find very few people who *don't* focus a fair portion of their *thought* and *energy* almost entirely on the fulfillment of their desires and perceived needs regardless of the fact that those desires and needs change with the wind.¹

What this means is that in most cases, the world the child builds around itself is here today, gone tomorrow. And because very little of lasting quality is being built into the self, the *child self* that we identify with so completely is remarkably *empty of lasting substance*.

Down deep, the child is aware of this substancelessness even though it doesn't want to acknowledge it, so it attempts to cover it over in any way it can. In all cases, its focus is to *feel good now*, consequences be damned, but it usually attempts to accomplish this task in one of two general ways.

The first has to do with a deadening of itself to the world both *out there* and *within*. This can be done in several ways. Drugs most immediately come to mind, but even activities as innocuous as watching TV can be effective. Just flop down in an armchair, turn on the tube, find a good movie and zone out. Absorption into fantasy is not necessarily bad—you aren't bound for hell if you do it and, in a lot of instances, it is useful to allow the mind to relax. But taken to extremes you find a child self that just wants to mindlessly drift. Drifting is comfortable; drifting is effortless; drifting centers attention *out there*, versus *in here*.

There are other ways to deaden the self's sensitivity to its internal state. Have you ever known people who are addicted to activity, who are constantly moving, moving, moving. This is hardly mindless, but it's often repetitive action. It is the person who is so busy that they couldn't

¹ How many of the things you thought were important when you were five-years-old are still important to you now? How many of the things you think are important now will be important fifty years from now or, if reincarnation is a reality, *five hundred* years from now? There is very little within the child's world that is lasting.

possibly stop to consider their state of inner affairs. It is the child self that believes that if it is in motion, it must be real.

The second way the child deals with its emptiness is to use the creativity of thought available to it to build a material and emotional world around itself that makes it *feel* fulfilled and worthwhile even though it knows that at its core it is not. It works to accumulate wealth (I can't tell you the number of young people I have known who truly believe that having lots of money will make them happy). It goes out of its way to make friends, gain power, accumulate prestige, make a family²—whatever the child thinks will give its existence meaning. In short, the child draws around itself *things* from *out there* to bolster itself, to make it feel complete and whole and secure. And when it gets those things, it attaches itself to those supports like a barnacle to a pier.

There is nothing *inherently* wrong with having money, friends, or family, but when the child becomes attached to those things, *drawing them around itself to cover over the emptiness it feels within*, it lives in an illusion the Buddhist call *the fullness that is empty*.

With all this in mind, what was going on with my reaction to Gray's death?

I would never have done anything to knowingly hurt him—I loved him very much—but there was a part of me that *unconsciously* nurtured a rather selfish significance to his presence in my life. I expected certain things from him. It didn't matter what was going on *out there* in the big, bad world. He was always waiting for me to get home, always ready to jump up on my lap at a moment's notice, always there to purr me to sleep at evening's end. He supported me, and because he did so I became even more attached to him than might otherwise have been the case.

When Gray died, the mental and emotional support he afforded me vanished, the void he had helped fill was left agape, and I was left with the pain of separation.³

² I know of at least three women who have had babies specifically because they wanted someone who would love them and someone they could love back.

³ One of the things I noticed in the meditation after Gray's death was that when he died, it was as though a big piece of me had been quite literally ripped away. What was left uncovered was a feeling of aloneness, a feeling of deep emptiness. If the East's view is correct, I was feeling emptiness that was there all along, emptiness that hadn't yet been filled with lasting qualities. My child-self had unconsciously used his presence to fill in space—to cover over the void. I just didn't realize it until that psychological patch was removed. That isn't to say I didn't love my cat—that I wouldn't have done the best for him in any situation that might have arisen. It is to say that a part of me attributed a significance to his existence in my life that was essentially selfish.

My tears in the vet's office . . . they weren't for Gray, they were for myself.

Now I understood better how Katie felt with the death of her friend. And what about Benson—the man who lost his whole family. Nobody in their right mind would be critical of or surprised at how devastated he was—you or I would undoubtedly have acted the same way. But if you think about it, his reaction didn't make much sense. The guy was a Christian. His wife and daughter were good people. They had died probably two hours before he was called. That meant that when he got the news, they should have been in heaven doing, as Mark Twain put it, “things you'd never be caught dead doing when you were alive—like singing in a choir and playing a harp . . .”

From an intellectual perspective, they weren't in any pain when he found out about the accident. In fact, they were in a very nice place (assuming his religious beliefs were a reality). So why was he so upset?

He was upset for himself. I'm sure he loved his wife very much, but selfless love is rarely the only emotion that exists between spouses. She provided stability in his life. She was the one who patted him on his back when things got rough and told him everything would be OK. She was the one he confided in; the one he made plans around; his mate; his companion; the mother of his children. He had invested an enormous amount of personal energy into his relationship with her, and all of a sudden she wasn't there anymore.

When someone dies, it is not unusual to hear a loved one say things like, “Why did he (or she) leave me?” Or, “How will I ever live without him (or her)?” I've even known people who were *angry* at the deceased for dying.

When people cry at funerals, nine times out of ten they aren't crying for the departed. Usually they are crying for their *own* loss.⁴

⁴ Love is a strangely perceived thing in our world. If a boy *really* loves a girl, he won't make her life miserable when and if she breaks up with him. He might be personally unhappy about the decision, but if he *truly loves her*, her best interests will be uppermost in his mind. Given the petty little things that rejected lovers so often do to get back at the other person, one wonders what a guy in the early stages of a romance really means when he whispers to his girl, “I love you.”

In a similar vein, assuming an individual continues to exist after the death of the body (i.e., goes to heaven or into the inner worlds or whatever), imagine how traumatic it must be for that departed Being to feel the deep despair loved ones often respond with as a consequence of its departure. Put another way, people who grieve terribly don't think about the consequences of their despair on others, *including the departed*. Their love just doesn't extend that far.

With this commentary on the child self in mind, let's get back to the teachings of the Buddha.

From his life story, it should be obvious that the Buddha was not some terrible, austere, self-punishing fanatic out to convince the world that pleasure is bad and the only road to salvation is by way of denial and hardship. He was a Being who loved deeply.

So what was he saying? There is nothing wrong with taking up the path of materialism, he said, but you need to know that if you do, by the very nature of the drive that motivates you to do so (i.e., the emptiness within the child), there will come a time when it will lead you to pain and suffering.

That was what the Buddha's Four Truths were meant to say. To put it in the vernacular, you can have your expensive car, a luxurious beach house, your own multinational company, a beautiful wife (or handsome husband), perfectly perfect children, good health, a great body, athletic prowess, even all the money in the world, but if you have acquired those things to feel more complete, or content, or worthwhile, you will have failed. The acquisition of "things" doesn't bring real peace and happiness. Why? *It is the emptiness within the child self that prompts the self's need for distraction and the acquisition of things; it is the loss of those things that brings pain.* That was the message of the Buddha's Four Truths:

- 1.) To exist as a separate personality (i.e., to live the life of a personal child self, complete with its fleeting desires and wants and its selfish, often reckless pursuit of self-gratification) predestines suffering and sorrow (due to the very nature of the child's quest for what it thinks will satisfy it).
- 2.) The greatest cause of misery is the desire to possess and the desire to preserve things possessed (both consequences of the child's insecurities).
- 3.) Freedom from suffering is obtained by the slaying out of all desires (i.e., the living of a life that works toward eliminating the child's *need* to cover over its void-riddled self with apparent fullness), save the desire for right action.
- 4.) The way of liberation and to the cessation of all opposites (i.e., to the stepping away from the personal pulling and tugging that the child so often engages in as it desperately tries to control its world for its

own purposes) is the Noble Eight-fold Path, the way of immortality.

The last line of the Buddha's *Four Truths* speaks of the Noble Eight-Fold Path. Its virtues are Right Belief, Right Aspiration, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Meditation.

"Contemplate these," said the Buddha, "following them to the best of your understanding, and you will begin to build into yourself qualities of such worth that the self's emptiness will be replaced by substance that is worthy of being kept."

Speaking of the sixth and seventh virtues (I've chosen these arbitrarily) of the Eight-Fold Path in his pamphlet *The Buddha*, Manly Hall wrote:

The sixth virtue of the Noble Eightfold Path is Right Effort: Those who move in purity of motive; whose honesty and sincerity hide no ulterior motive; who act not for reward but because the act was true and proper within itself; whose heart and mind struggle to build character within the small self—these are the ones who understand the sixth golden precept of the Noble Eightfold Path, the virtue of Right Effort.

And . . .

The seventh virtue of the Noble Eightfold Path is Right Mindfulness: Those who are thoughtful, who anticipate the needs of others, who meditate upon the needs of the Self; whose thoughts are always kindly and harmless, who do not tear down and dissect with the mind but rather dwell on those things which are constructive and positive and of use to others; who realize that thoughts are living things that can affect the mind of the less attentive and, in that knowledge, make effort to put out no thought that can do emotional or spiritual damage to another—these are the ones who understand the seventh golden precept of the Noble Eightfold Path, the virtue of Right Mindfulness.

The Noble Eight-Fold Path is not a particularly easy path to follow. The child's patterns are usually well defined and deeply rooted, having

been generated and developed over a myriad of lifetimes. And let's face it, the personal mind doesn't like being nudged away from its chosen path of self-interest. Not wishing to give up its prerogatives, it often rationalizes "I am what I am and I just can't change," conveniently ignoring the fact that it is *constantly* in a state of flux. But what has been built can be torn down . . . one simply has to move with rational persistence. The Buddha gave the Noble Eightfold Path as a way to do just that.

In summary, for all the personal self's protestations, the teachings of the Buddha were not harsh. He never suggested one couldn't have a loving relationship with another human being,⁵ only that basing that relationship on the expectation of personal-needs-fulfilled would undoubtedly bring pain sooner or later. It wasn't as though he wanted it that way; he was simply telling the truth of the matter.

In addition, his doctrine wasn't a ticket to annihilation and it didn't ask humans to stop living happy, useful, productive lives. All it suggested was that there is happiness and contentment other than the kind produced by the emotional ups and downs of the *lesser self*, and that there is a joy that comes with the successful stepping away from the efforts of the self to satisfy its endless array of desires and perceived needs.

The Buddha preached a *change of focus* in life (something most child-selves *don't* want to do). He did not preach a *cessation from life*. He said, in the deepest compassion and regard for his fellow human beings, that by filling the personal complex's void with something of quality in a cosmic sense, the need for supports and bolsters from *out there* would lessen and the root cause of pain and suffering would cease to exist within the individual. The child-that-was-no-longer-a-child could then use well the things of the world without emotional and psychological attachment and, because there would be no longer any need for attachment, would not feel the pain of the separation when the inevitable separation of *external-thing and self* finally came.

In looking back, I find it remarkable how much I learned from the death of my cat.

We've talked a lot about the illusory nature of all the things the child normally depends upon as it tries to build its world. One wonders what, in

⁵ Not only was a personal life in the ordinary sense not looked down upon, it was accepted and honored. As far as the Buddha was concerned, the *path of the householder* in which an individual raises a family and lives a "normal" life was generally believed to be a more difficult path than that of the ascetic.

a nutshell, *is* Real and worthwhile?

Most all of the major world religions in the world teach that love is terribly important. The Vedic tradition goes even further.⁶ It maintains that when the Divine Mind thought the inner and outer worlds into existence, the *first thing* to *manifest* was Its deep Lovingness for all of Its parts, all of Its creation. That Lovingness is believed to be the *first thrill*, that which underlies and pervades all things from the heart of the atom on up. It is considered to be quite literally the under structure of the physical world we know, or think we know, and of the inner world we are yet to fully perceive and explore.

If that be the case, how does the *opposite* of love fit into the plan?

Again from the Vedic view, the Divine Mind created within this bed-rock of lovingness the mechanism from which little bubbles—artificial spaces of sorts—could manifest in a way that would allow duality to exist. Our physical universe is one of those bubbles. It is in this universe that right and wrong can clash; where our relatively narrow concept of love is juxtaposed against the thoughtforms of hatred and anger; where there is up and down, black and white, the right and left hand paths. That duality is what allows Consciousnesses—you and me and all the greater and lesser Beings that inhabit this place—to exist, to experience, to choose, and hopefully to learn in a spiritual sense what it means to be responsible Awarenesses working *within matter*. And eons from now, when all the Beings linked to the 40,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 plus stars in our universe have grown and expanded into their potential, the necessity for duality will be no more, the bubble will dissolve, and what will be left? . . . the Lovingness that upholds all things.

What we are looking at here is a metaphysical reason for the considerable importance all the Avatars—all the world teachers—have placed on being a loving individual. Love is one of the very few qualities that, when built into the self, is Real and lasting. Truly make it a part of the Self and it won't evaporate with the fluctuations of the stock market, or with the vagaries of fame, or when another decides it would be fun to smite you on the cheek. It is the one thing that, if developed within, will truly be yours. And because that is so, you can lose your wealth, your looks, your power, your position in society, your family, your mind, even your body, but that loving selflessness you have made a part of your Being will continue to remain with you beyond time.

⁶ The Vedas are the ancient Hindu scriptures that preceded the life of the Buddha. Many of the Vedic metaphysical views, this one in particular, are accepted in Buddhist thought.

Put another way, when the child chooses to make lovingness and compassion a major part of its way of life, it begins to displace its emptiness with qualities of substance. As the self's emptiness diminishes, the child loses its need to attach itself to and bolster itself with props from *out there*. As attachment diminishes, the potential to feel pain when "things" are removed from it diminishes. Its world in a material sense begins to empty as its world in a spiritual sense fills, and as this happens the individual approaches what is called by Buddhists *the emptiness that is full*.

Chapter 8

YOGA 1

Where could man, scorched by fires of the Sun of this world, look for felicity, were it not for the shade afforded by the tree of emancipation?

Vishnu Purana

When I was a kid, I thought people in the 1920's and 30's never wore colored clothes, never saw beautiful blue-sky days, never enjoyed red roses or yellow marigolds. Why? Because the only contact I ever had with that era was through photographs and newsreels that were in black and white. It never dawned on me that what I was seeing wasn't an accurate reflection of the times.

When I was in my mid-teens, I thought all ancient cities were squalid, dirty, congested places where people threw their filth and garbage out into the streets. Why? Because my early history teachers vividly animated what life was like in medieval European cities . . . and that was all. I had no idea there were places like Knossos on Crete that had flush toilets as early as 1500 BC!¹ Or the fact that Pompeii and Herculaneum had sewers as of 40 BC. I was oblivious to all that because there were enormous gaps in my education, and because I made speculative guesses about *all* antiquity from what little I knew about *some* antiquity.

As surprising as this may be, historical scholars are saddled with similar problems.

As of 50 BC, almost all of the literature of the Mediterranean world was housed in one of two places: the Library of Pergamum on the coast of Asia Minor and the Library of Alexandria in Egypt.

Of the two, the Alexandrian Library was by far the larger storing close to 700,000 scrolls and manuscripts on topics ranging from art, drama, and

¹ You may well say, "Big deal. *We* have flush toilets." But it was a big deal. If you were given two hours to design a flush toilet, there is a good chance you wouldn't be able to do it. In fact, the first one to find its way into relatively modern European history was "invented" by Thomas Crapper in the 1800's.

oratory, to history, law, medicine, philosophy, and the natural sciences. Scholars came from all over the Mediterranean and as far away as India to study. The library complex had beautiful colonnaded walkways with places to rest and contemplate. There were lecture halls, sleeping apartments for guests, a zoo, a botanical garden, and parks. It was a major complex of learning; a place of refinement.

I'm sure that most modern-day scholars would sacrifice precious, private parts to have access to a hundredth-part of the information protected within the walls of the Alexandrian Library, but that possibility will never be. Julius Caesar, defending himself after taking the city (or, more accurately, arriving as an envoy from Rome, taking up residence in the palace, then finding himself in the middle of a city-wide rebellion), inadvertently burned a large part of the library during the fighting. Twenty or so years later, Anthony tried to make amends by looting the Pergamum Library and bringing most of its contents to Cleopatra and the newly rebuilt complex at Alexandria. With its competition sacked, the Alexandrian Library became the *only* major repository of ancient literature and knowledge in the Mediterranean world.

By 400 AD, the Christians had outlasted the Roman persecutions and were becoming a new and growing power in the Mediterranean. Incited by various bishops of the church, most notably Clement of Alexandria,² they began their own persecution of anything "pagan," which is to say anything that did not conform to their own relatively narrow beliefs. In 416 AD, they destroyed the magnificent Temple of Serapis located on a hill above the center of Alexandria and, according to eye witnesses, burned what was called "the daughter library" in which most of the metaphysical and non-Christian religious writings were housed.

Although the medical school remained intact, the Christian attack on the library resulted in enormous losses. The final straw came in 645 AD when the Moslem caliph Amr supposedly made his infamous statement, "If the contents (of the library) are not in the Koran, then they are false; and if they are in the Koran, then they are superfluous." With that he proceeded to use the remains of the library to stoke his bath fires.

What this means is that until the time of the Crusades, Europeans knew nothing about Plato, nothing about Socrates, nothing about Aristophanes or any of the other Greek dramatists, philosophers, or poets. Europe, in short, was completely in the dark when it came to the accomplishments of the ancient Hellenic peoples.

² This was *not* the Clement who taught Origen.

The only reason we know anything about the ancient Greeks today is because early Arab scholars translated a number of the Greek works—the writings of Plato and Sophocles and Aristotle, etc.—into Arabic before the Christian and Moslem fanatics individually torched the Alexandrian complex in their own time. It wasn't until East met West in that most unholy of endeavors, the Crusades, that Europe's ignorance on the matter was remedied. With that contact, scholarship was exchanged and the western world gained back a little of what had been lost.

With this backdrop, you can see why modern historians are to some degree hamstrung when they talk about the ancient world. It is not as though there isn't some material from which they can make their deductions. We do have the writings of Plato, who was absolutely brilliant. But we also have fragments of plays and poems that were sensitive and beautifully written but whose authors have been long since forgotten; we have *references* to brilliant thinkers and writers who were purported to have been voluminous in their creative output but of whose works we haven't a single shred (we know about them from mention made by other writers); and we know of philosophers every bit as thought-provoking as Plato but whose works for us exist only in scant fragments.³

In short, in comparison to what actually existed during the time of the Alexandrian Library, we haven't an enormous amount of primary material from which to study.

In the hierarchy of problems-one-encounters when trying to understand the ancients, far and away the most subtle problem—especially when dealing with the ancients' views of Man as a spiritually evolving being—comes from a source somewhat foreign to modern scholars and today's academic community. It had to do with secrecy.

In the very ancient world, the main repository of philosophic and spiritual teachings was found in what have come to be known as *the Mystery Schools*. The public side of the Mysteries are well documented because they were often run by the state. They used symbolic images—gods and goddesses animated through plays and parables—to educate the public concerning *the virtues*, the consequences of “evil” action, etc.

Although we know a fair amount about the myths, morality plays, and the public festivals that were staged to celebrate these teachings, we have very little in the way of public commentary about the inner workings

³ Heraclitus was one such individual. In thinking about the changing nature of man and life, he wrote, “You cannot step into the same river twice.”

of those institutions. All we know is that there were *inner teachings*, and that they were available only to those who had substantially directed their lives away from the mundane and toward a more spiritually inclined path.

As G. dePurucker said in his book, *The Esoteric Tradition*:

Whatever the Ancient Mysteries were, and whatever the doctrines taught in them, we know that they were deeply and universally revered and that the greatest men whom antiquity ever produced, virtually without exception, were among the number of those who had passed through, in greater or lesser extent, the different degrees of the initiatory rites.

Why do we know so little about the Mysteries? After all, we know at least some of their names: the Greek Eleusinian Mysteries; the Persian Mysteries of Mithras; the Druidic Mysteries of the Britons and the Gaels; the Greco-Egyptian Mysteries of Serapis; the Egyptian Mysteries of Isis and Osiris; the Christian Gnostic Mysteries; the Greek Mysteries of Orpheus and of Bacchus; and the Cabiric Mysteries of Samothrace. And we know the names of some who partook of those repositories of knowledge: Plato, Socrates, Plotinus, Pericles, Apollonius of Tyana; some even believe that Christ spent some of his “lost years” in the Mystery Schools of Egypt. But as for what was taught, we know very little because all Initiates of the Mysteries were bound by the *strictest oath of secrecy*. Our knowledge of them comes from veiled clues deduced by examining the lives and doctrines of those we know were Initiates. Example: we can surmise that reincarnation was a part of the Mystery School teachings; the evidence (if evidence be the right word) is found in Plato’s writings about the allusions Socrates made to the doctrine of rebirth, and in the Christian Bishop Origen’s commentaries on that same doctrine (Origen was an initiate of the Eleusinian Mysteries). What else might we conclude?

The inner structure of the mysteries was evidently based on two general levels, the Lesser Mysteries and the Greater Mysteries. The Lesser Mysteries probably focused on *moral virtues* and *the making of those virtues a part of the initiate’s everyday life*. It’s likely there was instruction in the sciences and astronomy. In addition, initiates of the higher levels of the Lesser Mysteries were probably introduced to a view of the *psychology of man as a spiritually evolving Being*, and to some extent to the “powers” thought available to an awakened, realized individual.

The Greater Mysteries were considerably more serious. If the Eastern view we have been examining is accurate to reality, the lower-side of

the child-self is a complex amalgam of wants, desires, natural and self-created instincts (both noble and not so noble), and “burdens” (i.e., habit patterns) developed in and accumulated over past actions. Through karma, life urges humans to deal with this spiritual hodgepodge slowly over great periods of time. For those who wish to move more quickly (i.e., for those who want to follow a spiritual path), this process must be accelerated. Severe psychological and emotional pressures are needed to pry open the aspirant’s subconscious so that the self, through disciplines, can be cleansed.

In ancient times, those pressures were not naturally a part of everyday life. Sure, people had to worry about invasions, pestilence, disease, famine—all those good Biblical scourges—but the pace and the general complexity of ancient life was not intense in the same way it is today. The ancient peoples were not constantly being bombarded with the heavy sexual imagery that we are immersed in through our TV, movies, advertising, even our music. There wasn’t the franticness, the tone of hurry we seem to have bought into in this age. They didn’t have to cope with subtle (i.e., sub-clinical) physical, emotional, and psychological stresses that you and I unconsciously deal with all the time: the breathing of air from an atmosphere that has essentially been made into an airborne-pollutant cesspool; the living in a space awash in high intensity, artificially created electromagnetic radiation;⁴ the drinking of water laced with chemicals; the eating of food that has lost most of its vitality due to land abuse (the using of nitrogen-based fertilizers to stimulate the land into producing greater and greater yields . . . and greater and greater profits). People in ancient times certainly had problems, but their life style hadn’t the artificiality we endure. In a lot of ways, their lives were more natural, more simple.

That is why the Mystery Schools existed. They were, if this view is accurate, the places where men and women went who wished to move spiritually.⁵ Within these schools resided the real spiritual teachers,⁶ the *men of power* who could bring to bear the deep emotional, psychological, and mental pressures required for one to proceed into the more advanced

⁴ If our eyes were sensitive to radio and microwave radiation in the same way our eyes are sensitive to optical light, Mt. Wilson just north of where I live in Pasadena, California, would look like the sun. We are being bathed in enormous amounts of electromagnetic radiation from the TV stations there. Although scientists claim there is no problem, we have absolutely no idea what the long-term effects on the body will be, not to mention the effects on the human psyche. Why? Because this situation has never existed on this planet previous to the last sixty years. Power-intense electromagnetic radiation—high power radio and microwave radiation—is not a situation that happens naturally on earth.

⁵ [Note not in the original text] We are talking *chelas* here.

⁶ [Note not in the original text] We are talking *the Brothers* here.

stages of spiritual enlightenment. These were not “feel good” places. There were places of serious, life and death, spiritual effort.⁷

As expressed by Alvin Boyd Kuhn in his book, *The Lost Light*,

All spiritual wisdom was held in secret brotherhoods and rigorously safeguarded from common dissemination
.. Sheer pious faith could not alone gain one admission into the Mystery Schools. Actual discipline of body and mind, and certain inner unfoldings of faculty were held as requisite for the grasp of deeper truth. Initiation was to some real extent a matter of the mastery of theurgic (i.e., inner world) powers dependent in the main upon purity of life. Esotericism (i.e., secrecy of doctrine) arose primarily from the necessity of safeguarding the use of dynamic knowledge . . .
What we have derided as “magic” in the religion of old was just the control of subtle powers which we mostly permit to slumber in dormancy beneath the surface of our superficial life. Religion touched man so deeply in olden times that it awakened the potencies of his godlike endowment, an enterprise which concerns us rather little now. The imputation of sacredness to the rite of religion flowed directly from recognition of the vital issues at stake in the soul’s incarnation on earth. And the right to participate in the higher mysteries, of which St. Paul speaks, belonged to those who had won it from nature by the payment of the full price—a life schooled to harmony by intelligent consecration of every personal force.

. . . (Consider) . . . the positive testimony offered by Plato, Porphyry, Apuleius, Herodotus, Plotinus, Proclus, Iamblichus, Euripides, and Cicero. Certainly a man like Cicero cannot be scorned when he testifies as follows:

“There is nothing better than those (Lesser) Mysteries by which, from a rough and fierce life, we are polished to gentleness and softened. . . . not only have we received from them the doctrine of living in happiness, but even of dying with a better hope.”

⁷ Interestingly enough, within this view it is believed that the reason there are no Mystery Schools today is because we don’t need them. All the pressures we need to learn and move ahead in a spiritual sense are now present in our everyday life.

. . . . There is little or no evidence of esotericism, for the good reason that esotericism is the one thing in the world that is bound by its nature to leave little evidence! Do scholars expect that the members of the Mysteries would have published their secrets abroad? On the contrary, they were bound to secrecy by the severest of all pledges.

Severest of all pledges, indeed. Consider: Alcibiades was the intelligent, dashing, charismatic nephew of the fifth century Athenian statesman and scholar Pericles. Even though Athenians of the time hoped Alcibiades would take up the reins when Pericles stepped down, he was nevertheless stripped of his citizenship and exiled from the city for becoming drunk and publicly reciting some of the Lesser Mystery teachings.⁸

Perhaps now you can see where the problem lies for modern historians. If the Mysteries were central to the philosophic heart of the ancient world, and if they were shrouded in secrecy as seems to have been the case, then making hard and fast judgments about any spiritual knowledge the ancients did or did not have has pitfalls that are not generally made public by contemporary historians.⁹

Why are we talking about all of this? The topic we are about to delve into is a *discipline* that was not directly connected to any Mystery School in India, but was created by a teacher who appears to have been of that tradition. The discipline is called Yoga, and just as was the case with the Mystery School disciplines, it was not originally intended for popular consumption. It was a severe discipline designed to aid the spiritually motivated aspirant along his or her path toward enlightenment.

The word *yoga* means “union.” As a discipline, it was originated by

⁸ Being exiled from a city-state at that time was like having someone put a gun to your head and pull the trigger. One’s safety and security was wrapped up in one’s citizenship. Being thrown out of a city-state was about as radical a thing as you could do to a person—even worse than throwing them in jail—but that was exactly what Athens did to the very well-connected Alcibiades when he broke his vow of secrecy to the Mysteries.

⁹ What is worse, the little that has been written about the Mystery Schools comes primarily from historic observations made long after the degeneration of those schools. Mention the Mystery Schools of Britain to most scholars and they will respond: “Druids: colored themselves blue with woad and performed animal sacrifices.” It is true. Later Druids (the ones for which we have the most records) did engage in animal sacrifices . . . but only after the wise within the tradition were long since gone and the remnants of the tradition had fallen into decadence.

an Indian named Patanjali somewhere between 400 BC and 400 AD (for more history, see the book *How to Know God* by Christopher Isherwood). Patanjali's work was not original in the sense that it was a focusing and culling of ideas first presented in the Hindu Vedas. His aphorisms are called *sutras* (the word means bead—the idea being that each aphorism is a succinct, unembellished, bare-bones statement of discipline the expansion of which is left to the student or subsequent teachers). They were beads of wisdom meant as guideposts for those whose meditations would allow them to see into the self.

In almost all cases today, Yoga is no longer taught in the old way—as a spiritual discipline. Universities across the United States provide recreational Yoga classes through their Physical Education departments. These classes teach the *asanas*—the yogic positions (mastering these guarantees a very supple body)—possibly along with elementary breathing exercises designed to calm and focus the mind. This is probably why the word “yoga” conjures in Westerners’ minds the image of men or women sitting all pretzeled-up in exotic positions, trying not to look as though they are in pain. What is important to realize for our purposes is that the original motivation behind the practice of Yoga was to gain enlightenment and, as such, a union with God . . .

The *first two limbs* of yoga, the Yama and the Niyama, are concerned with the moral and ethical fabric of the disciple-to-be. In ancient times, yoga masters were particularly careful to whom they taught their tradition. This, again, has largely been lost today, especially given the more recreational nature of the discipline in the Western world (as hard as it may be to believe, there are very few formal yoga teachers in the East today—almost all are found in the West¹⁰). Nevertheless, it was believed in ancient times that as an individual progressed through the limbs of yoga, he or she was preparing for a coming-together-of-the-self that would lead to some level of inner awakening. One consequence of this awakening was the opening up within the self of all sorts of seemingly abnormal phenomena—everything from the bubbling over of fears and angers, etc. from the subconscious, to intense psychological pressures, to psychic-type disturbances, to the opening up of what was called in the ancient Sanskrit language of India *the siddhis*—powers that were and still are believed to exist latent within all human beings.

The responsible yoga teachers knew they were karmically linked to

¹⁰ Why? My suspicion is that the reasons run from “that is where the interested parties are” to “that is where the money is.”

their teachings. Not only did they not want to put their students in spiritual jeopardy by allowing them to go beyond their abilities to cope, they also knew that if their teachings helped open up powers within a discipline and the disciple then misused those powers, it would to some degree be the teacher's responsibility for teaching the mysteries in the first place. As such, the responsible teachers in ancient times watched each novice for long periods, years even, to be sure that the student-to-be would be able to successfully deal with the disciplines of the Yama and Niyama. Only when the teacher was convinced that the student's motivation was as it should be, was continuation into the higher limbs allowed.¹¹

NOTE: Acknowledgment of a teacher's responsibility for his or her teachings and, consequentially, for the way followers act upon those teachings, is found in some relatively unexpected places.

Christian doctrine maintains that Christ came *to take on the sins of the world* (Hebrews 9:28—"so Christ, having offered once to bear the sins of many . . . ," and 1 John 2:2—"and he (Christ) is the expiation of our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the world . . . ").

There is no place in the Bible where *Christ* is quoted as making this claim, but the belief has nevertheless become a cornerstone of Christian doctrine. In fact, it is one of the Christian missionaries' most persuasive arguments: "Believe in Christ and he will lift your sins."¹²

What is confusing is the fact that when questioned about taking re-

¹¹ (Footnote not in original text: I used to tell a story to the E.Phil folks that, unbeknownst to them, was from the Brothers. There was, apparently, a Teacher in ancient times (most probably of the Brotherhood) who was known far and wide for his wisdom and kindness. A man who was young but who had done much in his life for the betterment of those around him dearly wanted to proceed down a spiritual path with the help of this teacher, so he walked several hundred miles from his home to the place of the Teacher in the hopes of becoming the Teacher's student. When he arrived at the Teacher's ashram, the Teacher was very cordial and complimentary, saying that he had heard of all the good things the man had done over the course of his short life. Then out of nowhere, the Teacher slapped the man hard across the face. Stunned, the man just stood there whereupon the Teacher said simply, "Accepted." What had happened was that the Teacher, with sight to see the energy patterns within another's aura, watched to see how the individual dealt with the slap on an inner level. If his response had been anger, that would have ended the interview. Apparently, the man's gut response was lovingness, so he was accepted.

¹² This is very similar to what Indian gurus often say when trying to attract followers: "Follow me and I will take away your karma." Translation: follow me and I'll fix things so you won't truly have to take responsibility for your actions.

sponsibility for one's own acts, Jesus said, "Take up your cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, 10:21, and Luke 9:23). He evidently didn't profess to be willing to lift anyone's burden in the ways one might be led to believe from examining current Church doctrine.

So how can this apparent discrepancy be explained?

The East believes that there have been at various points in history highly evolved spiritual Beings who have come into bodies to act as *world teachers*. The Sanskrit name for these teachers is *avatar*, and avatar is exactly what Christ, among others, is believed to have been.

An avatar is a human Being who has learned all there is to learn from this solar evolution, who has completely balanced the karmic energies associated with all of Its actions over all of Its many lives, who no longer has a karmic necessity to come back into incarnation. In other words, the Being who would act as an avatar must be absolutely pure, absolutely karma-less.

This level of purity is necessary because an avatar is not simply a spiritually awake human Being. It is a human Being who will, within the course of his or her teaching, be *overshadowed* by a Consciousness so vastly immense that you or I could only conceive of it in terms of the word God. This cosmic Consciousness uses the human Being/avatar as a conduit through which energy is directed, and by which It can grab humanity by the scruff of the neck and set it back on track.

Only an absolutely *pure cup* can act as host for this kind of overshadowing, and as such, only the purest of the pure within humanity can act as an *avatar*.

What is important here is that the human who takes on this task becomes inextricably linked to those whose minds and actions are affected by his or her teachings. These Beings love so greatly that they are willing to take on these ties even though in doing so, they take on karma in the process.

If this is an accurate version of what is really going on, the origin of Christianity's belief about Christ *taking on sins* takes on an entirely different glow.

That is, if Christ was an avatar he surely knew he would have to take responsibility not only for his own actions but, to some degree, for the actions of all those who acted in his name. And if that were the case, it would not be surprising to find him acknowledge the fact that he was moving from a state of complete, unfettered purity to a state of burden by saying something to the effect of *I am taking on the sins of the world . . . I am, in effect, casting my lot and becoming one with beings whose understanding*

is highly limited, and whose actions through my name will inevitably be imperfect.

Knowledge of such responsibility was part of early yogic teachings and, being conscious of that responsibility, the real yoga masters of ancient times were extremely careful to whom they taught their disciplines.

Chapter 9

YOGA 11

Abandoning without reserve all the desires born of mental fancies, and restraining completely by the mind the entire group of the sense from all directions,

With understanding held by firmness, and mind established in the Self, let him (the yogi) (thus) by degrees attain tranquility, let him not think of anything else,

Wheresoever the restless and unsteady mind may wander away, let him withdraw it from there and bring it under the control of the self alone.

He whose passions are quieted and mind perfectly tranquil, who has become one with Brahman, being freed from all impurities, to such a yogi comes supreme bliss.

Bhagavad Gita, VI. 24-27
(tr. by Swami Prabhavananda)

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, the first two limbs of Yoga, the Yama and the Niyama, were terribly important in ancient times. The reason for this will become more apparent as we look further.

The *third limb* of yoga is associated with what are called *the Asanas*—the body positions. There are, in fact, 84 classical postures. Although mastering these will insure a supple, well controlled body, keeping people trim was not their primary function in ancient times. They were intimately related to the control of *energy flows* that were and still are believed to exist within and around the body.¹

One of the best known examples of energy flow around the body is encompassed in the idea of *the aura*. As ridiculous as some within New

¹ There are no counterparts to this in western medicine. In fact, if such energies exist, western science hasn't a clue about them.

Age circles have made this possibility seem, the aura is believed to be a complex energy field that both exists around and interpenetrates the physical body. Since ancient times, well respected holy men within the East have spoken about the fine structure of this energy field. So complete has been their meditative dissection of the phenomenon that they have identified various aspects of the aura: the emotional body, the mental body, the astral body, the ethereal body, the spiritual body, all intermingled within the auric structure. The aura is said to have color associated with it.² The emotional body, for instance, clouds over with a deep, murky red when an individual becomes angry, whereas the area around the head of a spiritually evolved individual is bathed in a bright, golden hue (how many paintings have you seen of Christ with a golden halo around the head—interesting that artists would use that color in their works).

In short, there are very specific doctrines within Eastern metaphysics concerning the *auric energy field* and the way it reflects and interacts with the *state of being* of a human.

Related to this are the individual *energy centers* that are believed to exist within the body. Called *chakras* in Sanskrit, much has been written about these centers and their purposes. When artistically depicted in ancient writings, they were shown as opening flowers. Today, as in ancient times, each is believed to have its own geometric form, color, and tone.

Although different books list different combinations, a fairly decent representation of the seven major chakras follows:

- 1.) The first chakra (also called the lower chakra) is located at the base of the spine and is associated with power and the sexual energies;
- 2.) The second chakra (this is sometimes linked to the sun) is located at the solar plexus and is associated with physical vitality;
- 3.) The third chakra (called the heart chakra) is located in the heart area and is associated with compassion and remem-

² If the East is correct, it is possible that one might become sensitive to this subtle auric energy field (though following disciplines designed to make it so is not suggested—we'll talk more about forcing open "abilities" later). In reality, very few people are sensitive on this level. Nevertheless, one of the standard ploys of those who would like to appear sensitive but who aren't is to comment on, "how beautiful your aura looks today," the tacit implication being that they can *see* your aura. Beware of New Agers bearing gifts of flattery.

brance;

- 4.) The fourth chakra (called the throat chakra) is located in the throat area and is associated with creativity and the creative energies;
- 5.) The fifth chakra (called the web chakra) is located at the base of the neck and is believed to be something like a central switchboard between the physical body, the energy complex associated with the aura and the inner worlds (which we will talk about shortly).
- 6.) The sixth chakra (called the third eye) is located at the middle of the forehead and is associated with wisdom.
- 7.) The seventh chakra (called the crown chakra) is located at the top of the head and is associated with higher spirituality.
- 8.) In addition to the major chakras, there are minor chakras located in a number of different places, the hands and feet included.

What is important here is the fact that from this very ancient metaphysical perspective, the body is considered to be a lot more complex than one might think. And the yogic asanas? They were originally designed to help a yogi control *energy movement within this complex*.

Side point: It probably should be noted that the idea of controlling energy flows within the body has been incorporated into some forms of Eastern medicine. Chinese acupuncture is a good example.

There is absolutely no medical justification from a western perspective for acupuncture. The neurological receptors in your hand are no different from those in your arm; needling one should have no more significant effect on the body than needling the other. Yet if done by a knowledgeable practitioner under appropriate circumstances, the needling patterns employed by acupuncturists can produce remarkable effects.³

³ Acupuncture has been used in China to relieve pain for thousands of years. According to a November 4, 1991 *Time* magazine article on alternate health care, "In the U.S., the technique (acupuncture) was virtually unknown outside Chinese neighborhoods until New

When a truly knowledgeable acupuncturist is questioned about what is actually taking place when the body is treated with acupuncture, he or she will tell you that the needling patterns are used to balance *flows of energy* along *meridian lines* within the body. Energy movement is at the root of acupuncture theory.

The yogic asanas are believed to do the same kind of thing; they manipulate and control the flow of energy within the physical form we call the body. Part of the reason the asanas are deemed so important is that when a disciple is ready to attempt a leap in understanding—a step toward enlightenment—it is imperative that the individual controls the vitalizing energy flows that are generated when such an effort is made.

How so? It is believed within Eastern (primarily Hindu) metaphysics that there exists a kind of energy dormant in human-kind that is located at the base of the spine. It is called in Sanskrit *the kundalini*, and it is likened to a spiritual fire (it is sometimes called *the dragon fire*). The tradition maintains that when an individual moves to a point in his or her spiritual evolution and the time is right, this kundalini fire will begin to slowly, naturally open. As it begins to awaken, the energies associated with it will pour into and vitalize the first chakra—the chakra associated with sexual force fields. This vitalization tends to focus the individual's attention on sexual interaction, heightening the sexual appetites and sexual pleasure.

A spiritually advanced individual, one whose motivations are clear and whose intentions are beyond the self-indulgent, self-interested attitudes exhibited by most of us most of the time (someone, in other words, who has mastered the Yama and Niyama stages of yogic training), will force the kundalini energies up and out of the first chakra by sheer will. In doing so, the energy can then be used to enliven and vitalize the higher chakras.

Example: Ramakrishna was an Indian saint who lived from 1836 to 1886. As a child, he was an uneducated peasant. As a young man his purity and devotion led to enlightenment accompanied by the complete opening of the kundalini. As this happened, his creativity blossomed and his mental faculties expanded geometrically. It was as though he had tapped

York *Times* journalist James Reston needed an emergency appendectomy while on assignment in China in 1971. Reston reported that an acupuncturist's needles effectively blocked his pain following the operation.” There are now western medical researchers who claim that needling specific areas of the body stimulates the body to secrete endorphins (endorphins are opiate-like compounds that act as natural pain killers in the body).

Knowledgeable acupuncturists, on the other hand, maintain that although that may be the case, there is more going on with acupuncture than simple neuro-chemical stimulation.

into pure Knowledge. He could talk knowledgeably to men of science and philosophy alike even though he had had no formal schooling. A sample of this uneducated man's thoughts:

“Religion is the path which leads to God, but a path is not a house.”

and

“Only undertake those actions that fall within the limits of your purified thoughts and dreams. Seek not to flatter yourself with gigantic deeds. Undertake duties as small in size as your self-surrender to God. Then as your selflessness and purity grow—and things of the Soul grow very fast—it will pierce its own way through the material world and benefit others as the Ganges sprang through the hard rocks of the Himalayas and watered thousands of miles with her beneficence.”⁴

When used correctly, the kundalini is an energy that allows a spiritually awakening individual to unfold in ways that are beyond the norm. The responsible teachers say: Focus that fire in the heart chakra and compassionate action becomes the tone of one's life; center it in the third eye and the mental capacities explode; allow it to simply circulate in the lower chakra and, as pleasurable as it might be for a time, that potent force field will burn the user emotionally, psychologically, physically, and worse of all spiritually.

Why might someone act so? The simple answer is *ignorance*!

Example: A number of years ago I opened up a New Age newspaper—one of those free throw-aways you can get at any health food store—and noticed a large advertisement that trumpeted “INCREASE YOUR SEXUAL PROWESS—COME LEARN KUNDALINI YOGA!”

It seems that a bright young soul posing as a spiritual teacher had melded basic yogic asanas with a few of the more chaotic yogic breathing patterns to create a free-form yoga he dubbed Kundalini Yoga. Its design? To force open the kundalini. His selling point? The fact that if the kundalini could be pried open, energy would flow into the lower chakra and the sexual appetites would be vitalized.

Teaching unsuspecting people to force open the kundalini is monumentally irresponsible. Fully opened, the kundalini's movement through

⁴ Both quotes are from *The Life of Ramakrishna* by Romain Rolland.

the body is like a million amp current passing through a wire. In the spiritually unprepared, the metaphorical wire is impure and the force of the fire will inevitably burn it (i.e., the person) out. Anything from mild dislocation to full-blown insanity can ensue, depending upon the circumstances.

Fortunately, most people are so ill able to hold difficult mental disciplines for any period of time that the kundalini rarely opens even in the most ardent disciple. But that doesn't excuse those who teach the discipline. People who are searching don't understand what they are getting into when they begin to practice non-recreational yogic practices—kundalini yoga included. The teachers of these practices simply don't make the consequences of their disciplines evident (either by design or, more commonly, through their own ignorance). It never seems to dawn on anyone that when it's time for forces like the kundalini to flower, they will open naturally without prodding. Only then is it appropriate to learn to deal with the powers such energies offer and the restrictions such energies require.⁵

Going back to yoga, you can now see why controlling energy flows in the body was deemed important to Patanjali and the masters who made yoga their life (you can also see why the Yama and Niyama were so important). As an individual moves successfully up through the limbs of yoga, it is believed that the kundalini will open. When it does, it is paramount that the yogi be able to control the tidal-wave of energy (the lotus position alone forces the spine into a position that allows energy to flow up and down the spinal pathways unimpeded). The ancients did so through purity, will-power, and with the help of the asanic postures.

In short, the asanas are not as trivial as they seem at first look.

The fourth limb is called Pranayama. Prana is another energy-form believed to exist within Eastern metaphysics. Animated by sunlight and riding on air (specifically oxygen), it is taken in when one breathes (pranayama is the Sanskrit word for *breathe*). As such, Pranayama is asso-

⁵ One wonders what that intrepid entrepreneur was thinking when he decided to set out upon this venture (his following is considerable today)? If the Indian tradition from which he borrowed his discipline are at all reflective of the real world (i.e., if the kundalini fire does exist), it is probable that other ideas from that tradition might also have reality . . . like karma. As eye-catching as his ad was, helping to addict people to sex even more than they already are (not that there is anything wrong with sex in its place) and/or giving the psychologically unprepared a meditative tools that could well scramble their brain, is not a very bright move, karmically speaking. In short, he'd better hope that the East is wrong and that all he's done is sell gullible people a swindle. Otherwise, he could be in for considerable karmic trouble down the line.

ciated with breathing patterns that are, once again, designed to liberate and control energy flows within the body. In addition, this limb helps an aspirant steady and control the mind. As the Bhagavad Gita says, “When the breathe is steady, the mind is calm.”

An example of a breathing exercise at the Pranayama level is alternate nasal breathing—breathing in one nostril and out the other while visualizing energy flowing up one side of the spinal column and down the other.

The fifth limb, Pratyahara, is a preparatory step toward deep meditation. The effort here is to pull attention away from the senses. In most people, the mind is not focused to any great extent most of the time. Sense perceptions are often a stimulus to thought. For instance, when you smell an unusual, exotic perfume, your mind might shift to the old boy or girlfriend who wore it, or to the circumstance during which you first smelled it. Sound is another thought stimulant. Baby boomers who hear songs from the 60’s are taken back to *how life was* when they heard those songs from the radio (that is what nostalgia is all about).

In Pratyahara, attention is pulled away from sensory input. This is not a deadening process. Many people associate it incorrectly with a kind of drawing away from life. People say, “I just don’t think I could live without my emotions and my sensory stimuli—I’d die trying to pull away from all that.”

Patanjali had something to say to those who are so attached to their emotions. In his book, *How to Know God*, Christopher Isherwood quotes, then discusses Patanjali’s message:

“The universe exists in order that the experiencer may experience it, and thus become liberated.”

This last sentence (of this aphorism) is one of the most important in the entire book. It is Patanjali’s answer to the pig-people, to those who want to stay wallowing in their mire.

When told that all sense-experience is, in the last analysis, painful, the pig people become scornful and angry. They find such a philosophy cowardly and lacking in spirit. One should not be afraid of pleasure, they exclaim; one should seize the flying moment and enjoy it, whatever the consequences. They quote approvingly from their poets (for many of the finest poets write pig-poetry) saying that “one crowded hour of glorious life is worth an age without

a name,” and Patanjali is a timid old lady.

To this accusation, Patanjali replies: “It is you who are really afraid. It is you who shrink from experience. You talk so much about your pleasures, yet you know nothing about Pleasure. You never try to understand its nature. The universe of sense-experience is a great book; and he who reads it through to the end with discrimination will know at length that there is nothing but the Atman. No experience is in vain, no page of that book is superfluous, *provided that the reader learns something from it and passes on to the next*. You read the same page over and over, repeating the same meaningless experience, like a man who is half asleep, reading without remembering a word.”

Put in an altogether different light, the disciple practicing Pratyahara is not trying to go into limbo. Certainly, attention is being directed away from the normal sensory world you and I are familiar with, but what one comes to experience in this sense-less state is said to be far-and-away more interesting . . . even in some cases downright blissful. These meditative bliss states can be so pleasurable that they are actually considered potentially dangerous to the spiritual growth of the aspirant. Would you be willing to leave a state that was completely joyful only to re-enter this world of pain and suffering?⁶

Again, the Yama and the Niyama come into play. Pure motivation is

⁶ A story about Ramakrishna from the book, *The Life of Ramakrishna*, highlights this idea. “For six months, if such a statement is credible, he (Ramakrishna) remained in a state of cataleptic ecstasy, recalling the description given of the fakirs of old—the body, deserted by the spirit like an empty house . . . If it hadn’t been for his nephew, who watched over the masterless body and nourished its forces, he would have died. It was impossible to go further in ecstatic union with *the Formless*.”

“Ramakrishna himself recognized afterwards that he had been tempting Providence and that it was a miracle that he had ever returned. He was careful to warn his disciples against submitting to any such test. When young Naren (Vivekananda) importuned him to open to him the Nirvikalpa Samadhi—the terrible door leading to the gulf of the Absolute—Ramakrishna refused with anger, he, who never lost his temper . . . “Shame on you!” he cried. “I thought you were to be the great banyan tree giving shelter to thousands of tired souls. Instead you are selfishly seeking your own well-being. Let these little things alone, my child. How can you be satisfied with so one-sided an ideal? You must be *all*-sided. Enjoy the Lord in all ways!” (By this he meant both in contemplation and in action, so that he might translate the highest knowledge into the highest service of mankind).” Bliss states can be dangerous . . . or so it is taught by those who have knowledge about such things.

very important to the salvation of the seeker.

The sixth limb is Dharana. This limb is devoted to preliminary concentration. In it, the disciple focuses the mind on some specific point of consideration. It can be a divine form—Christ, for instance—in an attempt to come into a better understanding of that Being; it could be the focusing of the mind on a particular energy center within the body—the heart chakra with its close ties to compassion; or it could be the focusing on a principle such as *unconditional love* and the thoughtforms associated with that.

The seventh limb is Dhyana. It is advanced meditation in which the disciple brings the mind so completely into control that unbroken thought can be formed around a single point-of-interest. As Isherwood puts it, “(it is) like the pouring of oil from one container to another.”

The eighth and final limb is Samadhi. Samadhi is the complete absorption of the self into an object or individual-of-interest. It is total union. This state of *oneness* is usually held for a short period of time. By coming into a union with an object or person, it is believed that the disciple touches the essence of God (remember, within the context of this view, God is all things).

It should be noted that Samadhi is not the same thing as the Hindu idea of Nirvana. Nirvana is a state of evolution in which all the negative aspects of one’s self (accumulated over all incarnations) have been corrected and redressed. Going into Nirvana, one moves into union with God, the One Self, the Divine Mind, and remains in that state until a new sweep of evolution brings it out again.⁷⁷

_____ x _____

Aside from the eight great limbs, there are many styles of yoga extant today. Each generally adheres to the teachings of Patanjali while emphasizing particular limbs. As such, each has an undertone that is characteris-

⁷ Most Hindus believe that Nirvana is for eternity . . . forever. The problem is that an eternity for us humans is surely not an eternity for God. If the view we have set forth so far is accurate, going into Nirvana *is* the ultimate bliss but *is not* “absolutely forever.” After all, existence without the possibility of further expansion at some later time is a static existence, and static states stagnate.

tic of itself alone. Some examples:

- 1.) Karma Yoga: the yoga of selfless action. A follower of Karma Yoga focuses on taking action without thought of gain. It is primarily a mental discipline, though the asanas are practiced.
- 2.) Jnana Yoga: the yoga of wisdom. A follower of Jnana Yoga focuses on constant inquiry: “Are my actions taking me toward my spiritual goal?” It requires a constantly open mind, a constant discrimination.
- 3.) Bhakti Yoga: the yoga of devotion. A follower of Bhakti Yoga fills himself or herself with devotion and love for the Creator or some aspect of the Creator. Example: Ramakrishna devoted himself to the *mother figure* (if he had been a Christian, he would have devoted himself to Mary). His every act was in honor of that aspect of God.
- 4.) Raj Yoga: the Kingly yoga. Most yogic traditions claim to be off-shoots of Raj Yoga as it is associated with all aspects of the purification of the body and mind.
- 5.) Hatha Yoga: emphasizes breathing exercises. Most recreational yoga in the Western world today is Hatha yoga.
- 6.) Kundalini Yoga: already discussed—designed to force open the kundalini using postures and radical breathing exercises. If the responsible teachers in the East are correct, following the discipline of Kundalini Yoga is very dangerous.
- 7.) Tantric Yoga: the yoga of sex. Tantric Yoga is a part of the Tibetan tradition. It strives to use the sexual energies to elevate the self into a knowledge of God. One has to be some-kind-of-a-together-character to be able to use this yoga without ending up with an overactive, highly inflamed first chakra. The book, *The Kama Sutra* (subtitled by a friend of mine *The Original 101 Positions*), is a part of the Tantric Yoga tradition.

Bottom line: For those who attempt to move ahead of the stream of humanity in a spiritual sense, the tools of the effort are not found in the local library. So when it comes time for a disciple to come into a complete control of the mind and body, where does he or she turn?

In ancient times, Patanjali saw the need. He also knew the terrors and powers that would come when one made such an effort. That is why yoga was devised. It was never intended for *the man on the street*. Neither was it intended to be an end in itself.⁸ It was a tool to be used by the well-motivated as they attempted to grow into a spiritually enlightened, spiritually responsible human Being.

⁸ It isn't hard to see that a lifetime of devotion to this discipline would certainly allow one to come into a deeper control of the mind and body—a step all spiritually motivated individuals will have to take sooner or later. It is unfortunately that later followers of Yoga took the Yogic goal of “knowing God” as an end in itself. Patanjali never saw it that way.

Chapter 10

DEATH

Death is not the opposite of life, it is the opposite of birth.

unattributed

Heraclitus¹ was asked by a student, “What is the difference between life and death?”

Heraclitus said, “There is no difference.”

The student followed, “Then why don’t you kill yourself?”

To which Heraclitus replied, “Because there is no difference.”

Jakob Boehme² was asked, “Where does the soul go when a man dies?” His response? “There is no need for it to *go* anywhere.”

Interesting responses both. But do they make sense?

Have you ever noticed that the only *time* you will ever have to do anything is NOW? Ten minutes from now will exist, but you don’t yet have access to it. Ten minutes past existed, but again, you don’t have access to it. Truly, the only time you’ll ever have to do anything is NOW . . . NOW . . . NOW . . .

Have you ever noticed that the only place you will ever be is HERE? Right now, looking out through your eyes at this book, where are you? You are where you always are: you are HERE.

The only time you will ever have is NOW; the only place you will ever be is HERE.

With this in mind, where do you go when you die?

Answer: Assuming you don’t cease to exist, you won’t *go* anywhere.

¹ Heraclitus was one of the Greek philosophers from whom we have very little in the way of extant works. He was the man who, when referring to the changing nature of existence, said, “You can’t step into the same river twice.”

² Boehme was a late sixteenth, early seventeenth century European mystic.

From your perspective, you will still be HERE.

The question is, where *is* HERE?

Consider the following: You are sitting in Physics class. The lecture is scintillating, but your mind takes off thinking about that hot date coming up next Saturday night, or the argument you had with your mother this morning, or that big test you blew yesterday. From your perspective, where *are* you during the daydream?

As you sit amidst your meditations, you are still HERE . . . but where *is* HERE? Your body is in Physics class—but your attention isn't. The teacher is talking merrily; you aren't hearing a word. Where have you gone?

From the Eastern view we are examining, it is believed that you have focused yourself into what are called *the inner worlds*—you have gone *inward*.

In the lecture on *thought*, we talked briefly about the *inner worlds*. At that time, they were said to be a “place” where THOUGHTS have a substantive, physical reality, a place where THOUGHT resides.³ It was also said to be the place into which Beings move at death.

In short, we constantly swim in a sea of thought, touching, animating, affecting the inner worlds as we ourselves think.⁴ In fact, we are so intimately linked to their existence that our immersion in them goes largely unnoticed.⁵ Nevertheless, as far as the East is concerned, we are in constant contact with them.⁶

³ One could make a strong argument for the possibility that Jung's *collective subconscious* is intimately related to the idea of thoughtforms existing in the inner worlds.

⁴ This is even true when we are apparently unconscious. As far as this view is concerned, sleep is a state in which the body goes dormant while the self focuses into the inner worlds (ever notice that during dreams, you are still HERE and it is still NOW).

⁵ Our minds drift aimlessly on a warm summer day and we give it a name—we say we are daydreaming. Once it is named, we cease to find our ability to do so remarkable. It *is* remarkable! The “place” we have gone is immense. (Reminds me of the riddle: What is bigger on the inside than it is on the outside? Answer: the mind!).

⁶ Real meditation is a fascinating thing to experience. It is the focusing of the self into dynamic thoughtforms that reside in the inner worlds. From this view, the meditations of the Buddha before His enlightenment take on new significance. When Mara sent his legions against Siddhartha, it was a very real confrontation. When fear enshrouded the Buddha-to-be, for instance, it was a palpable, living thing that enveloped him. If there had been anything in Him that could have resonated with that thoughtform, fear would have found an entrance point and Siddhartha would have been lost.

So what happens when we die? It all depends upon how one looks at it. If we are in constant contact with the inner worlds (we *are* constantly thinking), and if death is a refocusing of the self away from the physical body and into the inner worlds, then at death we are essentially *going* to a place we have always been. Put another way, we don't *go* anywhere (thank you, Jakob Boehme).

Looking from the perspective of the body, on the other hand, death is definitely a departure. We shed our physical form (like removing our clothes before going to bed) and slip completely into a “place” that is not focused in the body.

What is the journey like? The following is one of a number of plausible scenarios out of the East:⁷

When the Being/child-complex steps across the line, so to speak, it finds that it hasn't changed much at all. It still has the trappings of personality around It, though with time that falls away. It still has the wants and desires it exercised during its previous stint in a body, and it is still aware. In fact, the self finds that it still *has* a body—one that is as appropriate and substantial in the inner levels as your physical body seems to you now on this level.⁸ In short, the self finds that there is no real difference between

Additional note: This is also why initiations in the Greater Mysteries were so seriously dangerous to the aspirant. The individual making the effort was, at the higher levels of initiation, taking a stand in a completely unprotected sense (initiates were supposedly sent out of their bodies and into the inner worlds during the effort, losing the natural protection the body provides against inappropriate other-level encroachments) against terribly powerful, potent forces from within the inner worlds. To fail was to lose control of the self . . . quite literally. It could mean death (i.e., not being able to re-enter the body) or, at the very least, the insanity of one who has no control over the self (we'll talk more about this problem later). In short, the Greater Mysteries were a spiritually rewarding experience for those who had made the efforts and were ready, but they were not to be taken lightly. They were deadly serious.

⁷ This scenario is a good, generic starting point from which to examine most of the East's beliefs about after-death states. Different philosophies focus on different aspects of the scenario, but it all hangs together if you know how to read between the lines. Example: In Tibetan Buddhism, much is written about *the bardo*—the time of transition between life and death. It is as though they have telescoped that aspect of the experience, animating the happenings at that brief point into the center piece of their philosophic tenets on the subject. Nothing in those teachings contradicts any of what you are about to read.

⁸ Raymond Moody is an MD, a Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia. He has done research on people who have been declared clinically dead for a period of time before being resuscitated via CPR or whatever. According to his work, some people who have been in this situation have brought back remembrance of what they were doing during their brief period of death (we will talk about this later). One of the things commonly re-

“life” and “death” (thank you, Heraclitus).

As the journey begins, the self moves up through the lower levels and into a state of introspection. During that critical but loving examination, a Guardian helps the self see for itself what it has made of itself during the previous life. That is, it sees where the child has succeeded in a spiritual sense and where it has failed and needs more work. This experience happens quickly and without emotion, but is very complete.

Once this period of retrospection is finished, one of a number things can happen. If the Being (you or I) has been a relatively decent, run-of-the-mill human, it will probably go into what is called Devachan. Devachan is a Sanskrit word that refers to what some would call *heaven*. Life in a body is tough. The psychological pressure on humans is immense. We get beaten around a lot. We have to put up with a lot of pain both physically and mentally. Devachan is a compensatory state in which an individual is allowed to play out his or her best aspirations in a relatively stress-free environment. It is not heaven in the Christian sense: it is not forever; you don't have one life during which you can gain entrance or not; it is not the opposite of hell. It is simply a “place,” a state where the best efforts of an individual are allowed to blossom in a pressureless, relatively blissful setting.

The self stays in Devachan until the energy of its compensatory experience is spent. At that time it comes out of Devachan and into a number of different possibilities. One possibility is to move into one of the learning states, immersing itself into thoughtforms like compassion or, more commonly, absorbing itself into the patterns of thought it had closely experienced in previous lives. Einstein, for instance, would undoubtedly move deeply into thought concerning the reality of space, matter and energy.

Sooner or later, the time comes when it is karmically correct for the Being to move back into the physical world again—to reincarnate. When that time comes, It is drawn into a body of the right sex, with the right genetics, in the right environment, given the Being's spiritual necessity to continue to grow and unfold.

Aside from moving into Devachan, there are two other possibilities for a Being after its period of introspection with the Guardian. The second of the two is an unusual situation in which the Being chooses to forgo Devachan altogether. For most of us, a hard life is viewed as a burden. We

ported was that after lifting out of the body, the departed found himself or herself in a body . . . but one that wasn't physical. Some even recounted trying to get the attention of their rescuers only to have one of the workers walk straight through them. As bizarre as this may seem, it is right in line with the East's view of after-death states.

feel abused because, from a purely personal point of view, we *have* been abused. We don't see pain as a teacher. For us, it is something we don't want to deal with. And if we do have to endure it, we want compensation. There are Beings who have moved passed this view of experience, who take the lessons of life with gratitude and move on. For them, compensation isn't necessary. Exactly what a Being does in this situation will be discussed later. For now, we will leave it as a relatively rare but certainly possible option for a Being who has just "stepped across the line."⁹

The last possibility has a decidedly darker tint to it. To understand it fully, we have to take another short side-trip.

Reiterating something we have already discussed, *thought* is considered to be real—it is believed to have energy and a life-of-sorts of its own. The consequences of this? Residing in the inner worlds, thoughts coalesce into great complexes of living energy called *thoughtforms*. For instance, existing in the inner worlds is the thoughtform of anger—an energy form that has been built and fed by every human who has ever exercised some form of that emotion *since the beginning of this evolution*. So where do these heavy forms reside?

The next more subtle level up from the physical is called the astral level (it is also called the astral plane). The upper astral is an OK "place" that presents a reflection of the physical world, complete with what appears to be a fixed landscape. The lower astral, on the other hand, is very much like a cesspool. This is where *anger* habitates along with all the other heavy thought-patterns that humanity has generated and reinforced throughout time.

If an individual has addicted himself or herself to any of these gross thoughtforms, the Being will not be able to shed those patterns when it is time to move more deeply into the inner worlds (i.e., after dealing with the Guardian). Individuals in this situation have so completely built those patterns into the fabric of their Being that they are not able to extricate themselves essentially from them.¹⁰ As such they are not able to move into the more subtle levels of Devachan and instead are drawn to where those

⁹ (Footnote not included in original text): Although I guess it is possible that there might be Beings who are so devoted to service that they go in this direction, the primary Beings who belong to this group are chelas.

¹⁰ Remember, we don't change much with the death of the body. The personality stays, at least for a while. The habits, attitudes, likes, dislikes, wants and desires, they don't just go away. By building them into ourselves while in a body, they become a part of us until we choose to tear them away and build anew.

heavier thoughtforms normally reside. In other words, they are pulled into the lower astral level by the very quality of themselves.¹¹ Beings to whom this happens are called *earth-bounds*. They remain in the lower astral until they either let loose of the patterns that have drawn them there in the first place (if they can let loose, they are free to move into the more subtle Devachan states),¹² or until it is time to reincarnate.¹³

Although a Being trapped in the *lower astral* is effectively in a hell state, it is not to be viewed as a punishment. It is a natural consequence of way things are set up. If you build into yourself obsessions that are heavy, you will not be able to disassociate yourself from those qualities at death and, as a consequence, you will be drawn to where those thoughtforms reside in the lower astral.¹⁴

¹¹ It is interesting to note that the *Egyptian Book of the Dead* talks about the “houses” the departed has to move passed after death. Each house calls to the individual. If the individual cannot disassociate itself from the calling, it is pulled in. This is a Being who is being drawn to the thoughtforms it has attached itself.

¹² For the spiritually evolved Being who chooses not to enter Devachan, one of the things the Being can do is become a “worker”—one who goes into the astral to help earth-bounds extricate themselves from those levels. We will talk more about the kind of Being that might take on such a task later.

¹³ A fairly common question asked at this point is, “What determines where you go? Who or what makes the judgment?” It is important to understand that this is not a judgment call. It is a natural part of the system. If you jump into a pool of water holding fifty pounds of concrete, you are *not* going to float—you’re going to sink. If you enter the subtle levels of the inner worlds having built gross, heavy thought-forms around you, you are not going to be able to “float”(carrying through with the analogy) into the subtle inner levels. Instead, the heaviness will draw you down into the grosser, heavier levels. Nobody is making you do it, it just happens naturally.

This isn’t a surprising question, though. Christianity has its Judgment Day, as do many other religions. Even in ancient religions you find reference to judgment, though in at least some cases those references are misleading. In Egypt’s *Book of the Dead* (this was actually called *The Book of Coming Forth to Light*, but because archeologists found it in tombs it was dubbed otherwise), the soul is told that it must present itself for questioning before the 42 assessors while having its heart weighed against the Feather of Truth in the presence of Osiris, the judge of the dead. That doesn’t mean the priests and initiates of the Mystery Schools believed that Osiris was really judging the dead, or that the heart was really weighed against the Feather of Truth, or that there were 42 assessors asking question of the soul. It means that the idea of a formal judgment was used to symbolize the after-death states to the uninitiated. Given what we know about the Egyptian civilization, I suspect they knew better (see Footnote 19).

¹⁴ Again, this is not an unfair encumbrance on the self. No mental addiction can hold if there isn’t at least a part of the child-self that wants it to stay (though often the higher part of the child is horrified at the addiction while the lesser part secretly enjoys the excitement). Karma is simply saying, “OK, there is a part of you that wants to experience . . . so experience.”

There is another twist that should be mentioned before leaving this topic. A Being bound to the lower astral still has the desire to exercise its addictions (that is the problem—it can't let go of its desires). Unfortunately, it hasn't a body through which it can do so. To remedy the situation, an earth-bound will often attempt to link itself to an individual *in a body* who is experiencing the desired sensation.

How so? As far as this Eastern metaphysical view is concerned, each person in a body has a shielding around the aura. The shielding is designed to protect you from overly intimate contact with the other levels. It is possible to thin that shielding. Alcohol, for instance, will do it; so will drugs; even unusual physical conditions like high emotions can dislocate the sheathing.¹⁵

So what happens when people drink, or take drugs, or exercise roaring, mindless anger (if that be their addiction)? It thins out their auric shielding. With the shielding thinned, an earthbound on the other levels that craves the sensation being experienced by the host can send tendrils of thought down through the thinned shielding and into the aura. In doing so, it can experience its addiction through the host. This is called *overshadowing*, and in some instances an overshadower can even affect the decision making process of the overshadowed host.¹⁶

The whole idea behind an exorcism in Christianity is to get rid of an overshadower. The difference is that in the church, the intruder is believed to be supernatural—*the Devil*. As far as this view is concerned, it isn't the

What's more, the self will sooner or later be given access to the kind of experience that will allow it to work its way up and out of the hole it has dug for itself (assuming it chooses to use the experience well). This system is not designed to trap individuals in misery; it is a very loving in nature.

¹⁵ As an example, an individual who has a very high temperature will sometimes report sensing unusual things—seeing snakes going up the walls or feeling things crawling all over the body (going through the DT's will also do this). The assumption in the West is that such things are a product of the mind playing tricks on us (i.e., hallucinations). The belief in the East is that the auric shielding has been dislocated by the unusual physical circumstances (i.e., the high temperature or whatever) and that along with the brain doing weird things, the individual is also *mentally touching the lower astral* more intimately than usual. As such, the individual ends up sensing thought-forms that reside in the lower astral. Hallucinogenic drugs do the same thing: they alter the brain chemistry but they additionally dislocates the aura so the individual sees into the astral. With good trips, they see into the upper astral; with bad trips, they see into the lower astral. Looking into the lower astral isn't a fun prospect, especially if you have no control over it.

¹⁶ Have you ever noticed that when people are drunk, they act quite different than normal. Science says it's the consequence of altered brain chemistry; the East suggests that it may additionally be the influence of an overshadower (or possibly a whole committee of them).

Devil . . . it's just an earth-bound craving experience it cannot have in any way other than by leaching it off someone in a body.

Interestingly, there are all sorts of phenomena that the West terms supernatural that the East simply accepts as *part of the system*. For instance:

Channeling looks like cuckoo-cloud-nine stuff from a western perspective, and a fair portion of the people who do this sort of thing are surely frauds. The supposed psychic sits down, makes mental contact with someone on the other side, then says something like, "Oh, so-and-so is coming through. Peace and love. Do you have any questions?"

People are making big money doing this, which irritates the gashnutz out of watchdog skeptics groups . . . and for good reason. In most cases, it's bunk. BUT, as far as the East is concerned, such things are possible.

Why?

Because if there are entities on "the other side," and if it is possible for a host (someone in a body) to make a mental link with one of those entities, then having that entity speak through the host is not as outrageous a possibility as it might otherwise seem. That is what channelers claim to do. The East dignifies it because it is a logical consequence of the way this place is built.

The problem with channeling? Assuming someone is really doing it, who do you suppose is coming through? Basically decent entities are busy in Devachan. Spiritually evolved entities (those who chose to forgo Devachan) know better than to interfere with individuals in-body, especially if doing so would titillate the child-selves of those involved (and people *are* titillated by anything "otherworldly"). Spiritually evolved Beings on the other side wouldn't be caught dead (pun intended) acting as channel-spooks. So who is left? Earth-bound! They are the only ones both available and irresponsible enough to do such things.¹⁷

In other words, when people go to channelers and ask questions like, "What should I do with my life?", it is the equivalent to going up to a drunk down on skid row and saying, "Tell me, what should I do with my life and my wealth?" . . . then *listening* to their advice . . . then *taking* their advice!

What is worse, many people in the New Age community figure that if someone is in contact with the other side, the "someone" must be terribly spiritual. That simply isn't true! To be an effective channel, all one needs is an auric shielding that has been thinned out enough so that an entity on the other side can infiltrate the complex and affect the host's thinking.

¹⁷ Actually, there are a few other equally unsavory possibilities which we will discuss in time.

That is not being spiritual, that is being psychically porous.

In short, channeling is believed to be possible within the East, but it is not believed to be a particularly savory thing to do.

Another example: *ghosts*. What might a ghost be? It is possible to have a situation in which something happens to an individual that is so traumatic, so emotionally stressful, that the Being impresses that situation upon itself and cannot leave it.¹⁸ Imagine an individual who was angry to start with, or who was highly emotional, or who just didn't understand life very well: how might a self like that react to being murdered? The Being would step across the line, spend time with the Guardian, then possibly be pulled back to the emotion and the place of the experience to relive it over and over again. Just as though it were addicted to a particular sensation, the Being would become earth-bound. And under the right circumstances, it might be possible for you or me to sense the presence of that Being in the "haunted" place.

Another example: *astral projection*. Astral projection is a situation in which an individual lifts out and away from the body. How does it work? By focusing one's attention into the astral sheathing of the aura and extruding it out into the astral level, it is possible to get the effect of leaving the body (those who say they have experienced the phenomenon report being apparently connected to the body by a thin cord—this is the astral body as it exists between the extruded focal point of the self and the physical body).

This is not a good thing to be doing. Think about where the experiencer is. The self is moving around in the astral without the normal protection afforded it by the physical body and auric complex. And although the upper astral isn't so bad, the lower astral is not a place you want to be. The responsible teachers say so; the irresponsible teachers (of which there seem to be a myriad) are busily making money by teaching people how to astral project. If the East is correct, that is really dangerous.

A last example: contacting the dead in *seances*. When the body dies, it begins to decay . . . but that is not all that happens. The auric pattern—the energy field around the body—its sheaths also begin to decompose.¹⁹

¹⁸ Think about it. Have you ever had something happen to you that imprinted itself into your thinking so completely that you couldn't leave it. Example: you get into a big argument with your mother, then relive the argument for hours after-the-fact.

¹⁹ In the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the soul is instructed on its journey into the underworld (the inner worlds). One of the things that is discussed is the *lifting out of the body* of what they called the ba (depicted as a bird), the ka (also depicted as a bird), the khu, the

The astral body, for instance—the energy link between you and the next level up (ie. the astral plane)—begins to fall apart naturally as it drifts in the astral level (this is another reason the astral isn't such a fun place to be—it is the grave-site of decaying astral-body debris). Under the right circumstances, a real psychic (of which there are probably very few) can re-energize someone's astral shell before it has decayed to the point of complete disassembly. As the astral shell contains all the memory patterns of the individual's life, contacting and re-animating that shell can elicit a response that appears to be coming from the dearly departed.²⁰ Although most seances are probably fraudulent, the possibility of such contact exists if the East is correct.

The problem is that when a legitimate seance is executed, you really don't know what you have tagged into. It could be the astral shell of the individual targeted or it could even be an earthbound attempting to disguise itself as the loved one. In short, when you touch "the other side" in this manner, you really don't know with whom or what you have made contact.

Parting shot: Heaven, hell, ghosts, quality of self, other-worldly phenomena, they all have their place within the scheme of things. And as for death? The East's views are certainly reasonable. Whether they are right or wrong remains to be seen. After all, we are all going to die. Sooner or later, we will all have the answer.²¹

kaibit, and others. There is discussion amongst Egyptologists as to what each of these actually was. One possibility: they were different aspects of the auric sheathes as they pulled away from the body, coupled with the Being itself (the ba was said to be that part of you that is immortal).

²⁰ This is another reason why highly emotional grieving at someone's death is such a disservice to the departed. Projecting enormous amounts of thought-energy at someone's memory considerably impedes the natural decay of the astral shell.

²¹ There is one other bit of whimsy that should probably be injected here. One of humanity's more popular way of getting rid of undesirable individuals—murderers, etc.—is to put them to death. If this view is correct, killing someone in this manner is not going to get rid of the problem. Aside from making the individual more angry than he or she already is, sending a sociopathic Being out of body and into the inner planes actually gives the Being considerably more possibilities for power than would have been the case if it had been kept confined within the physical form. Why? Because once in the astral, the Being can begin to overshadow weaker minds. And what do you suppose such a Being is going to nudge those minds toward doing?

HOW VERY PECULIAR

*I met one day upon the stair
A little man who wasn't there.
He wasn't there again today,
I wish that he would go away.*

apologies to Hugh Hearn

*You would be wiser to stick your head into a gunpowder magazine
with a lit torch than to play with psychic phenomena.*

apologies to Talbot Mundy

The story I am about to tell is true as far as I know. The woman to whom the experience happened was a good friend of my mother's when I was in college. She (I will call her Marianne) told me the story at my mom's request.

I should point out two things before continuing. First, although I didn't spend a lot of time around her, I recall Marianne as being intelligent, sensible, and caring; a generally down to earth human being. Professionally, she was a teacher in the Los Angeles Unified School District and, like my mother, had an administrative credential which allowed her to act as her school's principal whenever the real principal was not on campus. In short, she was a woman with a considerable amount of professional standing and responsibility; a woman who was certainly no flake.

Second, from our conversation, it became evident that she had known since early childhood that she was different, realizing as a teen that she was what some would call a natural psychic. She didn't talk about it because she had learned from experience that people wouldn't understand. She

had absolutely no control over it, and although it occasionally surfaced in other ways, it usually took form through premonitions--flashes of insight about people or situations that were often so apparently off the wall that not even she believed they had a chance of being or becoming true. Yet over the years she had come to find that her insights were nearly always right--she really could see into individuals and circumstances in ways that were not normal.

So much for the preface, on with the tale.

Marianne had been divorced earlier and, after the divorce, was casting around for something exciting to occupy her mind. She talked to her friends at school. The general consensus was that she needed a hobby. She had always loved reading so she began reading books written by people who were in the fledgling New Age community. It was comforting to find that there were other people who had the same kind of insights as herself--comforting to learn that she wasn't as alone as she had thought. She also found it interesting to read about other psychically-oriented phenomena that seemed to exist.

During that period, one book in particular caught her attention. It was written by a woman who claimed to have generated the book through automatic writing.¹ The entity supposedly "dictating" the book wanted people on this side to know that death isn't a terrible, scary thing, and that the other side was quite nice. It talked about the need to be a thoughtful, loving individual, and how qualities built into the self on the earth level had a lot to do with one's situation on the other side. In short, it was a very hopeful, upbeat discussion of existence after death.

Having been inspired by the book, Marianne decided it was time to see how real *her* psychicness was, and to find a way to use whatever she had in ways that would be helpful to others. She hadn't the foggiest idea how to start, so she went with the old stand-by, a Ouija board.²

¹ It is believed by some that under certain circumstances, an entity on the other side can overshadow a psychically sensitive person to the extent of being able to control the movements of the host's body. Automatic writing is written material generated by a ghostie via this process. The host sits comfortably until the take-over, then writes. The claim is that the individual experiencing the invasion does not know what is being written at the time. Whether that be the case, who knows? The point is that if there are entities on the other side and if overshadowing is possible, automatic writing is also a possibility.

² When most people think of Ouija boards, they think of parlor games. You know the story: a group of friends on a dark and stormy night sitting around a dining room table making semi-concealed booga booga moves to try to fake one another out. Most people aren't particularly sensitive in a psychic way; nobody in his or her right mind would expect such

I should probably mention that when I heard this story, I was a relatively normal 23 year old kid who was still in college (my electrical engineering program took five-years). As such, I possessed a tremendously inflated estimate of the rightness of my own views about the world. To say that Marianne's story didn't fit into that view was an understatement. What struck me as she talked, though, was that as strange as her story seemed to me, given my relatively conventional beliefs, she definitely wasn't a drugged out, mentally disenfranchised nut. Neither did she appear to be a hare-brained nit-wit whose over productive imagination had a tendency of taking her off into never-never land. Her sincerity and sense of humor coupled with her obvious fear that I might think her crazy made me wonder: was she the fool for trusting her instincts and personal experiences, for being open minded and inquisitive about the nature of *humankind* and *consciousness* and the possibility of *after-death experience*, or was I the fool for taking my know-it-all stance when, in fact, I really knew nothing about the possibilities? It was an unsettling question to consider.

Marianne practiced with the board for two or three weeks, each time blanking her mind totally before beginning. She knew that her muscles were providing the movement on the Ouija board; she wanted to be sure it wasn't her mind alone doing the spelling. She said it didn't take long before she, indeed, began to feel the presence of "something" other than herself involved in the process.

Who? Marianne's mother had died when she was a very small girl. As hokie as it sounds, Marianne thought it was her mother. It wasn't pure caprice; her conclusion came from the feeling she got when engaging that "something" and from the general tenor of the answers she received from her queries. She naturally asked probing questions about her childhood, some of which she hadn't answers. Everything that came back was credible. This continued for two weeks until one day when the message was short. "Mom" wrote out, "This is dangerous. I'm coming no more!" Marianne asked a few more questions but got no understandable response, so she quit.

a situation to get credible results.

But as was the case with automatic writing, many people who think about things from an eastern metaphysics perspective believe a Ouija board can be used as a psychic tool. Certainly, the individuals involved are motivating the puck to move around the table--who would believe otherwise--but if psychically sensitive people are involved, the impetus for the puck's motion *could* be motivated by an overshadowing entity on the other side in a manner something like that of automatic writing.

That unsettling message stopped Marianne for a few days, but curiosity and fascination with the possibilities drew her back. In starting up again, it didn't take long before she was getting coherent responses from the board once more. She would ask questions to test what was coming through; some answers were reasonable, some pure gibberish. It wasn't possible to tag down exactly what was going on, but she persevered.

Approximately five weeks after she began, Marianne was sitting at the Ouija board when she got the eerie feeling she could tell what the board was going to do before it did it. Of course, that sounds ridiculous. She was ultimately the board's motivator, spooks or no, so even if there were entities around, one would expect her to be at least subconsciously aware of what was about to take place.

It wasn't that simple, though. It was different. For the first time she began to feel that she was making a tangible, mental link with something other than herself. It was a bit frightening; she initially mistrusted her perceptions. But along with the trepidation, there was an urgency to push on.

She still wasn't sure if the other side existed--not sure beyond a shadow of a doubt--but as this strange feeling grew she became sure of one thing. If it *did* exist and she *was* sensing the presence of conscious entities on the other side, she felt more and more that she could focus her mind and push through the veils that separated her from them.

What's more, that is exactly what she did.

Marianne quite literally pried open the doors into the next level--the inner worlds. She found that she could make a direct mental contact with entities on the other side whenever she chose to "tune in," as she put it, with nothing more than her mind. And in connecting, she could communicate with them just as she would with a real person standing next to her.

It wasn't as though she was *imagining* people were talking to her. She said later that it was just like holding a conversation with someone over the phone--nobody was there in the room with her but she could hear a voice just as though someone was. The only difference was that the sensing organs were not her ears. She was having a spontaneous, coherent, verbal conversation with "someone else" through a direct, telepathic link in her mind. She was fully aware that most people would think her daft if they knew what she was doing, but she stuck with it and became not only secure but comfortable with her new-found ability.

Over the weeks, there were a number of entities she came to recognize and make semi-regular contact with. One special male voice came quite often and she soon began to think of him as her guardian. Whenever she was having troubles and wanted help, she would focus her mind at

him, tune in, and he would come through. She would also tune in to whoever or whatever happened to be around whenever she had nothing better to do--a kind of amusement of sorts. She said that one day while passing a hearse in a funeral procession on the freeway, she tuned in and heard an old man's voice say, "Gee, isn't this amazing." Tuning in became something she did quite regularly.

There was one other peculiarity about her conversations with her guardian. After a few minutes of dialogue, the conversations would often be interrupted by the arrival of entities who were not particularly savory. She and the guardian came to call them "the bad guys." Marianne would always close down communications by *tuning out* whenever her guardian warned of their coming.

Regardless of the bad guys, Marianne had a wonderful new toy. She was as sane as you or me. She taught her school classes with the vim and vigor that had made her one of the best teachers in her district. She would still sit with friends and discuss politics, books, the newest plays and sports. And when people were in need, she would listen to their problems or take action to help, whatever was appropriate.

She hadn't changed outwardly at all. But inwardly, she was different. She had control of her mind in a way she had never dreamed possible--she could tune into the other side at will. It was as though someone had opened up a whole new world to her . . .

On a cool February night a month-and-a-half after her first contact, Marianne went to see a friend in Newport. Coming home around 11:00 PM on a relatively empty freeway, she decided to tune in to see who might be around. Almost immediately a pleasant but unfamiliar male voice came through to greet her.

Marianne was sorry it was not her guardian but always enjoyed meeting and talking to new individuals. They talked for a considerable time before she asked, "Do you know my guardian?"

"Oh, yes," replied the voice, "I know your guardian."

She was delighted. After a few more minutes of conversation she asked, "How long have you been friends with my guardian?"

The man's tone changed perceptibly. "You've misunderstood, my dear. I didn't say I was *friends* with your guardian. I only said I knew him."

The change of tone made the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end. Guardedly, carefully, she formed the next question in her mind. "Who are you?"

“Don’t you know?” he said in an inquisitive voice.

Then in an almost inaudible whisper he added, “I’m one of the bad guys.” And with that he shattered the relative peace with the most explosive, sinister, hysterical laughter she had ever heard.

If you can imagine a hell on earth, you can imagine what life was like for her over the next few months. Not realizing it, she had flung open the psychic doors within herself, doors meant by nature to be closed and locked, and the dregs of the underworld now had complete access to her. Trying to contact her guardian didn’t help.

At night she would be awakened by terrifying screams. Entities would come and speak in kind ways, only to turn like a flash and pour out hateful, venomous filth. Beings who were obviously in deep distress would come regularly and plead for help. Whole groups of voices would descend on her to hold wild, loud, angry conclaves in which she was the focus of their rage and malice. Her mind was like a giant, empty room ready to be filled at a moment’s notice with anyone who wished to invade.

For two full months she had no choice but to coexist with the most deranged of souls. They could come and go in her mind at will as long as she was not focused on something that demanded her full attention. Once that focus was no longer required and she lapsed into the mentally slack state that most of us exist in for a fair portion of our lives, they would be back. She was, in short, completely out of control. She could not close the doors--she could not tune out . . . and it didn’t take long before she began to fear that she had quite literally lost her mind.³

Trying to contact her guardian didn’t help. Once all hell broke loose, he never came again (I wondered later whether Marianne’s so-called guardian was really a *no-good* whose purpose was to lull her into a false sense of security, all the while loosening up her ability to close the doors).

As she sloshed through this cesspool of abuse and torment, she began to mentally search her memory for anything she had read that might help. She knew she could not rely on contemporary psychologists or psychiatrists. Conventional medical people would almost certainly conclude that she was crazy and place her in an institution where she would never get the help she needed. There had to be another way.

Marianne’s salvation was found in her library. She remembered reading in book by Jesse Stern about a woman who, as far as he could tell, was

³ For those of you who are afraid in the dark, understand that Marianne was quite unusual in her psychic perceptions AND had actively opened the way for her problem. Although drinking and drugs can thin out the auric sheathing, making it easier for a partial overshadowing, the chances of your being overshadowed a la Marianne are almost zero.

responsibly knowledgeable about psychic problems but wasn't at all interested in attracting public attention (the woman, it turned out later, was not the least bit amused at being included in Stearn's book). He also included the city in which the woman lived. Marianne got hold of the appropriate phone book and found the woman's name and phone number.

It took two to three weeks for her new found friend--I'll call her L--to help her back into control. Marianne was told to "visualize golden-white light flooding into the aura while pulling up the auric shielding that exists around all of us as a kind of natural protection between our waking mind and the other levels--the inner worlds." She was to do this four or five time a day.

She was also instructed to command the highest in her--L called this her *high mind*--to close the doors into the other levels and to instruct her sub-conscious mind to stand guard over those doors no matter what the inquisitive "personal self" might say or do.

"Part of the problem," she was told, "is with the personal mind's fascination with psychic phenomena. Even though such experiences are often horrifying, they are also titillating to the personal self. In part, it is that fascination that holds the doors open."

Lastly, L said she had friends with whom she meditated on a regular basis, and that she would have them focus a healing, cleansing, fortifying thought toward Marianne to help her succeed in her efforts. Marianne followed the instruction religiously and, with L's help, was finally able to close out the voices.

I was told this story three years after the fact. At the time, Marianne was still mentally cleansing her aura with white light and pulling up her auric shielding three times a day. She hadn't had a recurrence, but the episode was so vivid in her mind that she was taking no chances.

There are a number of questions that naturally arise whenever I tell this story:

--Is the story true?

As it wasn't my experience, I have no way of telling for sure. On the one hand, I can't see that Marianne had anything to gain by lying. She was clearly embarrassed talking about the situation; she was visibly concerned that I wouldn't believe her; and as best I could tell she didn't want people-in-general to know what had happened . . . it wasn't as though she was going to sell the story to Hollywood or a publishing house.

On the other hand, who knows . . .

Fortunately for us, none of this speculation is important. What is important is that as far as this Eastern view is concerned, her experience is *not outside of the realm of possibility*.

--Are there people "out there" with similar stories?

I'm not sure about that either. The most recent New Age craze over the last few years has been channeling, and although nobody was talking about such things in the 60's when Marianne was having her thrill, channeling is similar with three *very big differences*. They are:

1.) Assuming the individual isn't a fraud, most channelers go into a trance before "something" overshadows and speaks through them. Marianne was wide awake during her experience.

2.) Channelers almost always make a public show of their abilities (if abilities they truly are), complete with expectation of pay for their performance. Marianne would have died if people knew what she had been through.

3.) And lastly, channelers usually attribute, either overtly or by innuendo, spiritual significance to what they are doing.⁴ In Marianne's case, what was coming through was definitely from the dark side.

--It is possible for people who don't want to become channels but who are psychic to develop their psychic abilities in a controlled way?

One of the main attractions to psychic phenomena is that it is a kind of proof. People are afraid of the unknown, especially afraid of death. If a person makes contact with an entity on the other side, that means "the other side" *must exist*. It means the person has seen for himself or herself that there is more to this place than meets the eye. Touching the other levels gives a person hope and a kind of security one just doesn't get by listening to sermons about heaven and hell.

Nevertheless, there are two big problems associated with psychic development. First, most people have neither the *mental control* (remember the *triangle* meditation?) nor the *purity of motive* (think about the Yama and the Niyama) needed to deal with this kind of development clearly. As the East says, *powers come and go with the breeze*. When it is time for

⁴ In a way, it is hard to believe that anyone would accept this. When it is time for a spiritual teacher to enter an individual's life, real teachers don't arrive via a trance medium. A highly evolved Being/teacher is not going to monkey with the karma of others in the way channelers seem to do, much less engage in activity that might hook the less astute on psychic phenomena. Given the apparent motivation of most channelers (practically none do it for free), assuming spiritual significance to their activities is really reaching.

the real spiritual powers to open fully in an individual (example: when one can fully exercise compassion in the face of the most demented provocation; when one can fully transmute the most depraved of thoughtforms into something better; when a Being can stand before the most abject negativity and in the deepest of love change that darkness to light by the very power of one's presence), then the lesser abilities--the so-called psychic powers--will naturally open almost as an afterthought. Short-cutting the process by focusing the mind prematurely on these rather pathetic, secondary, phenomena does nothing in the long run except reinforce the child's *fascination with phenomena* while additionally inflating the ego to the size of a zeppelin. Whether it is obvious or not, people interested in a true spiritual unfolding have bigger and better things to do with their time.⁵

Second, and even more to the point, forcing open psychic abilities will inevitably have long-range *karmic* repercussions.

Think about it. Assume you do disciplines designed to develop your psychic sensitivity. You follow the disciplines religiously and, after years of effort, you succeed. You can sense the future; you can read other people's intentions; you can astral project; you can hear voices; whatever. You have powers and you have the *knowledge* to keep the powers under control.

Being a relatively normal human being, you use your abilities for benevolent or not so benevolent purpose, depending upon the situation, your desires, your whim (hopefully you know your child well enough to know that it almost always claims pure motives even when they're not). One way or the other, you secretly enjoy the notoriety that comes with being "gifted." You find the attention pleasant; you *like* being different. In short, either consciously or unconsciously your efforts become a monument to the child's *perceived needs and wants*. So what might be the consequences down the line?

There is a fairly good chance that you will come into your next life, or the one after that, or some distant incarnation, as a full blown psychic. That is, you will bring with you the auric characteristics of someone who has

⁵ Consider the focus suggested by the real Teachers: look to see *where* you are as a human Being; look to see *what* you are; look to see in *what direction* you are going. Examine your attitudes--what are the things that you hold dear and why? How do you treat other people? What is it about the way you deal with life that karmically draws you into experiences that are friction-filled? How do *you* respond to life? Do you spend all your time focusing on how the other guy is the jerk, or do you look to see where *you* are a jerk? In short, if all you get from your efforts and meditations is a little power, you are shorting yourself mightily. Meditation is useful only if you come out of it a different, *better* person. In a spiritual sense, anything less is failure (temporary failure, but failure none the less).

access to these abilities. Unfortunately, the motivational safeguards that should keep you out of trouble as you exercise these faculties--safeguards that attend the *natural* opening of such abilities--are not there. Why? Because you have brought psychic powers into a life in which they are not appropriate--into a life in which they would not have arisen if you hadn't forced things open in the first place. As such, it's probable that you will have no control over them. You won't understand why you are the way you are, or how you got that way. You won't be able to focus the abilities, especially if they frighten you. You might hear voices from the other side, or see astral forms, or sense lines of karma and, hence, "see" into the future. You may be super-sensitive in a way that leaves you an emotional noodle--someone who is constantly drained, rung out, wiped out . . . and you won't have a clue as to why (and neither will your family doctor).

In short, you will be thoroughly, psychically messed up . . . and all of it will be your own doing. Karma will have responded to your demands by saying (metaphorically), "It's premature, but you've insisted . . . so EXPERIENCE!"

Bottom line: In response to the question, "Is playing with psychic development a good idea?", the responsible teachers out of the East say, "Absolutely not!" Sure, it's titillating, but it's also dangerous: dangerous psychologically, emotionally, karmically! As the quote at the beginning of the chapter says, "You would be wiser to stick your head into a gunpowder magazine with a lit torch than to play with psychic phenomena."

Two final points--

First: If skeptics are correct, psychic phenomena is bunk. If the East is correct, it's bloody dangerous. Either way, it isn't something people ought to be fooling around with. The only reason I'm talking about it at all is because the ideas are "out there." Channeling, astral projection, divination and more--it's all being discussed and tinkered with by New Age folks . . . most of whom probably haven't any idea how spooky these mental toys could become under the right circumstance.

Second: Kindly notice how naturally all of this stuff flows from the underlying beliefs that exist within the Eastern philosophies and their attendant metaphysical views. It isn't hocus pocus if you accept the underlying assumptions.

They are: there exists an all-encompassing God-with-a-purpose; a

human body, like all bodies, is a vehicle for experience by an evolving bit of God-Awarenesses; in the case of humankind, Awarenesses have developed to the point where they can learn to deal with *creativity* and *free will* as they exist in matter; *thought* has substance, form, and energy; thought underlies all things; the inner worlds exist; *thought* resides in the inner worlds; the inner worlds is the “place” where humans “go” when the physical body dies; a human’s sensitivity to these levels depends upon auric porosity (not spirituality); all manner of psychic phenomena come when Beings “run into” the other levels.

Of the topics outlined above, any one of them has the potential of seeming strange if viewed from an unsympathetic perspective, especially if that perspective doesn’t look at *the system* as a whole. Put together, though, the parts fit nicely.

In short, this class is beginning to accomplish what it set out to do: to give you a feel for the Eastern tradition while also giving you some semblance of an idea from whence all these strange New Age ideas have come. Again, you may not agree with them, but at least you are seeing why people believe in them . . .

REMEMBRANCE

Nobody can say where man ends. That is the beauty of it.

Carl Jung

The Greeks do not rightly use the term “coming into being” and “perishing.” For nothing comes into being nor yet does anything perish, but there is mixture and separation of things that are. So they would do right in calling the coming into being “mixture,” and the perishing “separation.”

*Anaxagoras (a Greek philosopher and
friend of Pericles circa 470 BC)*

In his book, *Life After Life*, Dr. Raymond Moody wrote:

In 1965, when I was an undergraduate student studying philosophy at the University of Virginia, I met a man who was a clinical professor of psychiatry in the School of Medicine. I was struck from the beginning by his warmth, kindness, and humor. It came as a great surprise when I later learned a very interesting fact about him, namely, that he had been dead--not just once but on two occasions, about ten minutes apart--and that he had given a most fantastic account of what happened to him while he was “dead.” I later heard him relate his story to a small group of students. At the time, I was impressed, but since I had little background from which to judge such experiences, I “filed it away,” both in my mind and in the form of a tape recording of his talk.

That was Raymond Moody’s first experience with what are now called *near death experiences*. His second came after he had received his

Ph.D. in philosophy. He was teaching a class on Plato at the University of North Carolina when a student approached him one day after class to talk about the idea of immortality.

It seems the student's grandmother had "died" for a short time during an operation, and upon recovery recounted an unusual series of events that she remembered happening during the operation--presumably during the period she was medically dead. The student related the specifics of his grandmother's story and, to Moody's surprise, they almost exactly correlated to the chain of events outlined years earlier by that professor of psychiatry.

Curiosity piqued, Moody began to delve more deeply into the possibility that man, as an integrated, aware Being, might continue to exist beyond the biological death of the body. He told no one about his two near-death stories, but he did begin to devote classroom time and student readings to the topic of immortality. He received an interesting response to his efforts. In nearly every class of twenty-five to thirty students, at least one student quietly came forth in private to recount a personal near-death experience (personal in the sense that it either happened to the student, to someone in his or her immediate family, or to a close friend).

In 1972, Moody entered medical school (he is now an MD specializing in Psychiatry). Although he was careful to closely guard the specifics of his informal research, he made contacts with other doctors through speaking engagements at medical conventions, etc., and made his interest in near-death situations known. As a consequence, near-death patients from all over the country were referred to him by their physicians. By the time he made his findings public through the publication of his book, he had collected approximately 150 cases.

Analyzing his interviews, Dr. Moody found that a number of different happenings seem to surface quite often as people recalled their particular experience. Weaving these most-often stated components into one composite picture, we find the following account:

- 1.) An individual, we will say it is a man, is in a life-threatening situation (he is drowning or in an automobile accident, or maybe he is having an operation and something has gone wrong). There is pain--he is in distress--and then he becomes very peaceful. He hears someone declare him dead.
- 2.) He hears a sound like a buzzing or a ringing.

- 3.) The man feels he is being quickly drawn into a void, a darkness (many describe this as being like entering head-first into a narrow, black tunnel).
- 4.) He finds himself out of his physical body, floating near it. He finds he has a body, but it is not like the physical one, it is more ethereal. (Some recall having people who are trying to revive the physical body walk right through this ethereal body).
- 5.) The man hovers above the physical body, watching resuscitation efforts and listening to the doctors (or whoever is trying to revive him) talk. (This ability to recount dialogue that has gone on while the individual was dead is fairly common; there have even been cases where the individual has left the immediate area of the physical body and observed happenings in areas nowhere close).
- 6.) The man feels the presence of spiritual Beings--Beings who have come to help him with the transition. They may or may not be physically obvious to him, but he feels them around him as they work.
- 7.) He finds himself in the presence of a *Being of Light*. (Some have associated this Being with Christ, but the majority, both Christians and non-Christians alike, have said only that it was a very loving, benevolent Being).
- 8.) In a very non-judgmental way, the Being poses a non-verbal question to the man which gently prods him into an analysis of his life. With the Being's help, the experiences of the man's life flash before him. It is not a threatening process--the Being and the man look impersonally at the man's actions and observe where the actions were benevolent and as-they-should-have-been, and where they were harmful. (Many say that the Being stressed two things during this period of introspection: the

need to learn to love others and the need to acquire knowledge).

- 9.) He comes to a point where he feels a barrier through which he can not pass.
- 10.) There comes a time when the man feels himself being pulled back down toward his physical body. (Often the individual is so absorbed in the peacefulness of the experience that he does not want to be forced back into the body; in some cases, he fights to stay out, though he becomes content once revived and fully back in the physical form).
- 11.) Later, he tries to talk about his experience to others. He is usually met either with skepticism or with questions of his sanity. After a few of these encounters, he stops talking to people about it.
- 12.) If the man is typical, the experience will not make him more religious in the sense of wanting to go to church more often on Sunday. It will change his view of life, though, giving it a more precious, spiritual quality. He will remember the *Being of Light* and the one lesson that came through so clearly as he watched and analyzed his life--the need to become more loving.

In general, Dr. Moody was very careful to preserve the credibility and dignity of his report. During the research, he took pains to insure that loose talk did not inadvertently prejudice or corrupt the testimony of possible future contacts. He also made it clear that his findings were not a scientific proof of life after death (scientific research follows a very strict protocol in which experimental data must be duplicable in a controlled environment; such a possibility would obviously be impossible in near-death research). He pointed out that there are many people who find themselves in near-death situations, yet who have no remembrances of anything taking place that was out of the ordinary, and he plainly says that no two near-death experiences are exactly alike. He even includes a chapter in which he discusses alternative explanations of the phenomenon.

When all is said and done, though, Dr. Moody's book highlights one point that is very difficult to refute: it is incredibly unlikely that so many independent sources have had this kind of experience, and that their accounts could be so relatively consistent with one another. Unlikely, that is, unless the experiences have some foundation in a area that science knows next to nothing about: the possibility that humans do, indeed, exist as conscious entities after the death of the body.¹

The fact that Moody's research paints a picture of blissful states awaiting a just-departed individual leaves unchallenged one unsettling possibility. If the after-death states are so great, why don't people who are miserable just skip all the pain and suffering of life and go straight into the inner worlds? Why don't they commit suicide?

Prompted, I'm sure, by the realization that this might be a tempting alternative for some, Moody did additional research with *near death suicides*. In an addendum to his book, he writes:

These (suicide near-death) experiences were uniformly characterized as being unpleasant. As one woman said, "If you leave here a tormented soul, you will be a tormented soul over there, too." In short, they reported that the conflicts they had attempted suicide to escape were still present after they died, but with added complications. In their disembodied state, they were unable to do anything about their problems, and they also had to view the unfortunate consequences which had resulted from their acts.

A man who was despondent about the death of his wife shot himself, "died" as a result, and was resuscitated. He states:

¹ Dr. Moody's research does not stand alone. Of the many who have published additional works on the subject, two stand out as notable:

The first is Dr. George Richie who, in his book *Return from Tomorrow*, recounts his own near-death experience during World War II. Interestingly enough, Dr. Richie was the previously unnamed professor of Psychiatry who first introduced Moody to the possibility of near-death experiences.

Dr. Michael Sabom is a cardiologist who began by being highly skeptical of Moody's work. His visceral reaction remained until he began questioning near-death patients of his own. To his surprise, many of the experiences Moody's patients reported were the same as those recounted by his own people. His book, *Recollections of Death, A Medical Investigation*, outlines his approach, his data, and his conclusions.

I didn't go where (my wife) was. I went to an awful place . . . I immediately saw what a mistake I had made . . . I thought, "I wish I hadn't done it."

Others who experienced this unpleasant "limbo" state have remarked that they had the feeling they would be there for a long time. This was their penalty for "breaking the rules" by trying to release themselves prematurely from what was, in effect, an "assignment"--to fulfill a certain purpose in life.

There are some observations that can be made from Moody's work, aside from the obvious.

--Even though "stepping across the line" does seem to effect a release of everyday-life-pressures, the *surviving self* doesn't appear to change much mentally or emotionally with death. Beings don't just automatically erupt into a blissful, celestial glow, sprout wings, and take up the harp. Note that this is very similar to the beliefs of the East we have already talked about.

--Although Moody's work seems to support the contention that personal Awareness does not cease to exist with the death of the body,² it says nothing about reincarnation. Of course, that isn't surprising. Each of the individuals Moody dealt with went only so far before being drawn back into the body. We will have to go elsewhere for proof (if proof exists) of rebirth.

² There are skeptics who would disagree with this. Just because the heart and breath have stopped, they would argue, doesn't mean the near-death victim is brain dead.

Indeed, this fact could explain how people might remember conversations held by their rescuers. That is, information might continue to be impressed on the brain during the short period after death and before the brain has completely turned off. And as for the phenomenon of hovering over the body: that could simply be a hallucination.

Of course, these arguments don't explain how victims remember *visually seeing* the resuscitation process as it goes on, later describing minute details not available simply through the sense of hearing. Neither does it explain how a victim having an operation might "hallucinate" going to, say, the hospital *waiting room* only to accurately recall the conversation between loved ones that occurred during that time--a time when the discussion is wholly out of earshot of the body.

What is important to realize from this is that there are other explanations that have been presented by skeptics. What also needs to be recognized, though, is that simply because alternatives can be presented, it doesn't mean they truly reflect what is really going on in the phenomena. It all comes down to the following: Whether or not Moody's work is convincing to you *is up to you*. In a way, looking to so-called experts (skeptical or otherwise) for the solution is not useful. In most cases, they don't have the answers any more than you or I do.

Moving along a little different track: Talk to almost anyone about the idea of reincarnation and you'll find that the single biggest objection to the possibility is the fact that people simply don't have personal recollections of their own past lives. Furthermore, people will say, if past lives aren't something one remembers, what good are they?

But why should it be strange or unusual that you can't remember past lives. After all, can you remember what you were doing exactly five years ago to the hour? How about five weeks ago? If you are normal, you'll answer, "Very little." So should it be perplexing that we don't have remembrances of lives that might have taken place hundreds of years ago?

Actually, there are a number of reasons why it *would* be surprising to find that one *could* remember past lives. Think about all the things you've screwed up in your life so far. Think about all the people you've hurt. Think about all the situations you've played badly, all the things you wish you could do over, all the regrets (for those of you who are young and can't list many things in this category, give it time . . . most older people are buried in guilts and uncomfortable remembrance of actions ill taken). If forgetfulness wasn't a part of the evolutionary system, imagine what it would be like to come into any life with complete remembrance of all the negative things you've done *over all your past lives*. It would be devastating. The weight of remorse would psychologically crush you before you ever had a chance to experience anything in the current life.

Forgetfulness is a very benevolent, useful accoutrement within the system we are examining. Along with allowing a Being to heal after difficult teaching experiences, it allows karma to bring the same kinds of teaching experiences to an individual over and over again. How so? For most of us, the child is quite set in its ways of action. It often takes a long time and a lot of karmic nudging to make it (us) see that its attitudes (our attitudes) are not as they should be. If the child had unlimited memory, it could easily learn to short-circuit specific kinds of experience, limiting their usefulness as a teaching tool.

Example: Assume you are a middle age man who, for various reasons, has deep, hidden insecurities. As is the case with most people, you are so involved in your own little world that you don't even realize this. Nevertheless, you unconsciously try to make yourself appear secure by constantly having relationships with, say, beautiful women (not that there is anything wrong with this; it is just that you won't even *consider* a woman who doesn't *look spectacular*). You have a great job, money, friends, and decent looks, so your life becomes a quest for that beautiful companion to bring it all together. You regularly become infatuated, fall in love,

have good times, have differences, then have everything fall apart. You are lucky if your relationships last more than a half year. Nevertheless, within a few months of each break-up, you are champing at the bit to try once again.

Why, with all the pain generated by each break-up, do you continue replaying this scenario over and over again?

The easy answer is that you are lonely and, hence, simply keep trying. But sooner or later, you are going to begin to realize that there are things you are doing that are counterproductive . . . like ignoring that nice, pleasant looking woman down the hall because she isn't 22 years old and probably wouldn't be asked to be a Playboy centerfold. Why do you ignore her? Because there are things in you that are driving you to repeat patterns of experience that are doomed to failure.

Still, your own blindness is drawing you toward a major enlightenment. As the experiences mount up, sooner or later it is going to dawn on you that beauty really *is* only skin deep; that what makes a woman worthwhile is not how structurally attractive she is but what is inside her--what her attitudes are about life. And once that becomes evident, who knows? Maybe you will begin to see that what makes YOU worthwhile is not who is on your arm but how you treat *people and life* in everyday terms. Are you kind when you don't need to be? Are you considerate when it requires an extra effort? Is it always the child-self first with you, or can you take the child in hand, unclench its grip on what it wants, and allow life to flow around you without all the demands and controls? In other words, repeated experience along this line has at least the potential of cracking the *shell of self* wide open, allowing you to begin to see beyond your small world.

Most people have a central theme in their lives, a theme that generates similar experiences that happen over and over again as their lives progress. If it were not for forgetfulness, the possibility of using a common experience in a recursive way would not exist and karma's duty to teach would be considerably more difficult than it already is.

In short, forgetfulness is a useful commodity within the spiritual evolution of the self. What's more, when the necessity for forgetfulness no longer exists, it will be no more. That is, when a Being has evolved to a point where it can treat life as an accepted and precious learning experience, when there is no longer the need to fight the child every step of the way, forgetfulness will lift and the Self will have the opportunity to look back and learn from all its lifetimes of experience. *The Jataka Tales* recounts some of the lives of the Buddha; the East believes remembrance of previous lives will come when it is appropriate within a Being's spiritual

evolution.

As for the belief that unremembered past lives have no effect on one's thinking, think again. The whole idea behind psychological analysis is that bringing to the surface (i.e., remembering), confronting, and dealing with buried, traumatic, early-life experiences will allow an individual to heal mental and related physical health problems in the here and now. Simply because one doesn't actively remember an abusive parent, for instance, doesn't mean the mental scars aren't there. Simply because you don't remember past lives (assuming they exist) doesn't mean they haven't played a role in making you who and what you are today.

But many people still want proof of reincarnation in ways that are obvious. They think if reincarnation is true, then a child should know from prior life that if it puts its fingers into a flame, it will be burned. If this isn't the case, they assume there are no proofs. Yet the evidence of rebirth may be all around us, unseen because we don't really know what to look for.

Do you carry any unexplainable, irrational fears? Have you ever visited some place, possibly in a foreign country, and had the overwhelmingly comfortable feeling you were at home?³ Or have you ever met a new acquaintance, only to find an immediate rapport, almost as though you were being reunited with an old, beloved friend you had not seen for ages?

There are probably a thousand ways one could explain these situations. One of the many possibilities is that you are experiencing the remembrance of a previous life.

What's more, why are you the way you are? Scientists believe there are two factors at work in forming a human persona: genetics and environment. The genetics is relatively straightforward. The absence or existence of certain gene combinations determines physical characteristics as well as propensities and abilities that seem to come with the body. But as sensible as this may seem to biologists, it stretches credibility to the max when used

³ My mom visited England a number of years ago on a bus tour. One day while driving through the countryside, she was struck by a view of a large house on the top of a small hill in eye-shot of the highway. When they arrived at their destination, she had the opportunity to visit the house. Upon entering the place, she was shocked by how familiar everything seemed. It wasn't the kind of familiarity one has by having seen pictures of the home; it was the kind of familiarity someone has when they know every nook and cranny of a place. She had never been to England before and, as best she could tell, had never seen the estate before, but she knew it well (she even knew where the guest bathroom was on the first floor long before it was pointed out to her by the guide).

At the time she had no way of explaining her strong, rather unusual feelings about the place. One obvious possibility is a past life connection.

as an explanation for someone like Mozart writing a symphony at the ripe old age of eight.

The environmental factor certainly affects how we react to life, but how far back can one go to determine why an individual is the way he or she is? Conventional psychologists are willing to consider effect all the way back to an individual's natal state. *Transpersonal psychologists* are willing to go even further. Working on the basis of evidence gathered during hypnotic regressions (they use a regression technique that must be done *very carefully*), they believe that if the roots of an individual's problems cannot be linked to experiences in this life, they may reside in decisions and actions taken in *previous* lives.

Still, people want to know if anyone has ever had a *full blown* remembrance of a past life. The answer to that is . . . maybe.

Dr. Ian Stevenson is the Carlson Professor of Psychiatry and Director of the Division of Parapsychology, Department of Behavioral Medicine and Psychiatry at the University of Virginia School of Medicine. Dr. Stevenson has written a number books, notably *Twenty Case Suggestive of Reincarnation* (University Press of Virginia), in which he presents the meticulous research and analysis he and his co-workers have done in the area of *past life remembrance*. As of 1974, his group had collected over 1300 such cases, four-fifths of which had been investigated by his team. The cases have come from all over the world--from Asia, the Middle East, Europe, North and South America--and including a large number, over 300, from Alaska and the continental United States.

Colin Wilson, in his book *Afterlife*, recounted a compressed version of one of Dr. Stevenson's cases from India. He writes:

Swarnlata, the daughter of a civil servant, was born in 1948. At the age of three, she began to tell her brothers and sisters about a previous life in the city of Katni, where she had been called Biya, and had been married to a man called Chintamini Pandey. At three and a half, her father took her with him on a school inspection trip, and as they passed Katni--about a hundred miles from their home--she asked the driver to turn down a road to "my house." Her father then learned that she had been telling her family about her "previous life" for some time. She performed for her parents songs and dances that she claimed she had learned in her previous life, and which she had certainly no opportunity to learn in the present one. When she was ten, her

family moved to Chatarpur, and she there met a lady named Srimati Agnihotri, whom she claimed to recognize as someone who had known her in her previous life. Her father was impressed when this lady confirmed many of his daughter's statements about Katni and her life there--for the first time he began to take her claims seriously. He began writing down her statement to compare with those of her "previous" family in Katni. He had made a list of nine points about the family house; all proved to be accurate; so did Swarnlata's description of her life as Biya, the deceased wife. Soon after this, Swarnlata and her family went to Katni; what followed was very similar to what happened to Shanti Devi.⁴ Swarnlata's family took care to offer her no clues, but even tried to mislead her on various points--such as telling her that the family cowherd was dead, then bringing him into her presence. She recognized him immediately. Stevenson's table of all the places, people, and events described accurately by Swarnlata goes on for eight pages, and makes impressive reading.

As was the case with Raymond Moody, Dr. Stevenson is a very respectable psychiatrist and researcher. Like Moody, his book includes an analysis of the problems and possible sources of error inherent in the kind of research he does, and an even-handed presentation of other possible explanations for his findings. In short, he does not present his work as a *proof* of reincarnation . . . but it does strongly support the possibility.

For the sake of completion, I think I should say more about the topic of hypnosis.

Contrary to popular opinion, hypnosis is not a play-thing. If exercised irresponsibly, it can uncork anxieties and unpleasant memories and generally debilitate an unsuspecting subject. Nevertheless, when normal analysis has failed, psychologists have for decades used therapeutic hypnosis as a port of entry into the subconscious. What is weird is that in

⁴ Shanti Devi was a four-year-old girl born in 1926 who was able to recount a description of people, places, and events that took place during a time that was previous to her birth in an area of India she had no prior access to or knowledge of. When she was taken to the place of her previous life, she was able to guide the carriage from the train station to her "previous" home, give a guided tour of the house, and greet by name friends and obscure relatives that were there.

doing so, many have run into unexpected results: patients who have recounted what appear to be past lives.

Case studies normally follow a typical pattern: While under hypnosis, the subject gives his or her name in the previous life, the date, the name of the country in which the life took place, the name of the individual's town or village, names of family and friends, and bits and pieces about the lifestyle of the times and the individual's personal situation.

Once convinced the patient isn't faking, and if the case is noteworthy, the psychologist then sends a researcher to the *country in question* with instructions to use every resource available to verify or deny the claim. Church and land records are scoured to find references to the alleged personality; relatives are interviewed if they exist; scholars familiar with the time period are interviewed. The researchers tend to be fanatically thorough . . . nobody wants to play the incredulous fool and substantiate a bad case.

Of course, there is always the possibility that someone will go to another country, look up a lot of obscure but historically documented information, and use it to present a fraudulent case in a faked hypnosis session. Researchers, trying to verify the information, would follow the hoaxer's footsteps to the same place the villain got his or her information, and nobody would be the wiser.

That kind of thing could certainly happen once, or ten times, or even a hundred times. But the odds of that being the case for the thousands of case studies that have been done all over the world in the last forty-years are not good. Even so, there are really only two kinds of evidence most self-respecting skeptics are willing to accept: a regression that produces information that no one in the world knows about at the time, but that is somehow verified at a later date; and a situation in which the regressee is so completely changed during the regression that he or she actually manifests physical differences that are discernible but impossible to fake.

I have already mentioned Colin Wilson's book, *Afterlife*. In it he gives us an example of the first kind of "acceptable" evidence. It reads:

. . . Iverson's most convincing case (Iverson was a T.V. producer who became interested in past life regressions after doing a T.V. special on the subject) is of a woman who prefers to be known as Jane Evans, and who recalled several past lives; a Roman housewife living in Britain, a Jewess murdered in a pogrom in York, a French courtesan, a maid-servant to a lady-in-waiting to the Spanish Infanta, and an

American nun from Des Moines, Iowa.

. . . the most impressive “incarnation” was as a Jewess, Rebecca, in twelfth-century York. Shortly before Richard the Lion Hearted rode off to the Third Crusade, in 1189, there were anti-Jewish riots in London; the English had worked themselves into a frenzy about “infidels,” and the Jews seemed to qualify as much as the Muslims. In 1190, there were riots in York; Jews took refuge in the castle, and most of them killed their families, then themselves, to avoid the vengeance of the mob. Rebecca and her family escaped the massacre, and took refuge in the crypt of a Christian church, “just outside the big gate.” But the mob found and killed them.

Iverson decided to consult an expert on the massacre, Professor Barrie Dobson, of the University of York. Dobson was impressed by her reconstruction of the massacre, particularly because ‘Jane Evans’ claimed to be totally ignorant of any such thing (the woman had evidently had no historical training beyond the usual elementary courses in school--and the completeness of her account was too meticulous to be the consequence of cryptomnesia⁵). He decided that the church that answered her description was St. Mary’s, Castlegate. There was only one problem--Castlegate had no crypt. But six months later, workmen renovating the church discovered the remains of ‘something that seems to have been a ‘crypt’-- room with round stone arches and vaults, under the chancel.

It isn’t often that rooms or passageways unknown to history pop up in the transcripts of regression cases, but it has happened. When it does, skeptics have little recourse but to nod and acknowledge there could be something to the evidence.

The second kind of evidence--physical or mental changes in the individual that come out under hypnosis--also occurs in rare instances of xenoglossy. Xenoglossy is the ability to spontaneously speak a language that one “does not know”. Head and Cranston’s *Reincarnation, The Phoenix*

⁵ The mind has the ability to take in enormous amounts of information, most of which is “lost” in the subconscious. Cryptomnesia is a situation in which an individual brings up from the subconscious memories of things he or she has unconsciously observed at some earlier time.

Fire Mystery, yields one such example:

Lydia Johnson was not looking for a previous life when she agreed to help her husband with his experiments in hypnotism. She proved an excellent subject, capable of slipping easily into a deep trance. Dr. Harold Johnson (not their real names) was a respected Philadelphia physician. He had taken up hypnotism two years earlier, thinking it might help in treating some of his patients. Now, as his experiments with his wife progressed, he decided to try hypnotic regression, taking her back in time.

Suddenly, she flinched, as if struck, and screamed. She grabbed her head. He ended the session immediately, but his wife had a headache that could not be explained. Twice Johnson repeated the session. The result was the same. On awakening from the trance, Lydia each time said she had visualized a scene with water, and with old people seemingly being forced into it to drown. She had felt herself being pulled down, and then the blow--the scream--and the headache.

Johnson called in another hypnotist, a Dr. John Murray (also a pseudonym). Murray repeated the regression . . . but before the pain could strike, he instructed her: 'You are 10 years younger than that.' Then it happened. She began to talk. Not sentences, just words, an occasional phrase. Part was in broken English, part in a foreign language unfamiliar to anyone present. But her voice. It was deep, masculine, earthy. Then from the mouth of the pretty, 37-year-old housewife, the chilling words: 'I am a man.' The name? 'Jensen Jacoby.' She pronounced it YEN-sen YAH-ko-bee.

She began, in halting English punctuated by foreign words, to describe a past life. In this, and sessions that followed, she told in that low, guttural voice, of living in a tiny village in Sweden some three centuries ago. The sessions were tape recorded, and careful notes were kept. Swedish linguist were called in to translate Jensen's statements. In the later sessions he spoke almost exclusively in Swedish, a language totally alien to Lydia.

'What do you do for a living?' he was asked.

"En Bonde (a farmer)," he answered.

‘Where do you live?’

‘I huset (in a house).’

‘Var liger huset? (Where is the house located)?’

‘I Hansen (in Hansen).’

Jensen showed a simple personality harmonious with the peasant life he described. He showed little knowledge of anything beyond his own village and a trading center he visited . . . He raised cows, horses, goats, chickens, ate goats milk cheese, bread, milk, salmon, and poppy seed cakes made by his wife, Latvia . . . He had built his own stone house, and he and Latvia had no children. He was one of three sons; his mother was Norwegian and had run away from home.

Objects were brought in, and Lydia was asked to open her eyes and identify them. As Jensen, she did--a model of a 17th Century Swedish ship, which she correctly called “skuta,” a wooden container used for measuring grain, a bow and arrow, and poppy seeds. She did not recognize or know how to use modern tools, such as pliers . . .

Although the above section came from Head and Cranston’s book, it was actually one of Ian Stevenson’s cases. Stevenson’s comment? He said he has used hypnosis in a few cases but much prefers cases in which small children who were *not* under hypnosis spontaneously spoke “unknown” foreign languages--in some cases, even extant ancient languages. Those, he maintains, are more reliable examples of xenoglossy and of much greater value if one is trying to build a case for reincarnation. They do not happen often (or at least they aren’t reported often), but according to him, they do occur.

Bottom line: Reincarnation . . . does it exist?

It’s your call!

DARKNESS AND LIGHT

*Even as the Sun, the eternal, shines forever,
From His light grows the worlds.
So the lighted Soul reflects that mighty One
Whose light shall create and renew the lives of men.*

*If I become as a lamp,
Those in search of light will seek me out;
I need do no more than shine
For the light will beckon them from far places.*

*If I become as a torch made from rotten reeds,
Smoking and smoldering into the worlds' darkness,
Who shall wish to carry me for light
And to what end shall I suffer the burning of the flame.*

*The impure reed feels the agony of burning;
The pure wick bears the perfect flame painlessly.
The fire must be lit,
So choose, immortal Soul, how you shall burn.*

Croissant/Dees

The desires of the child-self clamor continuously, confining the greater-Self to the smallness of the child. Imagine quieting the child, becoming free of the chains that bind you and me to our littleness. As the confinement fades, the state is blissful, wakeful; the state is full of compassion.

from an Indian Sage

In the early 80's, the University of Oriental Studies in Los Angeles invited the Dalai Lama¹ to come and speak. I knew very little about the man at the time, but my friends and I decided it would be interesting to hear what he had to say.

The freeway was unusually difficult that day and we arrived late. I was tense from the drive and a bit apprehensive about getting a place to sit. We were lucky enough to find seats up high in one of the side balconies.

When he arrived on stage, the Dalai Lama stood behind a podium. Ten or twelve Tibetan monks sat in chairs on the stage to the right and left of him. He began to speak in fairly good English. As he talked, it became evident that his sense of humor was warm and pleasant. He said things that were thoughtful and kindly but not unduly moving. Still, he wasn't half-way through his presentation when I started to feel, well . . . different.

Even if I had known more about who the Dalai Lama was, I would *never* have expected the tone of my thoughts to have altered as radically as they did as I sat there watching him in that auditorium. The pettinesses of my habitual nature, the self-imposed pressures of the day, the psychological tensions that go along with living, they all receded. It was just as though the lesser side of my *child self* simply went to sleep, leaving me in this extraordinary, freed state.

. . . And it had absolutely nothing to do with what the Dalai Lama was actually saying. His message was clear but not novel; his presentation was OK but not stellar. What made him different was his presence. It was as though he bathed the audience in a meditation of peace, amplified by

¹ The Dalai Lama is primarily the political leader of Tibet, although he is also very much a spiritual leader (the primary spiritual leader is the Tashi Lama). Both are believed to be reincarnating Lamas, or *tulkus*.

Historically, when a Dalai Lama dies, a search is immediately launched to find the new child into which that Lama has reincarnated and become. The search can last many years with the Tibetan people and monks looking for a baby with the correct birthmarks. Once found, the child is put through a series of tests. The protocol is rigorous. For instance, the hereditary toys of previous Dalai Lamas are mixed with numerous other toys, then presented to the child (this was shown in the movie *Kundun* about the life of the Dalai Lama). If the child picks out the hereditary toys, he is allowed to continue with the tests (for those of you who saw Eddie Murphy's film "The Golden Child," this tradition was alluded to in the opening scenes); if he fails, the search is resumed.

Tenzin Gyatso is the fourteenth Dalai Lama. When the Chinese invaded Tibet in the 50's, he escaped into India (the Tashi Lama was captured by the Chinese; God only knows where he was taken or what they did to him) and established a Tibetan *government in exile* based in Dharamsala in the north of India. He is a very benevolent man who loves so deeply that he stands whole heartedly against violence, even against violence that if carried out might free his homeland (his kindness, I'm sure, is a considerable source of irritation for the Chinese government). He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990.

the collective mental presence of his accompanying monks. It completely took me by surprise.

During the three days that followed, the effect lasted uninterrupted. I viewed life with a kinder, calmer, more complete eye. I found it easy, even natural, to act with compassion in situations where I would normally have become defensive and/or aggressive. I found that time was enough; that I could do in peace what was needed even in circumstances in which I would normally have been rushed. I was able to perceive what was important in the sense that I could look into the heart of a situation and find the bit of wisdom that was there, even in situations where emotions were high. My mind was cleansed of the clutter of trivial expectations and desires, which is to say that I could see with clarity through and beyond the emotions and dullness of my small self. The *tone of myself* was simply different.

The more I say, the more I realize how inadequate words are to describe the immensity and depth of the experience. What I can say is that it was blissful and that it lasted in full bloom until the morning of the fourth day at which time it faded, leaving me back in my old self. I don't know who else reacted in that way, nor am I completely sure why it happened to me (if this view is correct, it could have been a karmic giftie simply designed to allow me to understand that other states of awareness exist). What I do know is that during that period I was profoundly different from my normal state of being, and that the experience could only be characterized as enlightening.

I have since heard the Dalai Lama speak alone (i.e., without attending monks) twice. Neither time did I experience the effect, which makes me wonder how much the other monks contributed to my response the first time around.

I am sure there are ways a skeptic might explain away my rather peculiar experience, but the East has its own ideas about how a highly evolved spiritual Being (or group of them, for that matter) might affect an average individual like you or me, should they choose to do so. That is what we are interested in here.

If reincarnation is a reality, it is possible that there are individuals who have made choices and efforts that have moved them ahead of the stream of humanity in a spiritual sense (the culmination of this evolution is believed to be the enlightenment of the Buddhas). There are obviously as many "levels" of Being as there are Beings--each Awareness *is* its own state (I have no idea where the Dalai Lama fits into this continuum, though

I suspect he is “up there”). Beings who have essentially learned all there is to learn from existence on this planet are called in the West, Masters^{2,3} In the East, specifically in India, they are called Mahatmas.⁴

It is interesting to note that although the West has had many so-called gurus from the East arrive on its shores proclaiming themselves to be Masters, the last century has seen a landslide of information about such Beings coming not from Easterners but from Westerners.⁵ Most notable was H.P. Blavasky, a Russian born noblewoman who traveled extensively in India at the end of the nineteenth century (no small feat in itself) and who started an international philosophic organization called the Theosophic Society.⁶ Blavasky has since been regularly maligned by skeptics for being everything from a smoker (God forbid), to a “loose woman” (not likely), to a psychic fraud (likely if you look at things from a Western perspective; not as likely if you look at things from an Eastern perspective). In fact, a look at the evidence suggests that her main transgression was to annoy a majority of the Christian missionaries in India by reminding the Indian people that they had a religious tradition the heart of which was every bit as worth while as that of Christianity (the Indian people loved her for this revelation). She also attempted to show people that the mind could affect matter (she was purported to be able to materialize things--an ability, assuming that she really had it, that is sure to send modern skeptics for the Pepto Bismol) and she set forth for the Western world an erudite, deeply reasoned presentation of the doctrine of karma and reincarnation (the Buddhist view we have been examining).

I mention her here because there is an excellent book out called *H.P.B.: The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavasky*. by Sylvia Cranston⁷, in which a convincing argument is made for the contention

² It is interesting that many Christians unknowingly allude to this tradition when they call Christ “the Master Jesus.”

³ By the very nature of what it means to be a Master (i.e., a state of ego-less purity), those who *claim* to be so couldn’t possibly be! It is interesting that the Dalai Lama makes no such claim, though *Tibetans* traditionally believe him to be completely enlightened.

⁴ The word *maha* means *great* and the word *atma* means *soul*, hence *Mahatma* means “great soul.”

⁵ This is not to discount the affect such writings as the *Bhagavad Gita* have had on earlier American thinkers like Emerson and Thoreau.

⁶ The Theosophical Society is dedicated to the study of the great spiritual traditions of humanity. There are now two or three major offshoots, each emphasizing a different aspect of Theosophic thought. The chapter linked to Adyar (in Madras, India) and Wheaton, Illinois, publishes books on philosophy and spiritual research under the “Quest Books” imprint.

⁷ Sylvia Cranston has written a number of books on reincarnation including the anthology,

that Blavasky did, as was claimed of her, have contact with some of the Masters believed to live around the border region between India and Tibet. My suspicion is that some pedantic academics are not going to be pleased with the possibility that she could have been anything but a crackpot (I was once roundly criticized by an editor at one of the university publishing houses for even *mentioning* Blavasky in a piece I was writing). But no matter what academicians say, the fact remains that a considerable amount of writing about the Masters--some of it responsible and thoughtful, some of it not--has come into the western world as a consequence of the impetus she provided in her own, voluminous work.

If that body of work is accurate, the Masters are the Guardians of humanity, but not in the sense one might expect. Their meditations set the *tone of thought* around the positive side of this evolution, reinforcing the thoughtforms of compassionate action, lovingness, selflessness, and spiritual growth (remember, the East believes that *thought* is a kind of energy that flows freely within the inner worlds and has the ability to palpably affect minds). As a group they form a natural brotherhood of effort.⁸

What is important here is that the East believes that these Beings exist, in bodies, right now, on this planet.⁹

With all this in mind, an interesting question arises. If the Masters represent the level of Awareness toward which human evolution is moving, are we all assured of reaching that state?

The answer is “yes” and “no.”

From the Eastern perspective we are examining, spiritual evolution is pictured as a spiraling process. Beings start in a pure state “above,” descend into the experience of matter, then spiral up, out and beyond in a spiritual sense. In this way, Consciousness is given the opportunity to grow and become more through a series of incarnations, even though there

Reincarnation, the Phoenix Fire Mystery, which she wrote in collaboration with Joseph Head.

⁸ In early writing, these Beings were collectively referred to as *The White Brotherhood* (the reference to “white” is meant to symbolize the idea of purity--it has nothing to do with race). That name has long since been blasphemed by many modern New Age groups trying to legitimize their claims to spirituality through claims of contact with these Beings.

⁹ A common New Age belief is that the Masters must be “on the other side,” (i.e., that they must be discarnate spirits who communicate to humanity through mediums and channels). If the Eastern view we have been examining is correct, there are Beings at this high level of evolution both in the inner worlds and in incarnation. In addition, it is sure that Masters who work in the inner worlds do not play overshadower to channeling psychics. That simply isn’t the kind of thing a responsible spiritual Teacher would do.

may be times within the evolution when it appears as if Consciousness is failing--is going downward.

Right now, if this view is correct, humanity is at the lowest point in this evolution. The East calls this *the Kali Yuga*--the age of iron (it is believed to be an “age” in the sense that it could take tens-to hundreds-of-thousands of years to complete). This is the time when humanity experiences its deepest immersion in matter; when the energies and pressures of life are the heaviest; when a fair percentage of the Beings in bodies are individuals who have made particularly bad choices over many lifetimes, and who are now being given one last chance to move in ways that are better.

If a relatively normal individual has accreted around itself through many lifetimes of poor choice so much negativity that it will not be able to transit into the spiritually subtle experiences awaiting those who will move on the upward side of the spiral, that Being will not be allowed to continue in the present cycle of development. Going into a sleep state, it will remain actionless until another evolution similar to this one begins anew. This is not a punishment, although it is a failure. The Being is not damned; it is simply not able to proceed and must lag behind for a time (a very long time) until the universe can provide it with another appropriate opportunity to move onward.

A self that has been able to curb its child to at least some degree will be allowed to continue as the evolutionary path swings upward. It and its developed child-self will finish this evolution, coming out much more experienced and capable in the ways of existence-in-matter than was the case in the beginning. What is important here is that although there may be Beings in incarnation who are clearly moving upon “the right-hand path” (i.e., along the upward way), there are many souls who are on the edge. The Kali Yuga is the period of time when karma and the *High Mind within* presents these child-selves with their last chances to change in this cycle.

There is another side to all this.

It is believed in the East that when an individual has proceeded to a point of spiritual development where he or she can benefit from contact with a more highly evolved Teacher, the individual will come in contact with one of the Masters. At that time, if it is karmically correct, the individual will have the opportunity to become a student of one these Teachers. In Sanskrit, an accepted student is called a *chela*.¹⁰

¹⁰ The tradition of a student going in search of his or her teacher, a guru, is closely related to the belief that Masters exist. Although the idea originated in the East, it is particularly

On one level, the life of a chela is wonderful:

--The individual has the honor and privilege of having contact with one or even a number of these enlightened humans.

--There is joy in following a spiritual path, in moving in ways that are constructive and positive and Light-bringing.

--There is a satisfaction in working to pull free of the patterns that prompt anger and jealousy and craving in the self.

--There is a very deep gratitude engendered toward life as the self experiences tiny enlightenment after tiny enlightenment on its path of unfolding.

On the other hand, chelahood is not the romantic happening many picture it to be:

--The inner link between a chela and his or her Master means the Teacher is intimately connected to the student. How would you like to know that a highly evolved Being is feeling what you are feeling, knows all your little foibles, all your secret desires, all your little pettinesses.¹¹

--A chela is said to live *in* the world but is not *of* the world. That means he or she no longer has the luxury of mindlessly going along with the crowd; mindlessly pandering to the wants and desires of the self; mindlessly allowing the child to use negativity to make its way in the world.

--It is not unusual for groups of chelas to work together, but there are times when a chela must work in isolation. Self created disciplines are the norm; following those disciplines within the confines of the *self alone* is an extreme discipline unto itself.

--A chela's sensitivity and depth-of-insight is usually heightened--a definite double-edged sword. Not only does one see other people more

prevalent today in the West. People are seeking. Many have concluded that there is more to life than meets the eye. They want answers, and that means looking for someone who has insight. What they don't realize is that when the time is appropriate--when they have made their lives *ready through their actions*--the teacher will come to them.

Put another way, living the life of a chela means living the life of a chela . . . whether one is in direct contact with the Masters or not. There is no difference between the two situations; if you are going to live the life, live the life.

¹¹ Remember, a Master is a Being that has evolved to such an extent that there is no longer any necessity for that Being to deal with the barriers that keep you and me feeling separate. As such, an energy link between the heart chakras of a chela and his or her Master can bring the Teacher into a much more intimate contact with the inner thoughts and efforts of the chela than would otherwise be. The chela isn't so aware of this connection as he or she acts in daily life, but it is nevertheless believed to be there, connecting the Teacher to the student.

clearly, one sees one's own self more clearly (often a very spooky proposition).

In other words, the chela has essentially announced to the Law (karma) that he or she wants to move more quickly in a spiritual sense. That is not a trivial matter. If the intention is accepted, within a very short time every imaginable sort of hidden psychological flaw and inconsistency within the self burbles up out of the subconscious and presents itself to the aspirant (negativity cannot be stripped away if its presence is not evident to the person). Psychological pressures mount; situational pressures mount; failure to act in spiritually responsible ways is met with karmic repercussions that are far more severe than would be the case for a "normal" person. In short, the chela life is, from a personal perspective, harsh . . . Remember the Greater Mysteries? The kinds of people who attended those were undoubtedly chela types.

Still, it is said, the chela life is the most rewarding life one can lead.

Most people assume that all chelas are cheerful, pleasant individuals, and there is a good chance that that be true. What shouldn't be forgotten, though, is that one can never be certain what is going on in another's life. Theosophists believed Blavatsky was a chela, hence her connection with the Masters.¹² Although chelas do not always have powers and sensitivities beyond the norm, Blavatsky was purported to have been quite sensitive inwardly. Imagine what it would be like to be so sensitive that you could feel the thoughts of those who intensely disliked you. If she had that sensitivity, the animosity and anger that was directed at her by the Christian missionaries (not to mention every skeptic in the world) must have been an enormous mental burden. It would have taken a tremendously powerful Being to remain emotionally stable under such conditions.¹³

¹² In fact, some believe that she was not only a chela but a chela with the specific task of bringing a rational view of reincarnation to the West.

¹³ When I hear about cynical skeptics testing psychics, I wonder what they think they are doing. Self proclaimed psychics, assuming they aren't frauds, are almost always at least partially uncontrolled (chelas, assuming this view is correct, have control but aren't interested in attracting attention to themselves and, more to the point, have bigger and better things to be doing than to play psychological tag with an assembly of ego-bound skeptics).

So who do they test? Little Suzy down the street who, maybe, has a little ability to sense beyond the norm but who is so aurically shaky that she falls apart as soon as a focused, skeptical mind inveighs against her.

It is no wonder skeptics haven't been able to find anyone who can perform psychic feats to their satisfaction (though given their preconceived ideas about the possibility, it is doubt-

In short, higher chelas do have control over and insights into themselves in ways that could be termed extra-ordinary. Nevertheless, they are not perfected Beings. They are Beings who are constantly making their efforts on behalf of the whole of life (the first vow of chelahood is said to be *to work for the whole of life without thought of recompense*). Although it is not their immediate aim, in doing so they moved toward become what a human should be. And because their work has nothing to do with ego satisfaction, you could be standing right next to one some day and never know it.¹⁴

There is another twist to all of this that is also important to understand. If, as the East believes, it is possible for a Being to make choices that will move it ahead of the spiritual stream of humanity, it must also be possible for a child self to build, through certain disciplines, enormous mental abilities while making *conscious choices* that lead it along the “left hand path”--toward negativity and the *stunting* of spiritual growth. Because these individuals have focused their minds in ways that have allowed them to temporarily put karma off (as opposed to the Beings we learned about earlier who rather randomly chose poorly and will enter the sleep state until a new cycle can pick them up again), they exist to become darkness incarnate (i.e., devoid of Light). Their efforts are for the accumulation of power, for the satisfaction of the child’s wants, for control of all around them. Being totally in-turned on their own self, they have become soulless in the sense that they have severed all connection with their parent self, the Higher Mind.

We are talking about Beings who are profoundly angry at life. Their intention is usually to bring as many other humans down with them as possible. What is worse, they often have the power to do so in ways one might not expect. Specifically, they *could* be (though certainly are not always) failed chelas.

This startling possibility doesn’t seem to make sense until it is examined more closely.

ful that they would believe even if someone *could* perform on cue--see Appendix III for such an example). The very nature of a skeptic’s thoughts on the subject are almost certain to psychically jam just about anybody willing to try.

¹⁴ There is a nice story from India about a beggar who sat against a wall on a small street in Benares. When people would pass by, whether they gave him a few rupees or not, they would find that within fifty yards of passing him they would feel good. It was a kind of lightening of their load. The beggar, according to the story, was a chela. His self-appointed task in his life was to learn to radiate lovingness, which is exactly what he would do.

At the early stages of chelaship, powers begin to open even as psychological pressures begin to mount on the child self and its ego structure. The inner struggles that occur between the higher side of the child self and the living, negative habit patterns that the self has developed over many lifetimes can be fierce (these are usually motivational patterns that must be killed out and that, being animate, literally fight for their lives--you know what this kind of inner fighting is like if you have ever tried to stop a nasty habit like smoking or a benign one like eating sweets).

With this effort, it is likely that there will be temporary failures. This is particularly dangerous for the aspirant. Essentially in a state of inner war, the lesser side of the *child self* of a chela will not be completely aligned with the High Mind. In that state, it is possible that failure could so infuriate the *ego self* that the *higher side* of the child might lose control to the *lesser side*. If that were to happen, the self could temporarily take up the path of negativity.¹⁵ In most cases, the chela's attention-to-motive helps him or her get a hold of the self and back on track, but anger is a powerful thoughtform and nothing is assured. If there are areas of motivation that haven't yet been cleansed, those chinks in the moral armor of the Being could lead to the holding of this anger and maybe even to a budding desire for the self to *get back* at life for the failure.¹⁶

If the self is unable to pull out of the negativity, we could end up with a very angry, very powerful individual on our hands. And if that individual were to continue with its negativity, digging a karmic hole for itself that becomes deeper and deeper, it is possible the Being could get to a place where there appeared to be no way back to the Light. When that happens, when the Being sees no reward in even trying to change for the better, it becomes what the East calls a *Brother of the Shadow*--a *Dark Brother*.

Most traditions have lore about these dark souls: There is a Tibetan Buddhist sect, the Red-hats, who worship death. Within that tradition are

¹⁵ It is not unusual for humans, you and me included, to become temporarily insane. Consider: You have just walked up to a counter at a department store and the clerk, who is obviously agitated, is rude to you. Do you observe that the person has a problem and react to their incivility in a kindly way--in a way that will lighten their emotional load--or do you take offense and blast them? From a perspective of *spiritual sanity*, it makes no sense to provoke the clerk into more anger, more unbalance, more misery than he or she is already experiencing. Yet that is exactly what most of us would do when we are confronted with an "unpleasant person." This is not an act of sanity, at least not in a spiritual sense.

¹⁶ It is remarkable how people blame failure on anything but themselves. The last time you hit your thumb with a hammer, did you say, "Damn it!" ("it" meaning the hammer) or "Damn me!" (placing the blame where it squarely belongs)?

men called *dugpas* whose ritual practices are steeped in animistic earth magic that pre-dates Buddhism. Some dugpas are said to be very dark in spirit and to have enormous powers. Having trained themselves through meditation, they are believed to have the ability to affect and control the minds of the unwary.¹⁷

Dark ones can also be found amongst the shamans of the American Indians;¹⁸ the witch doctors of Africa; the magicians of middle east; the sorcerers of Europe. All over the world there are tales of Beings who have had powers and who are not benevolent in their use of them.

This Eastern view believes that such dark Beings do exist, in bodies, right now, on this planet. What is more, they are believed to be a natural consequence of the opportunities and pitfalls that face all Beings who attempt to progress through repeated incarnation. The only way a Being can grow into a working knowledge of *free will* and *freedom of choice* is if it has the possibility of choosing to be bad. It should not be surprising to find that some have taken that path.

As things stand now, nothing would make the Dark Brothers happier than to have as many Beings fail in their efforts during the Kali Yuga as possible. Misery loves company, and if there is one state that is miserable, it is that of the soulless.¹⁹ Since the accumulation of power for the sake of the self is the driving motivation behind the dark ones, it is believed that they are constantly projecting thoughtforms designed to affect the minds of the unsuspecting. They do this through today's music²⁰ through the

¹⁷ Remember the little fakir who focused thought to make the English newspaper man believe he was seeing flames? That is child's play in comparison to what dugpas are purported to be able to do.

¹⁸ Medicine men (shamans) within the American Indian tradition were generally benevolent, but some were not. Consider the shamanistic practice of killing an animal to capture its life-energy. Attempting to force nature into giving up her secrets and energies is never the way of an enlightened Being (to an enlightened Being, nature will give its secrets *freely*). *Killing* to force nature into giving up energies is a doubly dark thing to do.

¹⁹ That is, those who have severed the link between the High Mind and the lesser self.

²⁰ Although music can be quite harmonious, its effect on the emotional body makes it a primary entrance point into the aura. The sound patterns found in modern music are believed to be degenerating to the aura and generally debilitating both psychologically and on more subtle levels. Music that is tinged dark is believed to have the power to magnify depression, over stimulate the body's sexual drive (not to mention other appetites), and reinforce thoughtforms of violence, anger, hatred, sexual depravity, etc. In short, projecting dark thought through the minds of people involved in the making of modern music--espe-

reinforcement of the desire for revenge; through irrational anger; through drugs. The more chaos, the better; the more anger and frustration, the better; the more they can pull you and me off the path, the better. Their champions are the Adolf Hitlers, the Pol Pots, the Stalins, not to mention the myriad of lesser folks (you and me) who, to one degree or another, mindlessly fortify the dark meditations with unpleasantness where there need be none, with selfishness, with the exercise of petty angers, etc.

Against this stands the White Brotherhood. These guardians of humanity are constantly projecting the thoughtforms of compassion, reconciliation, kindness--of reason beyond that of the small self. The tone of their quality is found in the actions of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, the Dalai Lama, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and in the myriad small acts of benevolence that lesser folks (you and me) selflessly animate daily--being kind when you don't have to be; being helpful when others are in need; choosing to be understanding when someone hasn't been particularly nice to you (versus reflecting their discourtesy and anger back at them).

And which is more powerful, the White or Dark Brotherhood? Ultimately, Light will reign. Evolution never ceases, even when it appears stalled. But duality has its usefulness; it is the generator of choice. At this time, the powers of Light and Darkness are almost exactly even; the duality is almost perfectly balanced. Why? Because this is the Kali Yuga; there is need for a clear delineation between goodness and darkness. It is a time of choice.²¹

So what does this all come down to? As far as this view is concerned, there is quite literally a battle going on right now between the powers of Light and the powers of Darkness . . . and the stakes, quite literally, are the souls of humanity.

cially those who are on drugs--is believed to be a powerful tool in the hands of the dark side.

²¹ In the long run, the Dark ones will lose, *must* lose under the Karmic Law. Whether they like it or not, they are bound by karma. In fact, in a way, they are servants of the karmic Law--agents who give the opportunity of choice to others. They know this down deep; it is part of what makes them so angry.

GRATITUDE, PAIN, AND ILLUSION

I remember an old man who said to me, “It took me seventy years to find that if I sat down without thought, there was usually a splinter waiting for me. But if I took some thought to smooth in my mind the patterns in me that were heavy and sharp, then I found that the splinters did not stick.”

Take time to smooth in your mind by understanding and lovingness the sharp places around you. Then, where you sit will not be sharp even though there may be stones everywhere.

a story from India

There are four topics we need to discuss: the difference between acceptance and fatalism; the use of gratitude; the use of pain; and the illusion in pain. Stories will be used throughout.

There was once an old man who lived quite literally under a tree just outside a small village on the road between Bangalore and Mysore in the south of India. He was a beggar, and although begging was a perfectly acceptable way of life within India at the time, this particular man was a tremendous irritation to the headman of the village.

It seems that in good times and bad, the beggar was always cheerful, kindly, and comforting to those who chose to sit and talk to him by the roadside. The headman, on the other hand, was wealthy, busy, and rarely had the time to talk to anyone about anything except village affairs and business. Yet with all his prominence, the headman’s life wasn’t filled with the satisfaction he believed was his due. That is why it so particularly

irked him to know that just up the road sat an old beggar who had nothing, but who was considerably happier than he.

Things came to a head one hot summer day when a visiting dignitary spent forty-five minutes of the headman's valuable time rhapsodizing about the delightful conversation he had just had with "that old man up the way." It was just too much. So after the official departed, the headman made his way to the beggar's place and confronted him in a very unpleasant, condescending manner.

"I am respected for miles around," he matter-of-factly stated. "I have wealth; I have influence. In fact, I have everything a sane man could ever hope to have. You, on the other hand, have absolutely nothing except a miserable, dirty dhoti to wrap yourself in and a beat up begging bowl. Yet I am constantly miserable and you insufferably happy. I don't understand why and, moreover, I don't like it. So tell me, oh holy one, what makes you so joyful? What is it that you have that I don't have?"

The beggar had sat at that same spot for over forty years. He was known throughout the region for his wisdom, and because he was sensitive to the needs and spiritual necessities of the people around him, he was aware of the headman's frustrations. In a way, he was grateful the crisis had arisen. It gave him an opportunity to talk to the headman, to help him if possible.

As for the question the headman had thrown at the beggar, the answer came immediately and straight from the heart.

"My son," began the old fellow, "If I had to pick one thing that you do not have but that truly gives me joy, it would have to be my abundance."

Listening but not understanding, the headman's face grew red. Thinking himself mocked, years of pent up anger exploded forth as he nearly screamed, "Abundance! WHAT IS THIS ABUNDANCE? I *have* things. You have *NOTHING!*"

The beggar sat unmoved by the attack, unruffled by the storm, unpoisoned by the venom directed his way. He could have responded in kind, angrily defending himself as most of us would have done, but he didn't. Lovingness flowed through him and around him just as it always had, and because the thrust of the headman's rage fell as if on deaf ears, its destructive edge lost its power just as a burst balloon loses air.

The nature of the beggar's countenance was so caring and kind that, irrationality spent, the headman embarrassingly came to his senses. Tears filled his eyes. He bent down to touch his head to the ground at the old man's feet, then said in a hushed and most pitiable way, "Forgive me. I

just don't understand."

The beggar put his hand on the man's head, then raised him up with a benevolent smile. The two sat quietly with one another for a while, then began to discuss, among other things, the insanity of anger.

After a time, the headman respectfully said, "Holy man, I still don't understand. Please tell me about your abundance and your joy."

The old fellow chuckled and, in three sentences, answered. "My son," he replied, "the One Self, in Its infinite wisdom and compassion, saw that it was my necessity in this life to have *nothing*. And of *that* It has given me an abundance."

"Without my abundance," he continued, "I would never have come to my enlightenment, and without that I would never have known my joy."

When people hear this story, they often jump to the conclusion that the old man was simply being fatalistic. After all, he had accepted his situation without putting up much of a fight, and fatalism does seem to be practiced by many who follow one or another of the Eastern views. But fatalism was not the case with the old man.

Because he had nothing, he had the time to observe the play of life around him. He had time to go inward to see what it means to be a human being. Having *nothing* gave him the opportunity to grow in ways his child-self would never have stood still for if he had been born into a situation of position. It meant freedom from the everyday distractions that keep you and me busy throughout most of our lives . . . and he was grateful for that. Indeed, his child-self probably wouldn't have chosen that life if it had had its way, but he was at a point in his spiritual evolution where he could make a leap of understanding if placed in just the right setting. In his own words, that setting was "to have *nothing* in abundance."

Bottom line: Accepting a situation and being grateful for the teaching it brings is not fatalism, it is spiritual sanity . . . which leads me to the next topic, gratitude.

Most people see no reason to be grateful for situations their child-self identifies as being negative or uncomfortable or painful. For instance, when was the last time you were grateful for the symptoms that come when you have a cold? It isn't something you do. But if you think about it, there is a reason why your head gets thick and your sinuses run and you cough and sputter and feel miserable. YOU'RE SICK. The body needs time to cleanse itself; it's urging you to rest it. It isn't something to court,

but imagine the fix you'd be in if your body *didn't* let you know there was a problem. Sure, you'd feel great all the time, but you'd also run the risk of not knowing when something was wrong internally, not getting the proper medical treatment, having things build up, even keeling over dead without warning. We are damn lucky the body lets us know when there is a problem so we can take appropriate measures to work it through, yet we rarely look at problems in that way.

People treat uncomfortable experiences as something to get away from. As such, we don't tend to be grateful for them. The Eastern view we are examining does not suggest that you go out and look for situations that are unpleasant--plenty will come in the course of your lifetime as it is. What it does suggest is that there is the possibility of enlightenment at the heart of all experience, painful or not. If that is true, it is foolish to mindlessly mute painful experience simply because the child self doesn't find it pleasant. In short, *painful experiences* are not devoid of meaningful content . . . which cleverly brings us to the next topic--that of pain.

A number of years ago, a dark mole appeared on my nose, then grew. I went to a dermatologist who made a mash of removing it (it turned out to be benign, which is more than I can say for the dermatologist). When a second mole appeared a few months later, I went to an oncologist. Being a surgeon, the man was a veritable artist. The mole wasn't too big so he deadened the area with Novocain (or whatever), used a coring device to encircle the mole, then snipped out the offending tissue . . . all in about thirty seconds. Instead of stitches, he cauterized the area, then sealed it with silver nitrate leaving me with a black divot on the end of my nose (silver nitrate stains everything it touches black).

Other individual moles appeared over time, each being treated in the same way. During one of these episodes, the silver nitrate didn't hold and the divot began to bleed after I left the doctor's office. I couldn't get it to stop, so I returned to the doctor's office the next day and had a single stitch inserted. Figuring one needle prick was as bad as another, I waived the Novocain-shot-into-the-wound and had him do the deed without anesthetic--a big, big mistake. Instead of inserting a thin needle that would quickly deaden the area, he inserted a thicker, threaded needle through the skin twice, then pulled the thread tight to stop the bleeding.

The pain was spectacular.

Six months later another mole popped up just west of the previous problem. I went back to the doctors and had it removed. It was so small he cauterized it, then applied silver nitrate.

You can imagine my delight when I woke up around 4 a.m. the next morning to find blood trickling down the side of my nose. If there was one thing that could have brought me to full wakefulness at the time, it was the realization that if I didn't stop the bleeding I would have to go back to the doctor and have another stitch. So there I was, wide awake, applying pressure to the nose, thinking about pain.

Until that time, I had been almost completely oblivious to any wider meaning my proboscidian experiences might have had for me. But as I lay there that night, I found myself drawn into an interesting, searching meditation that took me back to India.

In 1987 I had made a trip to India and Nepal. It was quite a sojourn taking ten weeks and covering 22 cities. When I was in Katmandu, Nepal, I made the mistake of taking a nap in an air conditioned room after walking several miles in the hot, humid countryside. The end result? I came down with a cold. I left Nepal, traveled to Calcutta for a night, then went on to Darjeeling.

Darjeeling is in the north of India and was, during the time of the Raj (i.e., when the British were there), a hill station. That is, it was one of the places people went to get out of the summer heat on the plains. It isn't a modern city at all--more like a village on the side of a Himalayan slope.

It was there that my cold sprouted wings and I ended up with a 104 degree temperature. I wasn't the least bit uncomfortable as I lay there in my hotel bed with the rain pitter patter on the roof. In fact, my only discomfort was from intestinal troubles. Nevertheless, I let the hotel know about the problem and, as a consequence, was visited in the late afternoon by three New York doctors who happened to be staying at the hotel.

Upon questioning me, they learned that I hadn't had any shots before leaving for India and that I additionally didn't have a spleen (the spleen stores extra white blood cells--disease fighters one and all; I cracked mine due to a collision at home plate in a high school baseball game, so it had been removed when I was younger). The New York doctors were alternately horrified and delighted: horrified because, according to them, I was going to die if I didn't leave India immediately; delighted because they all specialized in "tourist medicine" and found my case most interesting. After a brief consultation, they told me that I probably had spinal meningitis and that I needed a spinal tap. They didn't mention that spinal taps are not only extremely painful but also dangerous to the patient, or that the treatment for spinal meningitis was the same as that for any internal infection that might produce a high temperature (i.e., high doses of antibiotics). Un-

fortunately, I was in no shape to be asking probing questions, so I accepted their pronouncement without much discussion and allowed them to bundle me up, put me in a car, and take me to the Darjeeling hospital.

The hospital was an amazing place. We arrived just at sunset and, as we entered through a dark stairway, I realized that the hallways were lit by candle light--they didn't have electricity (I found later that they *did* have a generator for night emergencies).

I ended up lying on a bed in the middle of a room lit by candles with an Indian doctor scurrying around trying to satisfy the demands of the three New York doctors. The Indian physician did his best despite the fact that the American doctors were acting like American doctors--giving orders, expecting people to jump at the sound of their voices, etc.

"We think he has spinal meningitis," one said. "He needs to have a spinal tap, and he needs it NOW." In all fairness, I'm sure the Americans were doing what they thought was in my best interest, but they gave the poor Indian doctor a terrible time in the process.

There was one other individual present at the time--a British trained Tibetan doctor. He was quite different from the Indian doctor as he used American slang like an American native (I found out later that he had gone to medical school in England, had been offered several jobs in Canadian hospitals and one in the U.S., but decided instead to return to Darjeeling to work where he was born--he was a pediatrician). While the Americans were consulting with the beleaguered Indian, the Tibetan came over and asked a few common sense questions (i.e., "Can you put your head on your chest?"--patients with spinal meningitis can't do that--I could). He felt around my neck and head, then gave me a hug and whispered, "Don't worry, you don't have spinal meningitis. You'll be all right."

With that, he turned to the Indian doctor and said something in Hindi (I found out later that he told the Indian not to let the Americans push him around; that I didn't have spinal meningitis and should not have the spinal tap). The Indian doctor turned to the Americans and said, "Well, I'd really like to give him a spinal tap but the generator is down and we really don't want to do it in the dark. We'll have to wait until tomorrow morning." Fortunately (thank God), the Americans had to leave early the next morning, so believing that they had convinced everyone that a spinal tap was in order they left (that was when one of the Americans told me that if I didn't leave India immediately, I would die).

I did appreciate what the American doctors were trying to do for me. They knew I was in a foreign land with what could be a serious medical problem being treated in a dilapidated hospital. What they didn't know

was that although the hospital was archaic, the doctors and nurses were all well trained and very caring. I got to know the Tibetan gentleman and found him a great fellow with a terrific laugh. We had a number of interesting conversations before I left.

As for the treatment, my veins and their antiquated equipment didn't get along, so instead of giving me antibiotics by drip method they gave me antibiotic injections through a semi-permanent insertion needle they had placed in my arm. The serum was quite harsh and after two or three such shots my arm burned as though on fire when the injection was given. One young nurse was clearly concerned at my reaction to the pain, so in an attempt to lessen the trauma she began giving me the injection in tiny spurts over a three or four minute period. It quickly became obvious that that wasn't such a good idea. As soon as the first injection entered, the arm would go ablaze. With each successive spurt, the pain would escalate to higher and higher degrees of excruciation.

I had never felt pain like that. It made me marvel at how frighteningly much pain the body could generate when something was wrong.

All this came back to me as I lay in bed at 4 a.m. considering my nose. And by the time my thoughts came back to the present, I had realized something that had never occurred to me, and I realized it in a profound sense: My body is without pain most of the time (this, in itself, is truly remarkable given the body's delicate complexity), yet I had never been the least bit grateful for the peace it afforded me.

How terribly thoughtless!¹

It was the prospect of pain that sent me into my reveries that night, and it was the remembrance of the pain I had in Darjeeling that brought me to my realization. I had always taken my body for granted, never stopping to acknowledge how well it works even under the worst of conditions (when I was young, hormones, athletics, and the ever-present belief of my youthful invincibility led me to beat my body up mercilessly). I had no gratitude for my relatively pain free existence, only irritation when something did hurt.

What I didn't realize until that moment of mini-enlightenment was that a lack of gratitude was caused, at least in me, by self-involvement. And with that observation, I began to better understand something else I

¹ This may seem a bit tepid to you as you read about it, but I can assure you it wasn't to me. The enormity of the enlightenment was matched only by the subtlety of what I saw . . . There really are no words to describe it adequately.

had been told earlier. *Gratitude is like a spiritual solvent. It allows karma to open the way to understanding; it allows the High Self to whisper wisdom into the ear of the child.*

How obvious it all became. Self involvement is just that, a constant focusing of attention on the perceived needs of the small self. It allows for little if any introspection (the one thing the child *doesn't* want is a close look at itself), and everything is measured by how much it satisfies the child's desires.

By focusing on gratitude, there is a constant looking outward, a constant acknowledging of the myriad of ways we humans are supported in our efforts on this planet. Exercising it changes the tone of one's life. It allows one to view experience beyond the supercharged emotions of the lesser self. And in that light, pain can be an avenue to understanding.

. . . which brings me to *pain as an illusion*:

My first real job as a teacher was that of long-term substitute at a high school in Los Angeles Unified School District. The assignment covered the last two-and-a-half months of the year and was weird at best. It seems the basketball coach was extraordinarily good--the school had won the Southern Section CIF title for 4A teams that year²--and had been offered a coaching position at the university level. As a consequence, at the end of the basketball season the coach simply quit and left for his new job.

Along with coaching and teaching Physical Education, the guy also taught three elementary math classes. When I arrived, that was the assignment I was given. I looked over the fellow's records and found that there were kids with a total of 27 points for the year along with kids with 2700 points for the year. That wasn't so surprising. What was surprising was the fact that he had given *everyone* in the class an *A* for the semester. Regardless of work done, this fellow had pulled what I guess was his idea of a *going out of business* sale, grade wise.

When I realized this, I decided I could not overlook the considerable discrepancy between the students who had actually done the work throughout the year and those who had signed up for the course but had never done anything. I informed the deficient students--some of whom were very large jocks--that they would undoubtedly be failing the class unless something spectacular came my way in the way of make-up work. I was met with a flood of drops. The teachers who knew what I was doing were impressed; my popularity with some of the students couldn't have

² This is like having an *All State* team in smaller states.

been lower.

With time, the kids who stayed in the classes found me to be knowledgeable, relatively demanding in an academic sense, and intimidated by nothing. They didn't know it, but as a rookie my greatest fear was to be perceived as soft and easily manipulated. I can assure you, nobody got that idea--I ran my classes with an iron fist.

Unfortunately, this insecurity reflected in an "attitude" on my part, and it took an interesting form of emotional pain to make me see that. About five weeks into my stay, we had a Monday holiday. At the end of the day on Friday, I walked to my car, drove out of the teacher's parking lot, and proceeded down the narrow street in front of the school. As school had just let out, there were literally four or five hundred kids milling around out in front of the school. I approached that area just as traffic stopped. Some kids in the car four or five vehicles up from mine had halted to talk to friends who were standing out in the street. The entire caravan sat for twenty or thirty seconds while the kids casually finished their discussion. None of the cars honked during this period, but by the time we began to crawl forward again I was relatively irritated about the hold-up. I'm sure I had a clearly angry look on my face, and just as I passed the spot where the kids had been I heard a boy's voice loudly say, "Get that look off your face, you asshole!"

I almost broke my neck as I swung around like a shot ready to nail the offender. The problem was that I found myself looking at upwards of two hundred walking, talking kids. I was in no position to be making any accusations, so I drove on. But all the way home, I was really, really irritated. "How dare some insolent pip-squeak yell at me that way," I thought. "The little bastard's lucky I didn't catch him--I'd have hauled him into the principal's office on the spot!"

I thought about the incident for most of the rest of the day and by the time Saturday morning came I realized I had pretty well ruined the front end of my vacation. I couldn't stop thinking about the happening, even though it was beginning to cause me considerable psychological pain. I just couldn't get it to go away.

By Monday, I was not only still irritated about the situation, I was also irritated about being irritated. Throughout the weekend I had periodically stopped the inner dialogue to try to reason with myself, pointing out that there was nothing I could do about anything concerning the occurrence and that I was just making myself miserable. Nothing helped. I couldn't put it out of my mind.

Finally, on Monday night I decided it was time to do something radical. Through a force of will, I calmed the still agitated *child-self* down long enough to begin a meditative practice I had recently learned. The rationale behind the technique was simple. If humans are here to experience, learn, and hopefully grow, then there is no experience that doesn't have within it the possibility of at least some form of enlightenment. From the experiences that are drawn to us, and from the way we deal with those experiences, we can learn a lot about ourselves and our understanding of life.

I had spent three days looking at the situation but had gotten nowhere. Why? Because I had done my thinking on the assumption that I was OK--that it was the kid who yelled at me that had a problem. Indeed, the kid may have been out of line, but the situation obviously hit a major nerve in me. Otherwise, why was my *child-self* so indignant?

I began the meditation by asking myself the question, "What is it about the way I'm dealing with life that isn't quite right--that made it necessary for me to be drawn into this experience?"

The answer came like sunlight piercing the gloom of a dark cellar, and it was so simple. I (my *child-self*) had begun to build into myself two things that weren't particularly useful. First, I so wanted to be perceived by my students as a strong, no-nonsense leader that I really wasn't treating them with the kind of respect human beings ought to be afforded. In a lot of ways, I was acting like a bully. Secondly, I was beginning to believe that my students should show me due respect, not because I was a respectable human being, but because I had a title and a position of authority.

In looking back, it is probable that the kid who yelled wasn't yelling at me at all. But because I was beginning to build into my perception of life qualities that were not as they ought to be, the very hint that someone might not be showing me the kind of respect I believed I deserved so infuriated my *child-self* that it simply could not get over the perceived slight.

This all became evident in a blink during the meditation, but what was really remarkable was what happened as the little enlightenment came. As soon as I understood the experience I felt physically lightened. It was just as though someone had removed two-hundred pounds of weight from my shoulders--so much so that I actually felt like I could float up off the chair if I'd wanted. The gloom and foreboding anxiety vanished and I was left in a state that was so blissful I haven't words to describe it.

And the psychological pain that had been? It was like an illusion. Once it had done its job--once I had found the little giftie embedded in its persistent presence, the experience changed, the pain ceased to be, and I

was left with a much deeper understanding of myself.

This was the first time I had seen how illusory the perception of emotionally traumatic experiences can be, yet how useful such experiences can be as a teacher. When the lesson was learned and there was no longer need for the pain, the pain vanished.³

At the time, I found that remarkable. In a way, I still do.

Life's experiences are not what they appear--they are, in a way, illusions. So far, we have discussed the illusory nature of emotional pain, but in fact illusion is quite literally embedded in the very nature of our physical world. To illustrate, consider the so-called fundamental building block of matter, the atom.

An atom characteristically has a diameter of around .0000000001 meters. Most of its mass is found in the nucleus at its center. The nucleus is composed of *protons* and *neutrons* (there are also a myriad of minor, obscure, sub-atomic particles, but they are usually ignored when looking at a bare-bones model). Around the nucleus "orbits" much smaller particles called *electrons*.

Hydrogen is the smallest atom found in nature. It only has one proton, one electron, and in most cases no neutrons. If we could magically expand an atom until its one electron was the size of a typical garden pea, we would discover some amazing things.

³ For anyone interested in understanding the psychology of the child self, this is VERY IMPORTANT. If there is one thing the child does not want to see, it is another who animates the same selfishnesses that it has built into itself. When it sees even a minor mirror image of itself, it responds with irritation.

Example: You see a small boy being sternly disciplined--abused even--by an angry parent. Inner, emotional friction arises in you (i.e., you get angry at the way the parent is acting).

The claim here is *not* that you are angered because you, yourself, abuse your own child (hence seeing mirrored in the other parent actions your own not-so-good propensities). That kind of linear relationship between the observed happening and one's own disharmony rarely occurs. Instead, the connections tend to be non-linear. Maybe you see in the parent's actions an individual who is taking his or her frustrations out on someone who can't fight back--something you may do at the office to underlings. Or maybe you see in the parent's actions an unjust estimation of the child's motives--something you tend to do with your spouse.

In short, there could be all sorts of patterns being mirrored in that one situation. What is important to understand is that as far as this view is concerned, if there is nothing in you that is of like quality to at least some aspect of the happening, you will not become angry. Instead, you will observe the obviously bad situation and respond by acting in whatever way might ease the problem. You will simply not feel the kind of emotional response the child exhibits when it is seeing its lesser side manifested in others.

To begin with, our pea sized electron would be moving around the proton at the speed of approximately 150,000 miles per second--close to the speed of light. The nucleus, with its one proton, would be about the size of a small weather balloon, and the distance between the pea and the beach ball would be somewhere around *eight miles*.

That means that after the expansion, we would end up with a balloon size proton and a pea sized electron, and in between would be eight miles of absolutely nothing.

Put another way, of the approximately 56,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 cubic feet making up the volume of that expanded spherical atom, only about thirty cubic feet will be occupied by what you and I would call *real matter*.

Conclusion (even if I got the math a bit wrong)?

Atoms are made up almost entirely of space.

Consequence?

Take an object, any object. Take your body, for instance. If we could somehow extract all the space out of your body, what would be left would be a tiny speck of matter that would probably take a microscope to see, and that would weigh one to two hundred pounds (i.e., your original weight).

Put a little differently, your body is almost entirely made up of space and yet it does not appear to be so. You do not look at your hand and say, "Ah, yes. Space!" That is not what your hand seems to be.

As the reality of your physical body is not what it appears to be, we have what in my country is call *an illusion*.⁴

The point to be made here is that *the universe in general* and *life in particular* are predicated on illusion. A traumatic experience will bruise the child self because that is usually the only way karma can get the child's attention. If the child refuses to look at the situation, refuses to understand the situation, the bruise will not heal. At best, the sore spot is forgotten with time only to be re-bruised by later experience. But when an experience is truly, profoundly understood, the illusion of its unrelenting, sometimes pounding presence is no longer needed as a teacher. With the wisdom extracted, there is no longer any *necessity* for the experience to continue to be a major presence within the individual's world.⁵ With un-

⁴ Appendix II addresses *illusion in the physical world* as viewed through the perspective of Einstein's Theory of Relativity (complete with a painless, qualitative discussion of the more interesting characteristics of Relativity).

⁵ We all know people who just can't let go of a painful experience. I have a friend, for instance, who is Armenian. She was born in the U.S. and is thoroughly American, but her

derstanding, the emotion and pain acts like all broken illusions and simply goes *whoosh*.

If karma exists, and if karma draws you and me into experiences that are designed to help us awaken into understanding in a spiritual sense, how should one's child deal with pain?

There is a curious dichotomy about this in modern western psychology. In dealing with personal problems, it is assumed that a patient's only choices are to either repress emotion or express emotion.

The former has its place. Screaming at the universe *in general* and anybody in earshot *in particular* is a fairly selfish thing to do. Who likes, for instance, to be around someone who is constantly voicing their personal complaints? Repressing an angry word because you don't want to dump your problems on others is a fairly noble, selfless act. Unfortunately, mindlessly repressing one's feelings and problems can and often does result in the festering of angers, etc., on a subconscious level. Sooner or later, an individual with big, repressed problems is going to blow.

The latter suggests that you can get rid of your problems by simply letting them out. Although people often feel better after having let fly at someone they are angry at, their expression of venom rarely settles the problem. Neither does it diminish within the screamer the tendency to be angry or the willingness to take disharmonious action. What's more, indiscriminately expressing the self does not get rid of anger. In fact, it may *feed* anger. If the East's metaphysical views about *thought* are correct, the exercising of anger is like the exercising of a muscle. The more you work it, the bigger it potentially gets.

What is interesting is that if the East is correct about karma, there is another alternative to the *express it/repress it* choice. When one comes into an UNDERSTANDING of a problem, the problem will no longer be a problem.⁶ There will no longer be the necessity for the circumstance to

mother was in Armenia when the Turks attempted their genocide of the Armenian people. The mother has since died, but when she was alive you couldn't talk to her for more than five minutes without her somehow turning the conversation to all the pain and suffering she had endured at the hands of the Turks. For seventy years, it consumed her life. The daughter is now writing a book about the necessity of letting go of old hatreds.

⁶ There are some areas of Western psychology that, to some degree, embrace this idea. When a student at my school was killed a number of years ago, the school psychologist immediately convened an all-day group discussion that people could join as they had the time. What was he doing? He was allowing the students to better understand their feelings by having them talk through the situation in the company of friends and supporters. The thrust

be a sore point because you have seen what there is to see within it. As such, the illusory nature of the experience becomes evident as the sting evaporates and the individual is able to move on.

Lastly, one of the most spiritually powerful disciplines one can follow is that of gratitude. Why? Because it requires the self to see beyond the small self. When one is exercising gratitude, potentially enlightening yet unfortunately painful experiences do not shrivel the child into a ball of self pity. Instead, there is gratitude for the teaching that is involved in the situation.

St. Francis understood this when he instructed his monks who were readying themselves to go into the world to preach. He said (loose quotation), "If they receive you half-heartedly, be grateful that they received you at all. If they refuse to receive you, be grateful that they allowed you to go on your way. If they refuse to allow you to go on your way, be grateful they did not stone you. If they stone you, be grateful they did not kill you. And if they kill you, be grateful that you had the opportunity to die loving those who would kill you, even as Christ died on the cross."

Gratitude. It is something we do not exercise enough. So much upholds us as we exist in bodies on this planet; there is so much for which to be grateful.

was to grow into understand, which is exactly what the East believes experience should do.

Chapter 15

NATURE

I walk along and I set aside a stone that might be uncomfortable for someone. I pick up a fallen thing. I bring along with me a light of regard for all that I see, and I see the beauty and wonderful splendor that exists in all things. I ask of my High Mind that I should be able to put that harmony into my hand so that all the Consciousnesses of nature, when they feel me coming, will smile.

a walking meditation

Westerners generally become vegetarians for one of two reasons: they are either worried about their health or they are motivated by moral considerations. Although we will begin by discussing both from a typically Western perspective, the East has metaphysical views about meat-eating that shed a surprising light on the nature of Nature. We will end by attempting to understand that perspective.

In the last fifteen to twenty-years, there have been two prominent books--*Eating for Life* by Nathaniel Altman and *Diet for a New America* by John Robbins¹--that have been severely critical about the way Americans eat. Specifically, they present strong cases against the eating of meat of any kind (the information quoted below is from these two books). The intention of the following section is not to convince anyone that eating vegetarian is the way to go. I have been a vegetarian for twenty years, but I'm more than happy to be around people who do not so choose. The following discussion is offered as an *introduction* to another topic the East has very unusual ideas about, that of Nature.

The life of an animal being “farmed” for its meat is not a particularly pleasant one. Because factory farmers are primarily interested in profits,

¹ John Robbins was the heir to the Baskin-Robbins ice-cream empire. He walked away from his inheritance in favor of living an ecologically sound life.

they expend little worry about whether their animals are living under inhumane conditions, or are in pain, or are diseased. For example, chicken farms raise many hundreds of thousands of chickens in an area the size of a football field. The animals are housed in individual wire cages barely large enough for each occupant; the birds are not allowed to exercise (on many chicken ranches, their feet will never touch the ground); and due to their close quarters and unhealthy situation a fair portion of them become diseased over the course of their short life.

An anomaly within the meat producing industry? Consider the production of veal. Veal is a polite term for *baby calf that has been starved of iron* (the characteristic, whitish color of veal meat is due this lack of iron). According to *Diet for a New America* (I'll refer to this book as DfNA from here on), baby calves are taken from their mothers almost immediately after birth (waiting might allow the calf to suckle; this is not allowed because suckling might injure the mother's teats, hence affecting her milk producing capabilities, and will definitely promote bonding between the cow and her calf--a big problem when the calf is removed). The calves are shipped to auctions within days of their birth where they are bought by veal producing factories. Once bought and transported to their new homes, they are placed in 22 inch wide by 54 inch high stalls where they will spend the rest of their lives (it is important that they get no exercise because exercise will produce muscle which, in turn, will diminish the tenderness of the flesh). They are kept in the dark to counter restlessness (in fact, many are blind by the time they are slaughtered). They are not able to wash themselves due to the cramped quarters; neither are they able to lie down as a cow normally would. The animals are starved of iron (in fact, their stalls have no nails in them because nails have iron in them and the calves so crave iron that they will chew on anything made of it), thus producing their milky white flesh; their "special feed" diet consists of U.S. government *skim* milk and is wholly devoid of any trace of iron. Calves that are able to withstand this abhorrent treatment are slaughtered in approximately four months (they will weigh between 300 and 350 pounds). The less hardy will die earlier due to their situation or, more often, due to disease. The animals are, in short, given no support as living creatures: no love, no companionship, little appropriate nourishment (appropriate from the stand point of the calves), not even the right to lick themselves clean.

This is not a situation for which humans should be proud.

One of the biggest problems a financially successful meat producer faces is loss of animals to disease. As such, the industry has long used an-

tibiotics to keep animals at least seemingly healthy until they can be killed. The problems with this practice are two fold.

To begin with, the more we use antibiotics (millions of pounds are used annually on livestock), the better chance we have of cultivating strains of bacteria that are antibiotic resistant. The scenario is simple: In a typical population of bacteria, there will be a few virulent bacteria-types that can't be killed by antibiotics along with a majority that aren't so dangerous and *can* be killed by antibiotics. As long as the bacteria that are not resistant to antibiotics are alive and well, the few mutant strains that are genetically resistant will have to compete and, hence, will be held in check by the presence of all the other strains in the community. When antibiotics are used, the non-resistant strains are killed leaving the resistant strains with a clear field to proliferate.² Case in point: In 1960 there were 13 strains of staphylococci bacteria resistant to penicillin; today there are well over 100 (according to DfNA, there were 91 in 1988).

The second problem is more immediate to humans. Eating meat not only presents the possibility of ingesting antibiotic-resistant bacteria from the animal, it also raises the specter of eating meat laced with antibiotic residue.³ As even small amounts of antibiotic residue is consumed, the body becomes more and more accustomed to having trace antibiotics within the system. The consequence, according to some, is that the effectiveness of antibiotic treatments, should they be required, are diminished.

There are other fun problems the meat industry has created in its production of meat for human consumption. For instance, it is not unusual for farms to pump cows full of female hormones (specifically estrogen) to make them grow faster. If you are into black humor, it is mildly amusing to note that men whose macho image dictates that they eat lots of red meat

² The same problem exist when pesticides are used to control crop-eating insects. Insects that are resistant are not killed by the pesticide while other insects--in some cases, natural enemies of the real culprits--are killed off. This leaves the pesticide-resistant insects with no competition and a wide-open field for proliferate. To counter the new threat, more powerful pesticides are produced. These are designed to kill the culprit insects. Unfortunately, there will be some mutants within that population that are not so affected and the cycle will start all over again.

³ According to John Robbins in DfNA, a cattleman (Herb Silverman) said the following about the high level of drugs fed to cattle today: "It's not good. Instead of improving husbandry practices, which would make the animals healthier, we just shoot 'em up with drugs. It's cheaper that way, and because this is a competitive business, I've got to do it, too. But in the meantime, the general public is catching on and getting afraid of residues in the meat. And I'll tell you something. I don't blame them."

are consequentially ingesting fair amounts of female hormones in the process. Another effect, one that is not so amusing, is the problem of premature sexual development in some adolescents. There have been cases of five and six year old children developing enlarged breasts, etc. The doctor cited in DfNA believes the problem, “is related to local whole milk in the infant group. At a later age (the culprit is) . . . consumption of (estrogen laden) whole milk, poultry, and beef . . . When we take our patients off meat and fresh milk, their symptoms usually regress.”

There have also been reports of meat packing companies injecting their cattle with steroids to make them grow bigger. Although diethylstilbestrol, known as DES, has been outlawed as a carcinogen for years (one-quarter-of-a-hundred-millionth of an ounce, administered daily, was enough to develop cancer in laboratory animals), DfNA claims that many factory farms still use it illegally. Even if that is untrue, the problems inherent in steroid use still exist. Factory farms today inject their livestock with alternate growth drugs that have the same effect as DES and that have many of the same ingredients. In a way, little has changed even with all the warning about possible health risks to the public.⁴

Probably the single biggest reason Americans are moving away from eating red meat has to do with cancer. Twenty-five or so years ago, researchers noticed that Seventh Day Adventists had a considerably lower incidence of colon and breast cancer. What was different about their diets? They don’t eat red meat. Subsequent studies have concluded that eating red meat is linked to the production of cancer in the body.⁵

⁴ According to a 1973 memorandum from the Director of Veterinary Research of the Food and Drug Administration (as quoted from *Eating for Life*), “there is a total of nineteen separate animal drugs used in meat-producing animals which are suspected of causing cancer; twenty-three separate animal drugs the residues of which could be a human hazard because of ‘possible super sensitivity, acute toxicity, and the development of resistant strains of bacteria.’ There are seventeen animal drugs that leave toxic residues if abused or not withdrawn properly, five pesticides which, if abused, could lead to toxic residues in tissues as a result of contamination of the environment, and five specialized drugs which if abused would lead to potent residues having a possible physiological effect on human beings.” Although the report is old, the situation has not changed much in the last thirty or so years due to the presence of a powerful meat lobby.

⁵ Interesting point: There are some researchers who now believe that although red meat is a major contributor to heart disease, the eating of *chicken* is the real cancer producing culprit. I’m not sure if this has to do with the fact that chicken production is notorious for producing diseased chickens (due to the farming approach used in raising chickens for food), or due to the almost non-existent food inspection process within the chicken industry (Reagonomics eliminated enormous numbers of inspectors in an attempt to “get the gov-

Studies have since shown this correlation in other related areas. For instance, countries with high meat intakes ALWAYS have correspondingly high rates of colon cancer, whereas countries with low meat intake have low rates; women who eat meat daily have four times the chance of developing breast cancer than do women who eat meat only once a week; and men who eat meats, cheeses, eggs and milk daily have over three-and-a-half times the chance of producing prostate cancer than do men who eat those items only sparingly.⁶

Another problem that arises is with pesticides. DDT, for instance, was banned long ago as a carcinogen (among other things, it causes sterility in males). Unfortunately, the EPA reports that DDT contamination of our agricultural land has not decreased markedly since then. Why? Because DDT is a very long-lived compound; once in the environment, it is almost impossible to remove.

Animals that eat grains grown on land that has been heavily sprayed with pesticide (and that is most of the agricultural land in the U.S.) are inadvertently making pesticides like DDT a part of themselves. The insidious thing about DDT is that it stores itself in fat cells. That means that as cows, for instance, eat hay even minutely laden with DDT, the pesticide accumulates in the animal's body over time. If the cow is a milk producer, the milk and the associated dairy products made from that milk (cheese, etc.) will have DDT in it. Animals that are raised for beef are no better off. What this means is that eating "normally" produced meat or dairy products (i.e., non-organic) will, sooner or later, increase the accumulated DDT level in your body. It will happen slowly, but it will happen.

Hard to believe? A recent E.P.A. study showed that mother's milk from almost all women (99%) tested across the United States had DDT in it. The Environmental Defense Leagues estimated that there is, on the average, a gram and a half of DDT in every American (that comes to approximately 20 tons cumulatively⁷). And that's just DDT. Agent Orange is a

ernment off the people's back"--according to *Eating for Life*, a typical poultry inspector is expected to examine upwards of 11,000 chickens in an hour--it isn't surprising that in 1996, it was estimated that 1 out of every 4 chickens marketed had salmonella), or whether the red-meat scare has simply pushed more people toward chicken. Whatever the case, some current thinking suggests that chickens may pose at least as big a problem as does red meat.

⁶ As can be seen from that last statistic, it isn't just meat that is causing a cancer problem. It also seems to be related to the eating of dairy products (eggs, cheese, milk). Eating a healthy diet obviously requires some education; reading *Eating for Life* is a good idea even if you have no interest in becoming a vegetarian.

⁷ Over 2.2 million tons of DDT were used world-wide before its ban.

carcinogenic defoliant used during the Vietnam war. Two of the active ingredients in Agent Orange (2,4-D and 2,4,5-T) are currently being sprayed as a pesticide on land used to grow grain for livestock. Yet these two toxins are just the tip of the chemical iceberg. As put by DfNA: "Recent studies indicate that of all the toxic chemical residues in the American diet, almost all, 95% to 99%, come from meat, fish, dairy products and eggs.⁸ If you want to include pesticides in your diet, these are the foods to eat. Fortunately, you can overwhelmingly reduce your intake of these poisons by eating low on the food chain, and not choosing foods of animal origin."

Put another way, according to DfNA, the diseases that can commonly be prevented, that are consistently improved and that in some cases can be cured with a vegetarian diet are: strokes, kidney stone, prostate cancer, cervical cancer, diabetes, peptic ulcers, hiatal hernias, gallstones, irritable colon syndrome, heart disease, breast cancer, pancreatic cancer, stomach cancer, hypoglycemia, constipation, diverticulosis, hypertension, salmonellosis, osteoporosis, colon cancer, ovarian cancer, endometrial cancer, kidney disease, hemorrhoids, obesity, asthma, and trichinosis.⁹

People who are trying to steer clear of meat often switch to seafood thinking that fish and crustaceans are fairly safe. That isn't necessarily the situation.

The problem of water pollution is unbelievable in the U.S. today:

--The Great Lakes are laden with heavy metals;

--Fertilizers from farming and chemical pollutants from factories dumping their waste into rivers have badly polluted our waterways;

--We have habitually treated the ocean as a dumping ground, completely ignoring any adverse consequences that might come from that policy.¹⁰

⁸ "But," you say, "the government inspects our food." True, but due to financial constraints, the governmental agency responsible for testing tests only *one animal per quarter million* for toxic chemical residue.

⁹ The number one cause of death in the United States is heart disease. Someone has a heart attack in the U.S. every 25 seconds while someone dies every 45 seconds (males have a 50% chance of dying as the consequence of a heart attack). Reducing consumption of meat, dairy products, and eggs by 50% reduces one's chances of having a heart attack by 45%. Completely cutting those items out of one's diet reduces one's chances of having a heart attack by 90%. The risk of a heart attack death for a total vegetarian male is 4%.

¹⁰ Example: Thirty to forty years ago the Navy dumped 4,000 barrels of radioactive nuclear waste twenty-miles out of San Francisco harbor. I don't know what they thought they were doing--if they thought that somehow the ocean's salt water would not dissolve the containers in relatively short order--but divers came upon the situation a number of years

The fish don't die immediately from this kind of contamination, but they do often become diseased or cancerous as a consequence. Fishermen complain, but when they catch a fish with big ulcers on it, do they throw the fish back and call it a loss or cut the ulcer out and sell what is left? The answer obviously depends upon the fisherman in question, but often the fish gets sold (an interesting spiral back to the factory farming mess: two-thirds of the fish caught in U.S. in 1972 were fed to livestock).

There are other reasons one might be put off by American's meat eating habits. For instance, there is the incredible waste.

Considering that 80% of the corn and 95% of the oats grown in the United States are fed to livestock, and that an acre can produce 20,000 pounds of potatoes but the equivalent of only 165 pounds of beef, one begins to wonder about things like *world hunger*. A baby dies of starvation in the world every 2 seconds. World wide, 60,000,000 people will starve this year. What is incredible is that if Americans reduced their meat intake by just 10%, the amount of grain saved could feed that 60,000,000 (this assumes the food could be delivered where it was needed).

On top of that, it takes 25 gallons of water to produce one pound of wheat while requiring 2500 gallons of water to produce one pound of meat (this includes the water used in the slaughtering process).¹¹ If the government wasn't subsidizing the water American farmers use in growing grains for cattle, a pound of beef would cost \$89. And this says nothing about topsoil loss due to farming that is done on behalf of the livestock industry (4,000,000 acres of topsoil are lost annually; 85% of the U.S. topsoil loss is directly related to the raising of livestock).

Add to that the pesky problem of the cutting down of South American rain forests to make room for cattle ranches that exist solely to produce and sell beef to fast food companies in the United States, and the All-American hamburger begins to lose its luster.¹²

later, and guess what? Many of the containers are leaking.

¹¹ Something to contemplate: A vegetarian who washes his or her car weekly in a drought is wreaking less havoc on the water shortage than is a once-a-week steak eater who never washes his or her car, ever, assuming both live in a corn-producing area.

¹² For those of you who don't know, rain forests house most of the biological diversity on the planet (ten acres of South American rain forest have more species on it than are found in the whole of Europe). It is from this biological caldron that most of the drugs humans depend upon to fight disease have been discovered. Destroying rain forest is like throwing

The last conventional argument for vegetarianism comes from the animal rights people. The two main arguments are: “Humans don’t have the right to kill other animals just because they’ve acquired a taste for animal flesh,” and “How can anyone think of themselves as a compassionate individual while simultaneously supporting (consciously or unconsciously) a treatment of farm animals that is cruel and selfish.” It is a fairly emotional response to the question of eating meat, but there are people who hold it.

There are several argument that have been used in the past *against vegetarianism*. They are:

Belief: Humans are, quite simply, carnivores.

Response: Certainly, humans are able to digest meat, but does that mean they are inherently carnivores? Not likely.

How so? All carnivores have two main physical characteristics that support their eating habits. Specifically:

--Carnivores don’t have grinding teeth: Think about it. The carnivores you know (dogs and cats) don’t really chew their food. I remember a collie I had when I was a kid. I’d give him a big piece of meat and he’d go *gulp gulp* and it would be gone. I’d give him a little piece of bread and it would take him five minutes to deal with it. He’d try his best to chew, and he’d chew and chew and chew, then he’d swallow it, get it caught in his throat, and cough it up. His eating habits were fitted to swallowing food whole, not chewing.

Look at human teeth. We have grinders--lots of them--at the back of the mouth. We have only two teeth that could in any way be construed as rippers (the eye teeth), and their existence isn’t particularly surprising in as much as there are non-meat foods that require a certain amount of ripping and shearing to eat (carrots, for instance).

--Carnivores have extremely short digestive tracts: Why do you sup-

potential medical discoveries right down the drain. In addition, by burning rain forests, we are not only adding enormous amounts of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, we are tinkering dangerously with our weather (the rain forest is a major player in dictating weather patterns). This, coupled with the possibility of global warming, could be a BIG problem for future generations.

What is tragic about the destruction of the rain forests in South America, aside from what has already been said, is that burning rain forest for farming solves nothing. Rain forest soil is suited only for the cyclic nature of the rain forest. It isn’t good for much else. The top soil is so thin that it can sustain farming for only a few years before turning into desert. Once a desert, the land is no longer able to support even a rain forest and *all* is lost.

pose? Because an animal that eats raw meat must digest it quickly before it turns poisonous due to putrefaction. A very short digestive tracts allows the animal to deal with the decaying food rapidly.¹³

The human digestive tract is, on average, between twenty-five and thirty feet long. In other words, it is not the digestive tract of a carnivore.

“So what,” you say. “Humans can digest meat quite nicely, thank you.”

That seems to be the case, at least on the surface, but there may be more too it. To see how, consider the following story:

I overheard an interesting conversation the other day. A girl was talking about a guy she’d met who was a vegetarian. As I passed out of earshot, I heard her exclaim with amazement, “He doesn’t even drink milk.”

It was as if she thought he had stepped completely beyond the bounds of rational behavior, and it struck me as being terribly funny. After all, milk is baby food. It’s designed to kick-start a new-born into rapid growth (it also allows the mother to pass antibodies to the baby). But the kind of milk people buy at their local supermarket is baby food *for cows*, “animals that have four stomachs, will double its size in 47 days and are destined to weight 300 pounds within a year” (as pointed out by DfNA). Something like 85% of the people in the world over the age of three no longer have the enzyme (lactase) required to digest milk. So although it is tasty (it’s sweet) and goes great with cookies, most people are at least mildly allergic to it. What that means is that if you know a milk drinker who commonly has a runny nose in the morning, there is a good chance that individual is suffering from a milk allergy. Drinking milk is not going to kill the person. His or her body *will* accommodate drinking milk with only slight protestation (a runny nose). But simply because the body is willing to put up with it, that doesn’t mean milk drinking is something that is good for that body. On the contrary, it only means that the body is able to *accommodate* the situation.

The same is true of meat. The body will accommodate meat eating--people do it all the time without keeling over dead on the spot--but that doesn’t mean humans are inherently carnivores. It just means the

¹³ Have you ever wondered why meat is aged? Animal muscle is soft while the animal is alive. When the animal dies, the muscles harden. They stay in that state until they have sufficient time to decompose. Then, and only then, do they soften again. Aged meat is just meat that has been given time to decompose to the point where it has softened.

body is willing to put up with the insult, at least temporarily.¹⁴

Belief: You can't get all the essential amino acids without eating meat (one of the meat industries favorite arguments).

Response: That simply isn't true. It has been shown that plants can supply all the necessary amino acids needed by a human body, and what plants don't supply the body seems able to generate on its own.

Belief: Some claim that a vegetarian diet decreases body weight and makes for physical wimps.¹⁵

Response: According to *Eating for Life*:

-- In a series of fifteen national cycling events held in Great Britain in 1963, a vegetarian cyclist, Ronald Murgatroid, won all 15 fifteen events (even though vegetarians were a small percent of the total number of contestants). For five years he won the Best All-Around Veteran Championship.

--Vegetarian Murray Rose was the youngest triple gold medal winner in swimming in Olympic Games history winning the 400- and 1500-meter free style and the 1500-meter marathon at the '56 Olympics in Melbourne Australia. He retained the 400-meter title four years later in the 1960 Olympics . . .

--Vegetarian weight lifter Alexander Macpherson Anderson twice pulled a fully loaded, twenty-two and a half ton electric tram 100 yards up an incline . . . and on various occasions used his teeth to pull four Sun newspaper delivery trucks, five passenger automobiles hitched together, and a double decker bus.

--Vegetarian Alan M. Jones, captain in the U.S. Marine Corp., per-

¹⁴ Indeed, "temporarily" may be the optimal word here, given the seeming connection between meat eating and cancer.

¹⁵ A lot of people think that eating vegetarian is going to decrease muscle mass whereas eating meat will allow one to get bigger. When I was a kid, my football coach wanted me to bulk up (I was a wide receiver and, hence, didn't need to be a monster; nevertheless, the coach wanted me bigger). During the summer between my junior and senior year my meals ran as follows: for breakfast I ate two breakfast steaks or five to six pieces of bacon, five or six eggs, five or six pieces of toast and a malt. For lunch I had two large hamburgers with French fries or potato chips and two large malts; for dinner I had a plate of meat, a plate of potatoes, a plate of vegetable, and a glass of milk; and at twelve midnight I'd go up to Bob's Big Boy (it was a drive-in when I was a kid) and have two Big Boy hamburgers, a coke, and an order of fries. I did this every day that entire summer, and I gained a total of three pounds.

The moral of the story: Eating meat is not necessarily going to put weight on you; eating vegetarian in a sane, regulated way is not necessarily going to make you lose weight.

formed 27,000 sit-ups setting a world record in August, 1974; swam 500 miles on the Snake and Columbia Rivers in eleven days in June, 1975; skipped roped 100,000 times in 23 hours in October, 1975; swam a total of 127,000 yards in 161 hours at the University of Oregon Olympic pool without sleep in November, 1975. He did all this after overcoming polio as a child.

In addition, *Diet for a New America* lists the following athletes as vegetarians: Edwin Moses (undefeated in 8 years in the 400-meter hurdles), Dave Scott (four time winner of the Ironman Triathlon and only man to win the event more than twice), Sixto Linares (world record holder for the 24-hour triathlon--4.8-miles of swimming, 185-miles of cycling, 52.5-miles of running), Stan Price (world record holder in the bench press), Paavo Nurmi (20 world records in distance running and 9 Olympic medals), Andreas Cahling (Winner of Mr. International body building championships), Pierreo Verot (world's record for downhill endurance skiing), and Ridgely Abele (8 time National Champion in Karate, including U.S. Karate Assoc. World Championships).

Bottom Line: Vegetarians can do quite nicely if they are careful. But if *you* decide to change over, don't go out, buy a stalk of broccoli, bring it home and eat it raw. That's not the way to go. Get a good vegetarian cook book, follow the recipes for a while, then start improvising. Once you get the hang of it, you'll find you can do spectacular things with vegetarian cooking.

The preceding has been a presentation of some of the arguments that have led many Americans away from meat eating and toward vegetarianism. To these we are about to add some thoughts that are both novel and typically Eastern.

To begin with: If *thought* is, as Eastern metaphysicians claim, an energy form that has substance and can affect matter, imagine what it would be like to eat food that has been soaked in thoughtforms of misery, pain, and fear. Given the way livestock are treated on meat producing factory farms, that is exactly what consumers are doing when they eat red meat or chicken. Animals in this context are viewed as a commodity. Their care is

limited to whatever it takes to keep them alive, make them big, minimize cost and maximize profits. The feed lots where they are fattened are unsanitary and crowded, and the slaughter houses permeated with fear. EFL states:

Just as our bodies are made ill during times of intense rage or pain, so do those of livestock animals. Just before and during the agony of being slaughtered, large quantities of adrenaline are forced through the entire body, thus “pain poisoning” the entire carcass. Even the meat industry acknowledges that pre-slaughter psychological stress produces physical changes in the carcass.

This addresses chemical changes in the animal; it does not address changes in the atoms of the animal on a more subtle level. As far as Eastern metaphysics is concerned, atoms absorb experience. That is, experience impresses a tone around physical atoms. Modern science would not agree with this idea. As far as physicists are concerned, for instance, one hydrogen atom is the same as any other hydrogen atom.

The East says, “Not so.” The hydrogen atoms that were used in the atomic bomb are fundamentally different from other hydrogen atoms. Why? Because each has its own history of experience; each has been associated with specific actions for which the other was not present.

If this is accurate-to-life, you literally paint the places of your life with the tone and content of your thoughts,¹⁶ and it doesn’t stop with humans. Animals do not have the power of thought as do humans, but intense

¹⁶ There is an interesting bit of whimsy associated with this idea. According to tradition, when a chela has moved in ways that are not as they should be, the atoms of the chela’s body are soaked with the tone of those actions (if you will remember, the karmic response to a failure on the part of a chela is considerably more intense than would otherwise be the case). In some cases, if the miscue is great enough, the chela will have to wait until he or she has shed those atoms before being able to continue. It takes seven years for the atoms of the body to completely recycle (that’s right, the atoms in your body today are completely different than the atoms you had in your body seven years ago). That means it takes seven years before the chela can completely purify the self and continue on his or her path.

For those of you who know anything about the secret societies of Renaissance Europe, you will know that a lot of the nursery rhymes and folk lore at the time had double meanings. I bring this to your attention here because there is a curious bit of superstition from that time that can be summarized as: break a mirror and have seven years bad luck. There are some who believe that the double meaning here is: break the “mirror of the self” with inappropriate action and you will need to wait seven years before the tone of that action can wash away from you.

fear or pain does generate thought that has astral substance. The flesh of animals that have been abused--and all animals that are grown for food fall into this category--is saturated with the heaviness of their situation.

Making that a part of one's body by eating the poor beasts will not be noticed by most, but for those who are more sensitive inwardly, the heaviness becomes evident in meditation. There was a reason that the Mystery School candidates abstained from eating meat. In a meditative sense, it pulls one down. Metaphorically, it is like swallowing a stone. And it is no joy for the animal, either.

Aside from the physical problems encountered by incorporating atoms covered with the thoughtforms of fear and pain into one's own body, there are other reasons why the Eastern metaphysical views suggest abstinence from eating animals. From this view, life exists to allow Consciousness the opportunity to animate bodies, experience, and grow. If that be true, then every animal form is a vehicle for experience. Certainly, the Beings animating animals like dogs and cats and cows have not evolved to the point of Beings animating human form, but they are experiencing, learning and growing in ways that are appropriate for their particular stage of evolution. Thus, depriving an Awareness of its vehicle to experience--even if the Awareness is on the level of lower animal form (let's face it, fish aren't real high on the list) is simply not considered to be an appropriate thing to do.

Even people who are sympathetic to the plight of animals wonder about another related question. Specifically, if one does not want to do harm to Awarenesses that are experiencing through bodies, what does one do about eating plants. After all, plants support experiencing Consciousness, don't they?

This needs to be examined.

In taking the life of an animal like a cow, you are depriving a fairly highly evolved Consciousness of one of the very few embodiments it has to experience through. But if you will remember, the view we have been examining maintains that the kind of Awareness that experiences through plant forms does so as a kind of oversoul. That is, it is not unusual for a single Awareness to animate hundreds of millions of plant forms at the same time. Although it is not considered appropriate to take any life without thoughtful respect and a giving of gratitude, the taking of a plant form for food is not like the taking of an animal for food; the two situations are

simply not believed to be the same.

Looking at this a little more deeply, it should be noticed that plants are geared to produce enormous quantities of themselves. A single stalk of wheat has the seed capacity to produce a hundred of its kind, and the time it takes for the growing to take place is very short. By contrast, a cow produces only one or two calves per pregnancy and the gestation period for a cow is something like eight months.

Additionally, plants have the unusual characteristic of being able to take sunlight and turn it into chemical energy. Animals don't do this. Part of the plant kingdom's duty, as far as this view is concerned, is to use this energy-converting ability to produce food by which higher orders of life are sustained, and that is exactly what they do. Eating plants and the eating animals are as different as night is to day.¹⁷

There is another intellectual quandary that pops up mainly from people who are put off by the idea of vegetarianism. "Look at nature," they will say. "Predators are designed to kill other animals for food. What's so unusual about one animal eating another?"

There is an interesting metaphysical twist to this that isn't often considered within the West--the possibility that *humankind* is responsible for the state of our planet's biological and psychological evolution as it stands today.

According to the Eastern view we have been examining, the real purpose of human endeavor is to learn to be responsible within the context of *existence in matter*. At our stage of development, we are doing this by learning to deal with *thought* as a living thing. If that be true, humans are the ones that set the thought-tone for this evolution. And the lesser kingdoms? They learn from their contact with the more highly ordered forms of Awareness, but their real duty is to support the efforts of that higher kingdom. All of the kingdoms of Nature do this by reflecting back at humankind the *state* of humankind.

Nature acts like a mirror that allows humanity to see where it is within its state of evolution. What that means is that when there is no longer harm in humankind--when humans no longer have the tendency toward violence--there will no longer be a need for violence in nature and, hence,

¹⁷ There is a Biblical quote that reads, "God gave man dominion over the animals." The passage could have been interpreted as an admonishment to treat animals as one's children (the word "dominion" comes from the Latin *dominae*; *dominae* means father). It is unfortunate that it has instead been interpreted as a justification to treat animals in whatever way the whim of man dictates.

violence will no longer *be* in nature.

It is not easy to over emphasize this idea. *Nature reflects humanity*. If there is anger in humans, there will be anger in nature. If there is guile in humans, you will find guile in nature. If there is violence in humans, you will find violence in nature. When humans evolve to the point when these things are no longer a part of the way they deal with life, Nature will have evolved into something entirely different from what it is today.¹⁸

A corollary of this is the belief that when a particular Being comes to a point where there is no longer harm in that Being, there will no longer be the necessity for nature and nature's creatures to react harmfully toward that Being--there will no longer be the necessity to reflect harm at that Being.

According to some, this tradition was a major part of the Mystery School teachings, not to mention a central theme within some of the more severe Mystery School tests. There is a place in England, for instance, that is dome shaped. In the top of the structure are millions and millions of bees. According to legend, Mystery School initiations took place there (actually, they were initiations of the Lesser Mysteries). The initiate would sit in that place, go into meditation, then the bees would swarm.

The test for the initiate was to have become so completely harmonious that he or she could sit within the considerable franticness of the swarming bees and not be moved to fear or protectiveness. If the initiate passed the test, he or she would simply stand up and walk out of the structure. But if the initiate had any bit of harm or fear within the self, the bees would sense the disharmony and would attack, possibly killing the person. Only if the initiate had become completely harmless would the bees not act aggressively.

There are other places around the world that were supposed to be devoted to the initiation of Beings who had moved ahead of the stream of humanity in this sense. For instance, it is believed by some that one of the main temples in ancient Egypt--most probably the Temple of Ptah at Memphis--had a small secondary temple (exactly where it was has been lost to history). The temple was said to be an initiatory place for the Greater Mysteries. If you will remember, the Greater Mysteries were supposedly concerned with fairly serious stuff: initiations in which Beings moved into the inner worlds to deal with powerful thoughtforms, etc. Being an initiate of the Greater Mysteries was not supposed to be a *feel good* expe-

¹⁸ . . . and the Lion will lay down with the Lamb?

rience (though there surely was a goodness of feeling for those who were involved). It was deadly serious.

One of the initiatory places of the Greater Mysteries was supposed to have been this little temple built on the shore of the Nile. It was constructed in an odd way, being circular with a diameter of somewhere around eighty feet. There was a great stone door that was never closed, and there were big areas cut out of the wall at ground level that allowed passage between the inside and outside of the structure. In the middle of the room was a three-and-a-half foot high platform.

The room was rarely used, but when an initiate was ready, he or she would enter just before the Nile would rise. Once in, the individual would plant themselves on the platform and go into meditation. While in their meditation, they would cleanse any residual darkness that might be within them and make their final commitment to harmlessness. The meditation would take three days. When the Being was ready--was completely, totally harmless--the Nile would have risen and the room would have a foot of water covering its floor.

As the water entered, so too did crocodiles. When the initiate came out of his or her meditation, the individual would find crocs all around. The test? When the initiate was ready, he or she would step off the platform into the midst of the crocodiles, and walk out of the temple.

If there was the slightest tone of fear or ability to do harm left in that Being, the crocodiles would sense that and would respond to the initiate as they would any human (read this "any meal"). But if the Being was absolutely harmless, there would be no necessity for nature to reflect harm in that way and the crocodiles would not become aggressive. In fact, there are even stories of Beings who so deeply loved that they would sit down in the water with the animals and commune with them for a time before leaving. Due to the benevolence of the human, the creatures would have become for a time harmless themselves.

Did places like this exist in the ancient world? The one in England still exists; the one in Egypt is gone (assuming it ever existed).

Were they actually used for these kinds of initiations? Who's to say.

The reason these have been brought up here is to point out a part of Eastern metaphysics that is accepted in the East: *that humans set the tone for Nature*. What you find in Nature is a reflection of the states of mind that exist now in humans. As humans change, Nature will change. And as this happens for the better, the creatures of Nature will slowly lose the

ability and necessity to harm.¹⁹

Before closing, there is one last thing that should be mentioned concerning Nature: As was discussed in an earlier section, Eastern metaphysics maintains that there is a kind of parallel evolution going on within the Nature kingdoms. Specifically, it is believed that there exist Awarenesses in Nature that are quite pure and evolved in their own right, but not in the way humans are evolved (i.e., they have not immersed themselves as deeply into matter as have humans, hence their purity). These Awarenesses are called Devas.

For example, trees, being a more highly evolved form than mere plants, are believed to be animated by Devic forms while whole forests are overseen by great Consciousnesses that are also Devic in nature (these Beings are sometimes called *nature spirits*).

Going into the forest can be a very pleasurable experience. Part of the reason why, from this perspective, is because in going into the forest you are coming in contact with these great, benevolent Beings.

In other words, when you are in a forest, you are not alone . . . even if you ignore the animals. A forest is alive. And with that thought, I direct you back to the walking meditation quoted at the beginning of this chapter:

I walk along and I set aside a stone that might be uncomfortable for someone. I pick up a fallen thing. I bring along with me a light of regard for all that I see, and I see the beautiful and wonderful splendor that exists in all things. I ask of my High Mind that I should be able to put that harmony into my hand so that all the Consciousnesses of Nature, when they feel me coming, will smile.

¹⁹ Minor point: I don't want you going out thinking benevolent thoughts for two or three days, then approach a rattlesnake thinking it isn't going to strike because you have become harmless. Initiates of the Mystery School were traditionally believed to be Beings who had spent many lives and great efforts, and had had enormous trials in coming to a point where they could attempt these severe tests. We aren't talking about average people, we are talking about highly evolved human beings.

Chapter 16

RELATIONSHIPS AND KARMIC KNOTS

There is no power in the universe, nor any form of intercession, that can separate a cause from its effect, action from reaction, or a man from consequences for his deeds.

unattributed

If I had been a wiser man, less blinded by my lower nature, I could have found a better way. But I was blind, so I took the only way I could. I will accept the consequences of that now. When I return to earth again, I am convinced I shall be less blind; and at least I shall own no debt.

from "Om: the Secret of Abhor Valley"
by Talbot Mundy

Karma's duty is to bring Consciousness into an understanding of what it means to exist in matter. A big part of this has to do with Beings learning how to deal with one another. Given human genetics and the strong animal instinct humans have to procreate, one of karma's most powerful tools in this regard is the interaction that come with the exercising of the sexual prerogatives. This is what this chapter is about--karma and personal relationships. I'm going to animate these ideas with a somewhat unusual story.

Several years ago, Cathy (one of my compatriots) told me about a rather sad situation into which a friend of hers had fallen. In a nutshell, it seems the woman was married and had children when she met another man and unexpectedly fell in love with him. Not being able to leave the marriage for the sake of her children, she had to tell this new love to go

away. There was considerably more to the story, all of which Cathy recounted to me during several conversations.

At the time, I was experimenting more and more with meditation. It was also a time when I was interested in better understanding how karma worked. As a consequence, I decided to try to meditate into this woman's situation to see if I could comprehend what was really taking place underneath the surface.

What came in relatively short order was a series of pictures that painted a surprising and interesting scenario. Of course, I had no idea whether the insights I was having accurately reflected what actually happened or whether I was just suffering from an overactive imagination. Fortunately for us, the distinction is moot. What is important is that the East would maintain that the scenario I'm about to lay out for you is at least possible.

I'm presenting the following in the form of a short, fictional story. It is, in fact, a composite of the actual facts of the woman's situation coupled with the pictures that showed themselves in my meditations.

The time is the late 1400's. The country is Italy.

A Being comes into a body. The body is that of a female. The child grows into a fine woman. When it is appropriate, the woman is betrothed in an arranged marriage, as is suitable for the time. The man is wealthy and powerful. She accepts the marriage in the hope that she will grow into a fondness for the man. Her life proceeds. She has children. She loves her children deeply.

Everything is passably good in her life until she runs into a young man she has loved in a series of earlier lives (though neither the man nor the woman is consciously aware of that fact). When she meets him, it is as though life is breathed into her for the first time.

There is moderate intimacy between the two, though she is painfully aware of her responsibility to her husband and, more importantly, her children.

Finally, the young man, who is not a deep thinker, demands that she go away with him. She tells him she loves him, but that she can't bring herself to upset her children's world even though staying will mean forsaking her own happiness.

The man doesn't understand. They argue. Due to her refusal to come with him, he decides she doesn't really love him and that she has just been toying with him all along. He says so, then exists in anger.

He returns to his abode, packs his belongings, and leaves the city that night without a word to her. She never hears from him again.

When she finds he has left, she is devastated. She really does love the man, she just can't choose her own happiness over the happiness and security of her children. She is left with deep despair and an abiding desire to find him, to explain to him, to make him understand . . . but she can't because she doesn't know where he has gone. Nothing has been resolved.

She goes into a depression. She becomes angry with the very existence of her husband, and in her completely debilitated emotional state she unconsciously begins to neglect her children. The young man's leaving has destroyed her life. She spends her days in a kind of dazed fantasy, thinking about how it might have been if life had given them a break and he had stayed. She pines for him. She pleads with God to send him back.

He is her obsession. He is all she thinks about. And in doing so, she builds huge thoughtforms within herself wrapped around her desire to be with him.

Time passes.

It is now the mid-1960's. The Being who was the woman in the Italian life is again born into a female body, this time in Georgia in the United States. When she reaches her twenties, this intelligent, willful, attractive woman is ready to get married if the right guy appears. He does--a musician who has dropped out of college to do his own thing. He's a seemingly fun guy from a fairly wealthy family. He is attracted to her. She is attracted to him.

For several months, they have a wildly romantic life together. She's completely undone by the experience.

When his job takes him away, their relationship becomes a long distance one. With their separation, she develops all of the symptoms of love sickness. All she can think about is him. There are hours and hours of telephone conversations. There is great pining. There are surprise visits, airplane trips for weekend assignations, and lots of sex when they are together. After a year of this, they get married.

Shortly after the wedding, she begins to realize that the party-hardy attitude that she had found so fun during the courtship is covering over a problem. He is drinking a lot. When she asks him about it, he responds, "It's none of your business." She finally realizes that she has married an alcoholic.

There follow trials and arguments and some very bad times, but her tenacity and desire to make the marriage work finally, after nine years of struggle, comes to fruition. He promises he will never take another drink

again--a promise he keeps. She vows she will never leave him as long as he holds to that promise.

In the meantime, they have had two children.

This is a woman who has been psychologically and emotionally battered by the stress of having to deal with her husband and his problems. She has been the glue that has kept the family together; she has been the stalwart one; she has been the one who has fought for him even though his state of relative self-involvement has meant that he has done almost nothing to support and nurture her in the process. Nevertheless, by the end of the tenth year of their marriage, she has a family to be proud of. And if she were to characterize herself at that point, she would say she was happily married.

Along with everything else, she has been the main financial support for the family while her husband has been working toward his college degree. During this time, several professional opportunities have arisen, all of which have required her to expand her knowledge beyond the masters degree she already holds. During one such effort, she comes in contact with a second man she finds unusually interesting.

It all starts out innocently enough. He works in the same field she, albeit several states away. She comes in contact with him through a professional referral. Their initial interaction is based on telephone calls and email. He is, by the way, single.

For an entire year, all they do is talk about her job challenges with only the occasional sidetrack into their personal lives. Still, since their first telephone conversation, she has noticed that there is something about this guy that is strangely attractive. There is something about his voice . . .

At the end of a year of long distance communications, they meet during a four day conference that the two independently attend. The first three days of interaction are friendly and fun and that's all. She isn't what she is normally attracted to, and besides, she's made it clear that she is happily married. Yet at the end of the last night of the conference, there is a very short period of relative intimacy. They don't have sex. They don't even kiss. Nevertheless, she makes it clear to the man that she is not looking at him as a mere colleague.

In fact, she has fallen completely, irrationally, totally in love with him. Once home, she begins to phone him continuously. She can't seem to control her desire to hear his voice and be in the aura of his presence, even though they are a good thousand miles apart and she knows she may never see him again.

The affair, if affair be the right word, lasts for several months during

which there is great inner turmoil within her. Several times they make plans to meet only to have the plans fall through.

During this period, it is not unusual for her mood to swing wildly from feelings of raging desire to feelings of severe guilt, all within a matter of minutes. She doesn't understand why she feels the way she does. Everything about her life to this point has been steeped in the Southern virtues of honor, loyalty and nobility. Yet here she is, uncontrollably wanting to be with this man who is not her husband.

Still, she knows down deep that she can't leave her situation nor can she cheat on her husband. She believes that if she did leave him, he would fall apart and go back to drinking. This is not something she wants for him. She has, in a way, additionally made a compact with him to support and raise their children. The children love their father, and he loves them. She can't bring herself to separate them from him.

In short, her basic decency won't allow her to trade the happiness of her children for her own happiness. She is trapped where she is, and she is too moral a person to allow her love for the other man to degenerate into a mere affair. If she can't freely go to the man she loves, she won't go at all.

She keeps asking him, "Why is this happening? How can a happily married woman who has always prided herself on being in control of her life, be so out of control?" She has thought about doing things that she would have berated others for even thinking about, awful things from a standard, Christian perspective (like leaving her family). She has looked hard, but she can't see how she can possibly bring herself to do the things she'd need to do to get what she wants. It is all so painful.

After all the emotion, all the fantasizing, all the guilt, all the cogitating, she finally comes to the conclusion that what is best for her children must be the guiding light in any decision she makes. She realizes that every step she takes toward the man she loves is a step away from her family. She realizes that where she is is, for the sake of her children, where she must remain.

She explains this to him. He understands, presumably after going through his own emotional ups and downs. With his help, she finally ends it.

It doesn't mean she stops thinking about him. It doesn't mean she stops wanting him. It means she accepts that she can't have him. Of her own accord, she finally accepts stepping away from him.

From the Eastern perspective we are examining, what is, in all likelihood, happening here?

If the pictures that presented themselves in my meditations are an accurate reflection of the woman's real-life situation, the woman's husband *now* was her husband in the previous life . . . and there is a sizable karmic knot between them.

In the Italian life, the lesser side of her child-self took over and her response to the situation was typical child-self in nature. She treated her husband badly in her despair over the departure of the man she loved. Now karma has put her back in a similar situation to try it again, to try to make things right between them. She has worked for him tirelessly over a long period of time, supporting him, nurturing him. In doing so, she has loosened the karmic knot she created in that previous life.¹

Her children *now* were her children *then*. They are demanding now, always wanting her attention, always acting as though they don't believe she will be there for them. Another karmic knot, and again she is in a position to make things right.

The man she has fallen so unexpectedly in love with is the man who left in anger in the Italian life. He has undoubtedly had several lives since in which he has gained better control of his tendency to anger. Seeing what a terrible situation she was in, he devoted himself to making her life as good as it could be. Knowing that she was the one who had everything to lose, he allowed her to decide how things should proceed (versus leaving in a huff after the first sign of conflict). Having relinquished all control over the situation, he kibitzed but accepts all of her decisions without dissent . . . even when she said they must part. There was a karmic knot there for him to understand, also. His response to the situation loosened that knot.

The most intriguing part of this story, though, has to do with the thoughtforms of desire she generated after he left in the Italian life. Those enormously powerful forces came flooding back into her when she came in contact with him again. Their presence was why she couldn't let him go, even though she fully understood the jeopardy into which she was putting her family. In animating those thoughtforms while in Italy, she had built a mental link between herself and the man that was, in a spiritual sense, holding both of them back. This had to be dealt with.

That is why she was in complete control of the situation (complete,

¹ Don't misunderstand, this is not to suggest that every woman who finds herself in a trying marriage is in the process of working out a karmic knot, or that a woman in a bad marriage should stay in it indefinitely. There are as many reasons for an uncomfortable marriage as there are people. Nothing is set in stone. This is a specific case meant to animate a specific point. It should not be used to generalize about all marriages.

that is, with the exception of the impediments that karma placed between their meeting for a second time). She was the one who needed to deconstruct those thoughtforms. Karma helped her to do so by putting her in a situation in which her very finely tuned feelings about *what is right* were juxtaposed against the thoughtforms she had generated in that Italian life. Something had to give. She chose the noble path--putting her family's best interests ahead of her own desires. In doing so, she began to deal with the insanely powerful urges that came streaming through her . . . all self-created in the Italian life.

In short, karma, in its infinite benevolence, had given her the vehicle she needed to take those thoughtforms apart. The situation was agonizing. The situation didn't make sense from where she was sitting (or, for that matter, from where he was sitting). The situation didn't seem fair. But as painful as it was, it gave her her opportunity to loosen the spiritually debilitating karmic knot that resided there, and she did not fail the opportunity.

Karma generally works in one of two modes. When it freewheels, the individual involved is given many possible avenues of experience, none of which outweighs the other. It is a time when an individual can go in whatever direction he or she prefers. There is, in short, no karmic nudging in one particular direction. It is freewheeling.

The second mode is more constrained. It is usually associated with situations in which the individual is forced to face some kind of karmic knot. As such, the individual still has freedom of will, but life dictates the circumstances in which that freedom must be exercised. There are enforced boundaries to the circumstance.

The story outlined above was one in which a series of karmic knots had to be addressed. It was important that the woman meet and fall in love with the man who would become her husband. As such, she was so completely swamped by the emotions, desires, and hormones that come when one becomes attracted to another that she didn't even notice his alcoholism. The whirlwind affair was just that, a whirlwind. Karma was nudging her toward matrimony because she needed to be linked to that man.

After she finally met her long, lost love, every time the woman would contrive a meeting with him, life would step in and make it impossible to execute--karma nudging again. It was as though karma was saying, "You need to continue to experience the attraction, but you can't consummate the desire."

In short, in this part of her life, karma wasn't directing her into what was to be a wonderful, physical, loving experience. It was giving her the

opportunity to work through her self-imposed obsession with one Being, and to make peace with others.

You, as an individual, never know whether a personal relationship you have chosen to move into is karma moving in freewheeling mode or karma surreptitiously drawing you into a situation designed to deal with and hopefully dissolve a karmic knot. If it is the latter, you will have little to say about how the situation proceeds, or about the constraints that will keep you within bounds (this is something to think about the next time you look at another couple's situation and judge it harshly--you have no idea what kind of karmic elements might be in play between two individuals). If it is the former, on the other hand, you will have a free hand in deciding what scenario you move into and how you will proceed once there. There will be boundaries, but they will be much wider and looser.

Chapter 17

SEX

The personal self is the ultimate liar. It constantly tells you it cannot be happy without the fulfillment of its desires. Nowhere are its desires more extravagant than in its urge to be sensual and to be loved.

commentary from an Indian sage

[Note not in the original text: This chapter was written from the perspective of a chela, which I lay no claim to being but which is not a normal way to look at life (that being something you will understand if you have read the autobiography). As such, it comes down fairly hard on "normal," fun-loving sexual activity. Don't be put off by it. In all probability, at least some of what you are about to read was not really aimed at you.]

A number of years ago as a friend and I walked through a run-down section of Los Angeles, we passed a black teenager who had a look on his face that was hard and mean. I hadn't been paying much attention (I was talking to my friend), but when the young man got near I looked up, noted his general demeanor, and smiled at him. Almost immediately, he responded with a smile that was like sunshine.

What the young man was doing was something that was, most probably, very useful in that rough neighborhood. He was presenting a facade to the world that said, "Don't mess with me." It wasn't until he realized that we weren't threatening that the facade fell, exposing what I suspect was probably a very nice disposition underneath.

What is important to notice here is that it is not unusual for a typical child-self to project some kind of facade when it is in a situation in which it is insecure and unsure.

Speaking of insecure, if there is one area most selves are unsure about, it's dealing with the opposite sex. Have you ever noticed that when you meet someone in that context who you want to impress, you change.

You suddenly get witty or sedate or strike any one of a number of poses that aren't really characteristic of the way you are in real life.¹ What the child is doing is presenting to the new acquaintance a view of the self that it believe is appealing, all the while unconsciously obscuring qualities that are not appealing. The child is saying to the world: *I am nice* (even though I am often selfish and, hence, am not nice when crossed), or; *I am funny* (even though I am also *moody* and not-so-funny when in a funk), or: *I am secure in myself* (even though I am not secure in myself and would prefer to crawl under a stone rather than taking the initiative to talk to you and possibly be rejected). In all these cases, the self is presenting to the world a facade, a view of itself that can be intentionally or unintentionally misleading.

This kind of deception is rarely conscious, but it does exist as an avenue for the child-self to appear appealing when it may not be. It is a symptom of the child's insecurity. It isn't something to fear; it is something to understand . . . especially in situations in which one is dating people one doesn't really know very well.

Although a *facade* is not a particularly good reflection of the state of a person's child-self, it does highlight what the individual wants the world to believe he or she is like. Yet there is still something more going on when people first begin to date. There is the problem of *the glamour*.

The first time I remember coming under the influence of a glamour had nothing to do with dating. It was 1963. I was a sophomore in high school, and at the time the aim of my life, the hope of my heart, the desire that loomed beyond all others . . . was to own a Chevrolet Corvette. I found a 1960 edition I thought I could afford, approached my parents with the stealth of a man about to tickle a tiger, and popped the question: "Oh please can I buy this toy?" (we called Corvettes *stingie toys* in those days).

To my considerable surprise, they *didn't* say *no*. Instead, my step-dad said, "Sure, on three conditions. You have to be able to make the payments on the car; you have to pay for your own insurance; and you have to be able to buy gas and keep it running . . . all on your own. If you can deal with that, you can get the car."

I was ecstatic. Visions of cruising in my fuel-injected Vette flooded into my head. All I had to do was to accommodate those minor parental

¹ My parents' generation called this *putting your best foot forward*. Nobody wants to look like a goof right off the bat, especially if it means screwing up a meeting with someone desirable.

requisites, something I could surely do, and the Vette was mine.

Then my dear mother hit me with the kicker. “Of course,” she said sweetly, “you’ll have to give up your free time so you can get a job . . . “

It was brutal. My mind came out of its reverie like a shot as the glamour I had unconsciously cast over the situation dissolved and the disaster that was waiting to happen loomed out at me. I was no more interested in marrying myself to the financial sinkhole that car would have become than I was in contracting a social disease!

Mom’s few words totally changed my perspective, and when that happened the glamour went poof and there I sat looking smack into the reality of the situation. It wasn’t a pretty sight . . .

A glamour is an illusion we cast over something we want. It highlights the points of desire while selectively ignoring all the detriments. Although the example given above has nothing directly to do with boy/girl relationships, the idea of a glamour is relevant in that kind of situation, also. How so?

Due to the state of the child-self in us all, there is a constant desire within the self to be bolstered and supported and made to feel fulfilled. What that means is that almost everyone looks at potential date-mates with an eye to meeting one’s own needs. I knew a fellow in college, for instance, who was what we called a *face man* (that is to say, he was good looking and he knew it). His belief was that there are nice *ugly* girls and nice *pretty* girls in the world. He had nothing against the ugly ones, but he was willing to date only the pretty ones. Why? Although I’m sure it never dawned on him, his problem was that he measured his self worth by the beauty of his dates. He lived for having a beautiful woman on his arm . . . and he paid for it. Every girlfriend he had for the two years I knew him (he was a junior when I was a freshman) were shrews. They were self absorbed and constantly demanding his attention, his obedience, his money. He had what he wanted--girlfriends that were beautiful--but the glamour he placed over them was selective. There was no beauty in their dispositions, and as such his totally skewed view of reality left him supposedly fulfilled and totally miserable, all at the same time.

Another example: In the 1950’s and earlier, it was not unusual for a young girl to go to college to find a husband. What often happened: the girl would find a guy who was handsome and possibly intelligent and maybe had the potential of becoming a good bread-winner, and she’d set her sights on marrying him. Unfortunately, she would completely overlook the fact that he, say, drank too much, or wasn’t particularly kind, or was

just plain selfish. She would place a glamour over the situation, selectively screen out qualities that would later make her life miserable in favor of highlighting what she wanted to see at the time. The consequence? She would inevitably find herself in an unhappy marriage.

An old-fashion corollary to this situation: the women who say, “Oh, so-and-so is a good man, but there are things about him I don’t like. That’s OK, though. I’ll change him after we’re married.”

What does this all come down to? When two people first begin to date, it is probable that neither individual will see the other clearly. Both will, to some degree, glamorize the other depending upon the viewer’s needs and desires. At the same time, both will present a facade that places them in what they perceive as the most advantageous light whether it be a true reflection of their child’s nature or not.²

If that were all that goes on when people date, it would be no big deal. Sooner or later the facades would begin to slip and the glammers would begin to wear off. If the couple was lucky, each would find beneath the other’s deception a human being who was worth while, and all would be well. If they weren’t so lucky, they’d find there was no harmony between them and, subsequently, they would break up. Having wasting only a few months of their lives, each could then begin looking for someone better suited to themselves.

Unfortunately, it is rarely that easy. People don’t approach dating as two-friends-going-out-to-have-some-fun. Inevitably, sex gets injected into the scenario, and once people get hot and heavy, they are rarely in a position to make rational judgments as to where a relationship should go in the long run.

The excitement of sexual relationships is powerful, and I’m not talking solely about having sex. As an example: When you talk to somebody of the opposite sex, do you act the same way you do when you talk to someone of the same sex? Probably not. You are probably kinda cute, or you verbally joust a bit, or maybe you poke at the person . . . you generally try to get a rise out of the individual. You don’t do that with same-sex

² This attempt to seem other-than-what-one-is is sometimes found in the oddest situations. In my fraternity, we used to have what we called “the ass hole of the month award.” It was given to the guy who had consistently been the biggest jerk over the previous month. Some very nice guys became so caught up in the farce that they actually vied for the supposed honor even though they were decent people.

Migration toward a negative facade is seen in other places. For example, the high school kid who acts out a tough-guy or bad-kid persona when he or she is, in fact, a basically nice person.

friends. With them, you talk like a normal human being.

The difference? Whether it's obvious to you or not, your normal conversation with the opposite sex is loaded with sexual interplay. That isn't bad, but it is powerful and it is so much a part of the way males and females interact with one another that most people don't even realize that it's happening.³

A problem can arise during dating when this interplay gets serious, escalates fast, and prematurely leads to sexual intercourse. Assuming the guy isn't out strictly for the sex and the girl doesn't enjoy the occasional late-night-rendezvous with the football team (that is, assuming both are looking for someone to settle down with), this can make for big complications. How so? Consider:

One of my college friends had a very sexy girlfriend that he dated for a long time. She was sweet, a bit naive maybe, but a lot of fun. The following was his recollection of their first date:

He asked her to an overnight party being thrown by the fraternity at a neighborhood movie theater. She accepted and they went. The party broke up early (around 4 A.M.) and everyone left to go elsewhere. She wasn't at all suspicious when he suggest that they go to a friend's apartment, even though she knew the friend was out of town. When they got there, they talked for a while until the yawns were too much, then the two went up to the bedroom and lay down on the bed. He evidently kissed her a few times which she responded to, then after a short lapse he moved to undo her bra. He executed the maneuver deftly, then found to his horror that she had fallen asleep. Being adept at undoing bras but having no experience at re-connecting them, he realized he was in big trouble. What was she going to think of him when she awoke to find herself undone. He decided the best path of action was to bite the bullet and face the proverbial music. He gave her a hard nudge to wake her up, then got up and went into the living room to await his fate.

When she came out, he immediately apologized, saying something about being from California where the girls were faster (she was from the

³ This myopia is unfortunate when a girl wears a provocative outfit and then is surprised when guys come onto her aggressively. Most women know what they are doing along these lines, but there are some innocents out there who are truly surprised with the responses they get. For example, the daughter of one of my friends had a girlfriend who was particularly well endowed. She kept complaining about obnoxious guys bothering her at the mall, seemingly unaware of the connection between their actions and her T-shirt. It read in enormous letters across her ample upper section, "MOUNDS" (as in *Mound's candy bar*).

east coast). She was indignant but willing to talk. The evening (morning) ended with conversation.

That was their first date.⁴

My friend was a normal, healthy, red blooded male whose hormones were running like Appaloosas. There were things about her he wasn't crazy about, but she was pretty and unintentionally sexy, and she seemed to be interested in him. As such, he asked her out again and she accepted. Touched off by that first night, their sexual experimentation (she was a virgin, he wasn't) was accelerated. Within two months, they were sleeping together.

From there on, sex was a very big part of their relationship, even to the detriment of their studies.

I watched the two for the entire time they dated, and although they appeared on the surface to be OK with one another, it was really a very sad situation. Almost without exception, the only time those two were happy together was when they were in bed with one another. They clearly had nothing in common; they were constantly arguing; they basically made each other miserable, and they did it for about two-and-a-half years.

What kept them together? The sexual interaction between the two had been quite intense almost from the start, so instead of realizing in fairly short order that they didn't have a thing in common, breaking up a month or two after they started dating, they stayed together for over two years. They both obviously wanted to have somebody to love and possibly marry and hopefully be happy with, but in staying together they completely negated the possibility of actually finding someone to whom they might have been better suited.

College is a unique situation. By and large, it is comprised of relatively young, energetic, single adults. There is a lot of interaction in the way of dating because there are a lot of like-minded, fun seeking people, all confined to a relatively small area (the college). Once out of college, assuming one hasn't gotten married, the situation changes radically. If the individual is fortunate enough to get a job (every parent's hope), one's daily companions will be the people at work. A lot of those people will be married; those that aren't will not necessarily be anywhere close in age.

⁴ Two years later, they were engaged to be married. It was around that time that she told him that she'd found their first-night's experience strangely exciting. Having been brought up in a very strait-laced family around school-chums who had never made advances toward her, she really didn't think of herself as being sexually desirable. The fact that he had even tried both surprised and titillated her.

What this all means is that if one's ideal is to find someone to settle down with, college is the perfect place to do so.⁵ My friend and his erstwhile girlfriend basically squandered that chance by staying together in a bad relationship. They did it because they had bonded to one another. He liked the sex and the notoriety of being her man; she had given him her virginity and, as such, couldn't bear to count-as-a-loss the emotional investment she had made in him (even though down deep I'm sure she realized she had made a big mistake). The sexually generated emotional bond turned out to be a noose. Fortunately, they didn't get married, have children, and really mess up people's lives.⁶

If you choose to go into your college experience looking for love, there is one other thing to consider. Karma.

On the down-side, if reincarnation is a reality and a person's child-self is only a small part of the Being-that-is, you have no idea what is submerged below the psyche of the person you are dating. The individual could have very noble qualities that need only the right pressure to bring them forth, or the person could have all sorts of insecurities and associated problems that won't come out until later when life's little tensions begin to mount.

What should one do about this? Become a friend first, long before sex gets into the act.

That is hard for young people to accept (old people, too). The pros-

⁵ I should mention, though, that the current trend with young people is not to get married out of college. As of 1992, according to statistics provided on a PBS special with Bill Moyers, 53% of the 40 million adults in their twenties are not yet married; 40% are from divorced homes; 65% will not live as comfortably as did their parents; 53% will never feel financial security. Of those who responded to the poll, the overwhelming majority said that they wanted to "find themselves early as individuals" before looking for a relationship. What was not stated but is probably true is that their reticence to marry is intimately related to their upbringing. This is the first generation of latch-key kids. It may be that these people were so affected by the strife they saw in their parents' lives that they simply refuse to mindlessly marry.

⁶ I should add that if the girl had been smart from the start, she would have told my friend at the outset that she intended to date him seriously for at least two years before even considering the possibility of sleeping with him. He would have gone through the ceiling and probably would have been ready to pop after the second or third month of waiting, but at least she would have had the chance of deciding without high emotion and the specter of a sexually failed relationship whether he was the man for her. She also would have the opportunity to experience a foretaste of how he might treat her later in life (should they stay together) when other major disputes might arise. Unfortunately, most girls are not secure enough within themselves to make such a move (they also like sexual interplay as much as guys do), and most guys aren't selfless enough to accept it when girls do.

pect of having intimate relations with another human being is an exciting unknown. Neither individual really knows what the other is thinking: the guy wonders how the girl is going to respond to his advances; the girl wonders what the guy will try next. The sexual tension involved in *the chase* is alluring, and the excitement is incredible--especially when the proposition is considered forbidden.⁷

So Henry and Matilda finally do the deed, and it's divine. Where do they go from there? Believing they are in love (they may be, then again it may be purely physical--it's hard for them to know under these circumstances), they go steady or maybe even get married.

Whatever they do, the chase will be over. Sex will still be pleasurable, but after a time it will become just another thing they do together.⁸ Being no-big-thing, the excitement will become less and less and, if it was the focal point of the initial relationship, life for the two as a couple may begin to get stale.⁹

This is a recipe for unhappy times.

Sex is primarily a mental activity. Sure, orgasms are pleasurable, but they only last for a few moments. What is really exciting is the maneuvering, the anticipation, the foreplay, the interplay between partners. Without that interaction, as George and Matilda will learn, the physical act loses its excitement and becomes humdrum.

What people do in this situation depends upon how much they have come to love and respect their partner. They could divorce, freeing each other to find someone more compatible; they could bite the bullet and stay with their partner even though they would prefer not (in the old days, this was often the choice of parents who were no longer in love but who stayed together for the sake of the children); they could look for the lost excitement by cheating on their spouse; or they could artificially recreate the excitement by turning to kinky sex (kinky sex is rarely something one does with someone they truly respect, but then again, respect is fairly thin out there these days).

I've painted a rather bleak picture of life and relationships in this day and age. Happily, there is one other possibility that exists, especially if

⁷ Young adults who have not previously had sex are particularly prone to this. The very fact that they are not suppose to be doing this thing makes it titillating.

⁸ This will be especially true if they get married.

⁹ Interestingly enough, this doesn't happen to people who are truly in love with one another because the relationship isn't focused primarily on sex.

some of the metaphysical views out of the East are correct. It is believed that each individual has a tone that belongs to one's Being. It is further believed that there are groups of Beings whose tone is particularly compatible. Finding someone whose tone harmonizes with your own is often referred to as *finding one's soul mate*.

This is considered to be a truly blessed situation. The harmony between the two partners is so complete that a true love can exist. Each makes his or her decision with the best interests of the other uppermost in mind. It is not a possessive love; it is a cooperative love. It is a love that does not entertain the jealousies and insecurities of the child-self. It is, in short, what everyone hopes for when they choose their mate.

This is a very rare situation. Most people are so self-oriented that they would probably not know what to do with a soul-mate even if one presented itself. The life-path of most people is simply not karmically right for that kind of supportive interaction with another human being. Yet the desire to be loved exists within the child. As a consequence, if this kind of true love doesn't come, the child is usually willing to accept a replica in its place.

Sorta-love comes when people with common interests and, possibly, common goals, get together. Sexual attraction often plays a part in the scenario; so do karmic propensities. But in almost all cases, pseudo-love comes as a consequence of the child-self's desire to have someone who will love it. As such, it is no wonder that people become mean spirited when a break-up between partners occurs. Feelings are hurt; insecurities are tweaked; personal selves become defensive and, in some cases, spiteful.

All of this is not meant to put you off from finding your mate. It is possible that you will find someone who is well tuned to you. If not, it is possible that you will be karmically drawn to someone who is willing to think of your own good, if not always, then at least more often than not. The key in this situation is that the individual be a friend as well as a lover. If the individual is a friend first, then when the sex gets old and the goals are all achieved, there will still be something there to hold onto. It is a path that requires the willingness to compromise, but it is worth it if you can find a partner worthy of the effort. Just remember, in Buddhist thought the path of the householder is believed to be considerably more difficult than the path of the ascetic.

What you don't want to do is to marry because you are lonely. It is perfectly possible to be lonely in a crowded room. Loneliness is a problem

within the child-self; no amount of support from the outside will cure it. So even though it is fairly common, loneliness is not a good reason to look for a relationship (and it's an especially lousy reason to have a child).¹⁰

Things have obviously changed since the 1960's. *Safe sex* or *no sex* are the by-words today. Why? Because having sex with someone is the medical equivalent of having sex with everyone *they* have had sex with in the last fifteen years. That's spooky.

How do young people learn about such things? Through education. Fortunately, there are now Sex Education classes available in at least some schools. These classes address the problems of kids who are sexually active but who don't know how to protect themselves from diseases like AIDS or from become unwilling parents. The successful programs proceed on the assumption that kids are going to be sexually active and, hence, need to know what they are doing (this includes a lot of discussion about how one deals with relationships and the emotional feelings that accompanies relationships). As noble and unfortunately needed as these programs are, they have serious drawbacks . . . especially if the Eastern metaphysical views we have been examining are anywhere close to being accurate.

1.) The first problem is endemic to humans as a whole. We have come to the conclusion that sex is a form of play. As such, very few people think much about what sex was really designed to do. Sure, it is pleasurable--nature would have been foolish to make it otherwise. But its not a toy; it is a mechanism whereby humans can create a body into which a Being can meld and through which that Being can experience. One of the great misfortunes is that we humans now perceive sex as a form of entertainment.^{11, 12}

2.) According to Eastern metaphysics, when two people have inter-

¹⁰ If you are lonely, try doing something useful for someone else. Go read a book to a blind person; help the local school tutoring kids. Do something useful with your life and karma may well relieve your loneliness in ways you never dreamed possible.

¹¹ Two things to be noted: First, this is not unique to the East. The Vatican has long maintained the sanctity of the sex act by not allowing Catholics to use contraceptives. Second, don't get the wrong idea. People in India copulate as whole-heartedly for pleasure as we do. They aren't saints there; we are talking about the core of their philosophies, not the way they practice them.

¹² It is interesting that there are stories in the East of chelas who marry specifically so that they can create a body for a highly evolved Being. Once the baby is conceived, the chelas live the rest of their lives as brother and sister. They no longer exercise the sexual energies between them as there is no longer a justifiable reason to do so.

course their auras literally meld and become one for a short time. This is believed to have a lot to do with why the psychology of the act is so satisfying. It is a *becoming one* with another Being.¹³

The downside of this situation is multiple. For starters, there is an interchange of auric energies between the two during the melding. Not only does the female leave with whatever semen is deposited, she also leaves with a residue from the male in her aura. Similarly, the male leaves with an auric residue from the female.¹⁴

Don't misunderstand, it isn't as though you begin to *think* like the other person. It is a lot more subtle than that. If, for instance, you are having an intimate relationship with someone who is a little unstable psychologically (I might add, this could be just about anybody), mingling aurically with that person could affect your emotional body quite strongly. It is not as though you would suddenly go bonkers, but you might find yourself more tense in a psychological sense than you normally would be. Being sub-clinical, nobody "out there" would ever notice. But *you* might notice, and you will probably not find it pleasant.

The point is that intercourse is a considerably more intimate interaction than one might think, and that's saying a lot given the degree of physical intimacy it represents.

3.) When people have sex, it is believed that an energy vortex moves up into the inner worlds. This vortex is essentially a tone that heralds the possibility that a body may be formed through which a Being might experience. For Beings in the inner world that are ready to come back and that could karmically benefit from such a union, it is as though someone has

¹³ This is the basis for Tantric Yoga (Tantric Yoga can loosely be identified as the yoga of sex). By experiencing the oneness of sex, it is believed that a disciplined, trained individual can come into a oneness with God (remember, all things are a part of the Mind of God from the yogic view) during the sex act. There are obviously a lot of ways to *fail* this discipline.

¹⁴ For males who frequent prostitutes, the consequences are pretty grim. What the man is doing is bathing himself in the aura of a woman who has herself bathed in the auras of all the men, both high born and low lives, she has had intercourse with in the recent past. In most cases, this means that some very heavy, vibratory stuff is being inserted in the make-up of the auric pattern ALL AROUND (i.e., both to the John and to the prostitute).

I haven't said a lot about the aura, but it is a very intricate, complex, important part of the physical structure. Example: As far as this view is concerned, *thought* doesn't originate in the human brain (activity occurs in the physical brain when you think, but that isn't where the thought actually comes from). It is first generated as an energy-form in the auric brain above the skull in the area called "the helmet." This auric energy pattern around you is not an artifact; it is a dynamic part of what you are. Messing around with it in this way is not good.

tapped them on the shoulder.

When people have intercourse, the inner worlds ever so slightly shake. Two people having intercourse may be affecting the paths of many Beings.

4.) In an attempt to remove apparently irrational taboos, today's Sex Education class characteristically pictures masturbation as a perfectly normal and acceptable thing to do. This is both good and bad. Masturbation is normal in the sense that a fair portion of the population engages in the activity at least occasionally, and it is acceptable in the sense that it's a hell of a lot safer than men going to prostitutes and women picking up just any-old-guy at a bar. With masturbation, the experiencer has control over *what happens* and *how it happens*.

What isn't talked about in these classes, probably because the significance isn't evident, is that when one fantasizes sexually, one is exercising *thought*.

Sexual fantasies are mental creations. One is thinking the fantasy into existence, or more likely, is animating and feeding thought-forms that *already exist*. In doing so, the individual is linking him or herself to thoughtforms that are *real* and *alive*.¹⁵ In many cases these thought-forms are extremely heavy, astral oriented projections. As pleasurable as the physical experience may be, one is grossening the self down by making these mental manifestations a part of the self.¹⁶

5.) And finally, abstinence is broached, but only in low tones. I assume the belief is that kids just aren't going to listen to such nonsense. Nevertheless, that very topic leads me to my parting shot on the subject.

To begin with, please understand that I am not suggesting that anybody reading this should become a celibate. The attempt here is to come into an understanding of why such a stance is so popular amongst people who are attempting to follow a certain kind of spiritual path.

¹⁵ It is interesting that Christ said, "If you look at a woman lustfully it is as though you have done the deed."

¹⁶ If you were a porn queen, imagine what it would be like to have thousands and thousands of men creating every manner of perverse, heavy, gross thought around you. It would have to affect you psychologically, having all that thought projected at you as the center of the fantasy.

If thought is a real thing, fantasizing while masturbating is the creation of something that lives, that does affect the minds of others, and that you will have to take responsibility for at some time. Karmically speaking, that is a fairly heavy thing to be doing.

Technically, a celibate is someone who has never had sexual intercourse. I have a friend who was a Tibetan Buddhist monk (all Buddhist monks are celibates in the strictest sense). When he was very young, he and the people of his monastery walked over a Himalayan pass into Nepal when the Chinese invaded Tibet. For various reasons, he was chosen to go to the U.S. to make money for his order. Being inexperienced, terribly lonely and particularly naive, the poor fellow found himself married after two years. It was ultimately a devastating blow for him as he was no longer, technically, a celibate. As such, he had to leave his beloved monastic order.

Aside from technicality, what most people don't realize is that it is perfectly possible to lead a celibate's life even if you have had sex at some earlier time in your life. Why would anybody want to take such a step? Once again, a story will help.

Two Buddhist monks were walking down a road in the countryside. Coming to a swollen river, they found a woman trying to get across but having no luck. The one monk, knowing he wasn't suppose to be fraternizing with women, ignored her.¹⁷ The other monk was older and wiser. Observing the woman's dilemma, he picked her up and carried her across the stream. Once on the other side, he put her down, then continued on his way with his companion.

The two finally got to their destination. They begged food and sat down to eat. All the time the first monk said nothing--not a word all day. The thoughtful monk understood there was a problem, so he finally gave the first monk leave to speak by saying, "You haven't said a word all day. What is the matter?"

The first monk immediately replied, "You touched that woman. You *carried* that woman."

The wise monk shot back, "Yes, I picked her up; I carried her across the river; and then I *put her down*. You, on the other hand, have been carrying her ever since."

¹⁷ In early times, Buddhist monks were not suppose to have any contact with women at all. The rationale was that the distraction from such contact would be so great that it would pull the monks off the disciplines they were supposed to be doing.

In a way, if you think about it, this is kind of sad. Basically, what was being assumed was that the monks were so weak that they were unable to look at a woman without getting excited--hardly a situation one would expect of a very highly evolved Being. Nevertheless, that was the custom.

Celibacy is a mental discipline. Abstention from the physical act of intercourse is merely a consequence of that discipline. The individual who has never had sex but who consciously or unconsciously longs for sexual interaction is not truly a celibate, at least not in spirit.¹⁸

There comes a time in the spiritual development of any individual when it becomes appropriate to be able to look at another human Being and see beyond the facade. There comes a time when it is appropriate to have the ability to see what is really there in another human being without being distracted by the form of the body in which that Being resides.

When a normal male looks at a female, what does he see? He sees a face and hair, breasts, legs, hips, fanny; he focuses on the body. As long as that male exercises his right to think in sexual terms, that is what he is going to see every time he comes in contact with a woman. In short, his superficial surveillance will rarely if ever see past *the physical facade* to the real person underneath.

The mental disciplines involved with celibacy are centered on the refocusing of the self away from sexual interaction, and that means all of the kinds of sexual interaction. This is not an easy discipline, especially in this day and age when we are constantly being assaulted by all sorts of sexual imagery (probably half the ads you see on TV have some sort of sexual content to them).

Then there is human genetics with which to deal, that part of the self that provides us all with the driving instincts that scream for a response from the opposite sex. Consider the dreaded *involuntary erection*. It does have to do with instinct; it is a common problem amongst males; but what most people don't seem to realize is that it doesn't have to be a problem.¹⁹

¹⁸ We obviously aren't talking about the New Age celibacy here. For those of you who don't know, New Age celibacy suggests that a couple should abstain from sex for a month, or at least until the two are so horny they can hardly stand it, then break the fast with an entire week of wild and crazy love-making. Once complete, the cycle is repeated.

I wouldn't want to be the one to break the news, should you know anyone who still follows this practice, but this is not celibacy. This is reining the self in sexually until the desires are so riotous that the child is about to explode, then relieving the situation by having sex. It reminds me of one of the teachers at my school who used to fast by, "not eating until noon, then eating like a pig for five minutes, then not eat until 6, then stuffing herself for five minutes, etc." In my country, we don't call that fasting. We call it *not eating between meals*.

¹⁹ An interesting response to this observation is that even small babies get erections. This is true, though from this view you have no idea where the Being animating the body has been or what it has done in previous lives. You may have a kid who was once one hot number; it wouldn't be at all weird for the self to have brought with it within its package of skandas fairly well defined tendencies toward overt sexual behavior.

Humans can make their own instinct. If one chooses not to wallow in the sexual thoughtforms that will inevitably excite the proud owner, a male can move to a point where he simply isn't sexually excited at the drop of a hat (or the swish of a skirt). It may not be something a typical male would want to excise from his world, but that is not the point. When all is said and done, involuntary erections are not as involuntary as one might think.

Still, this is the Kaliyuga; the cycle when the sexual force fields are constantly being dangled in front of people. Following a celibate's path is bound to be difficult, if for no other reason than the fact that the celibate is swimming upstream against some amazingly strong thoughtforms. It requires the individual to be awake and alert; it means the individual is constantly at attention so as to see what is coming at the self; so as not to be caught drifting mindlessly off into these sexual thought-patterns that are being projected so powerfully.

Nevertheless, those who follow this kind of path say that becoming free of the ebb and flow of these instinctual patterns, even if it means foregoing sensations most young adults would delight in experiencing, is worth it in the long run. In short, exercising celibacy is not the horror the child-self would make it out to be. It is simply a refocusing one's attention away from a basically primal interplay that goes on between guys and girls, and toward disciplines, activities, and actions the celibate thinks are more important in a spiritual sense.

And if it additionally allows the doer of the discipline to see other human beings more clearly, so much the better.^{20, 21}

²⁰ I once had a student ask, "If that is so, then do guys see guys more clearly than girls see guys because there is no sexual tension?" The answer to that is "not really," but for reasons that may not be obvious.

The problem is that most people are so inattentive and scattered that they are rarely in a position to see anything clearly. Guys know what other guys are thinking because most guys have the same things on their minds: food and sex. It has nothing to do with sexual distraction, it has to do with common experience.

Given humanity's lack of observation, all sexual tension does between a guy and a girl is to add another level of haze to situations. What is unfortunate is that this additional confusion often leads people into accepting situations, even actively courting situations, that a more clear-sighted individual wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole.

²¹ The one thing we haven't talked about in this section is homosexuality. When you are looking at life from the perspective of *Consciousnesses experiencing in matter*, you find that topics like this are very complex. As such, I will make only one comment.

Although different groups within the East have different views about homosexuality, the perspective we are examining maintains the following: If individuals choose to exercise their sexuality in homosexual ways, karma will respond to that choice in whatever way is appropriate for the Beings involved. That may sound ominous, but it is not. As far as

this view is concerned, the only time sexual intercourse is acceptable in a spiritual sense is when it is entered into to create a vehicle for experience for another human Being. Using the sexual energies for any other reason is not where one ought to go.

What that means is that homosexual activity is not condoned, *but neither is most heterosexual activity.*

MEDITATION 1

A man approached a spiritual Teacher seated by a stream, sat down, then asked, "What must I do to reach enlightenment?"

The Teacher said, "Look into the stream."

As the man did, the Teacher grabbed him by the back of the neck and forced his head under the water, holding it there for a very long time. Finally, with the man's arms frantically flailing about, the Teacher released him and he came up gasping for breath.

"When you want enlightenment as badly as you wanted that breath," said the Teacher, "then you will make way for its coming."

Why is enlightenment something that so few attain? Because the child-self in most of us is neither ready nor willing to take the step.

Why is that? (Haven't you been listening?) Because the child-self within is neither ready nor willing to take the step.

commentary from an Indian sage

Reincarnation is an appealing, intellectually sound philosophic tenet in which many Americans believe (a Gallup poll pegs 40% of the American population accepting the idea). Furthermore, it is not uncommon for people who believe in reincarnation to maintain that they are not afraid to die. After all, if human beings are really Consciousnesses beyond the body, then death is not an end of anything. Death is just a transition from one state to another.

The idea that you and I are Awarenesses that experience through these expendable vehicles called *bodies* is all fairly easy to accept . . . until the tests come back from the medical lab saying your cancer (or whatever) is terminal and it's time to die. Then everything changes. The intellect turns off and the gut turns on. "Jesus H. Christ," the child thinks, "it really *is*

going to happen . . . “

For those who have never come face to face with their own personal death, it is hard to visualize how this feels. I, with my melanomic nose, have had the thrill and have lived to tell about it. It was quite an education in the ways of the child. I remember my initial reaction was a lot like the reaction I used to have when I was a kid and my mom would take me to the doctor to get a shot. We’d walk through that door, I’d smell that alcohol, and every instinctual fiber of my self would scream, “Run.”

That’s the way the lesser-side of the child feels when it is time to die (assuming there is time to think about it beforehand). The only difference is that when the time comes, there *is* no place to run. It’s like riding a high-speed, brakeless bobsled right over a cliff--there is absolutely nothing you can do about it except go.

To the child self, this kind of helplessness is absolutely terrifying.

Why? Life is a known quantity. Even when it’s uncomfortable or hard, it is a familiar. A wife who stays with a husband who beats her; a mother who will not release the memory of a dead child; a man who stays in a job he hates: these are all examples of the instinct-driven side of the child-self scrambling for security *through familiarity*. Lose that security and the child often reverts to sucking its metaphoric thumb. For the child-self, losing a body is about the biggest calamity it can imagine.

Psychologists tell us that the terminally ill go through several stages: The first is a denial that something is happening that cannot be “fixed.” Then comes anger, then acceptance. These are relatively common responses of the child whenever it runs into anything it is powerless to affect.

Assuming the personal self isn’t so undone that it goes into a stupor (i.e., stays stuck in one of the first two stages), the third stage is the most important from the standpoint of the evolving self. Why? Because the prospect of *death within my lifetime* provides the child with the opportunity and motivation to consider things it to that point had only peripherally thought about during its tenure in body.

This is true no matter what the individual’s philosophic leanings. Questions like, “What is going to happen to me?” and “What have I done with my life?” come to mind. If the individual has a strong religious affiliation, the child often clings even more strenuously to that affiliation in hopes of salvation and a happy ending. If the individual is an atheist, he or she may reconsiders the possibility that there is more to existence than meets the eye. In all cases, it is not unusual for an individual to begin to look appreciatively at the good things he or she has thoughtlessly

taken for granted in life (again, assuming the individual is not completely mired in self-pity or anger). Maybe it's the love and devotion of a wife (or husband) and family; maybe it's the amusement of having dinner with close friends, or going out on a frosty December night to see the Christmas and Hanukkah lights decorating the neighborhood, or enjoying a baseball game, or sitting quietly reading a good book, or working in the yard, or walking through a living forest, or going skiing, or simply taking the time to admire a flower.

In short, the prospect of imminent death reorders one's thinking entirely. While the lesser side feels oppressed by the magnitude of the change that is about to occur, the higher side of the child finds itself open to a view of reality that is otherwise normally obscured by the trivia of life.¹

From that meditative perspective, tiny enlightenments can come. For example, the self may begin to consider all the actions it has taken in this life that will determine where it goes next (a Jehovah's Witness, for instance, may hope that he or she has converted enough sinners to end up in the top one-hundred and forty-four-thousand;² a Protestant may hope that his or her acts and faith will be found worthy enough to allow the self to go to heaven; and a Moslem may hope the same as the Protestants--that his or her acts and faith will be found worthy).

People who believe in reincarnation, at least the Buddhist's version, might begin to think about the *qualities* they have built into themselves. After all, if your actions in previous lives have helped to form the kinds of experiences you have been drawn into in this life, how you live *this* life and how you choose to THINK *now* must be intimately related to what you will become in the future. What you visualize and focus on now becomes a temporary part of the fabric of your self.

What this means is that the more you visualize, say, mayhem toward someone or something you are angry at, the more you make that kind of thinking a part of yourself. There are Western psychologists who maintain that it is OK to be angry, to let your mind experience rage when you feel

¹ Understand that for simplicity sake, I have made this entirely too clear-cut to match up with reality. Even if an individual is fortunate enough to begin to see life more clearly as a consequence of imminent death, the lesser side of the child self doesn't just go to sleep. It is still there, being depressed and angry and generally debilitated. When the higher-side ends its pondering, the mind falls back into the normally slack state that characterizes most of one's life, giving the lesser-side the opportunity to complain and chafe about the awfulness of it all.

² The Jehovah's Witness faith believes that only a certain number--144,000--will be allowed to enter heaven. Where you stand in line depends upon how many people you have converted.

you have been wronged. Better to *think* mayhem than to do mayhem, or so they say.

The Eastern view we have been examining doesn't agree with this. Thinking in this mode is like mentally practicing the taking of actions that the higher side of yourself would normally never agree to. When you visualize mayhem, no matter how righteous you feel about it, you are steeping yourself in thoughtforms that are negative, heavy, and gross. By pouring energy into visualizations that are spiritually violent, you are making those images a prominent part of your mental world. As you do so, the qualities inherent within those images attach themselves to you, sooner or later showing themselves in your actions.³

You may think, "So what? I don't mind having a little negativity in my life. It gives me an edge."

The chances are good that you won't continue to think so when you are drawn into contact with others who are like minded. How would you like being a small child in war torn Bosnia, for instance? Not fun!⁴

You *are* what you *think*. Where you "go" next, if reincarnation and karma are a reality, is intimately related to what you are building into yourself right now.

In short, *you are your own parent*.

Most people don't think about things like this until death is staring them in the face (and some don't even then). For that reason, the prospect of imminent death can bring considerable enlightenment if the individual is able to accept it.

There are those, though, who have chosen not to wait for the draw of impending death to motivate them toward a deeper understanding of themselves and life. For them, among other possibilities, there is meditation.

Meditation is one of the Eastern concepts that most enthralls westerners. Aside from the possibility that *the universe in general* and *life in particular* may be the consequence of a great meditation going on within the

³ I have always wondered how television executives rationalize their work. On the one hand, they steadfastly maintain that negative imagery on TV (i.e., the constant exploitation of woman and sex and violence, etc.) doesn't affect the behavior of those who view it. On the other hand, they charge hundreds of thousands of dollars for merchants to advertise their products claiming that advertising *can* affect the way people think. The dichotomy is striking.

⁴ Note that there are lots of other possible reasons why you might be drawn into a life in a war torn country besides being negative in the way you deal with life.

One Self, there seem to be two general forms of meditation occupying human-kind these days: self-oriented meditations and self-less meditations. A brief run-down of a few of each follows:

--In the self-oriented category:

Not surprisingly, some of the most popular forms of meditation are “feel good” meditations. Meditations in this class have one thing in common: for a short time, they give the practitioner the illusion of peacefulness.

Probably the best known example of this is Transcendental Meditation. T.M., as it’s known to its followers, was brought to the west by a guru who originally billed himself “the Glory of the Himalayas.” He later changed this carnival-style moniker to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. One of his greatest coups was attracting the Beatles to his ashram in India. That infatuation didn’t last long, but it did give him world-wide press.⁵ After the Maharishi brought this style of meditation to the U.S., T.M. spread through college campuses in the 1960’s like wild-fire.

The meditation was easy. Upon entering the fold, each new disciple was given his or her special *mantra* (a mantra is a word, phrase, or series of phrases that embody spiritual significance). The mantra was suppose to be tailored to the individual *vibration* and *spiritual quality* of the disciple and, as a consequence, was never to be shared with other individuals. According to the guru, telling one’s mantra would diminish its spiritual effectiveness.⁶

In any case, the disciple was instructed to silently repeat his or her mantra over and over again. In doing so, assuming the individual was concentrated enough, inner tensions would be replaced by a kind of peacefulness. Having become peaceful, one could then begin to help others (or so the line went).

That was the hook used to make the technique appear less selfish (i.e., when you feel good, you can then help others). Of course, that reasoning

⁵ In fact, the Beatles stayed with the guru several months, leaving only after he made what appeared to be unseemly advances toward one of the female members of their entourage. According to a recent “History of the Beatles” movie aired on public TV, their final analysis of the man was that he was an OK guy who had some knowledge about spiritual matters but who wasn’t a whole lot different as far as wants and desires goes than anyone else. In short, he wasn’t the spiritual teacher they originally thought him to be.

⁶ It turned out to be more than that. When drop-outs began talking to each other it became evident that almost everyone had the *same* mantra. According to one highly placed defector, mantra assignment was governed by age: if you were 20 to 30 years old you got one mantra; people 30 to 40 years old got another; etc.

conveniently ignored the fact that an individual with a true spiritual bent will help others no matter how they feel (that is part of what it *means* to be spiritual), but it was nevertheless the rationale behind the discipline.

In short, T.M. was and still is really nothing more than a technique designed to make its user temporarily feel good, and it works.⁷ What wasn't evident to anybody when it first arrived was that focusing on *anything* to the exclusion of all else will do the same thing. Why do you suppose executives play golf? They don't do it because they *like* being aggravated and frustrated to the point of distraction. They do it because it takes their minds off the *real* problems they have at the office or at home. T.M. does the same thing.

Another feel-good meditation that people, mainly kids, seem to be attracted to is *staring into a candle while blanking the mind*. This isn't really a *meditation*, but it is popular amongst dabblers. Because it has some potential for being dangerous, a few words are appropriate.

This kind of exercise is designed to draw the mind into a blank state. There are three points to note about the exercise: First, it is based on the same principle as T.M. with the exception that it requires the doer to focus intently on *nothing* instead of focusing intently on one's mantra.

Second, some believe it can be an avenue to extinction. That seemingly perverse thought is based on two ancient Eastern ideas that have gone awry. When an individual comes into enlightenment, the lesser side of the child self is so *changed* that for all intents and purposes, the lesser side becomes extinct. Extinction is also referred to when talking about Nirvana--an expansion of the self that is so profound that the doer literally becomes one with God. Because nirvana is an experience that is far beyond normal human comprehension, talking about it in regular language is impossible. As such, its nature is characterized in ancient Eastern dialogue in the form of a paradox--as the *negation* of what it really is (it is sometimes described as "a blowing out into nothingness"). In relatively recent times, both of these ideas and the language used to present them have been misinterpreted, hence the belief of some that blanking into extinction has some spiritual significance.

The final point is more practical. If the Eastern metaphysical views are accurate, staring into a candle can be dangerous. Why? It defocusses

⁷ I should probably note that there are a lot of very nice people who do T.M., and that there has been research done that suggests that it can help people with high blood pressure and other stress related problems (then again, lovingly stroking a cat can also lower blood pressure).

the mind and, in doing so, can open up the individual to the astral.⁸

--In the self-less category:

A popular form of group meditation is the *healing meditation*. Never meant to replace medical intervention (if you have a cracked spleen, you aren't going to ask a meditation group to fix it), a healing meditation is designed to coherently project thought-energy in an effort to harmonize the flows of energy in a person who is suffering. Although it can affect physical ailments, it is primarily used on behalf of people who are having psychological problems.

We have already talked about a meditation like this, though at the time it probably wasn't obvious. If you will remember the "I'm one of the bad guys" story, my mom's friend (Marianne) was having serious psychic problems. What was it that the woman from Jess Stern's book did that helped her out of her predicament? It was a healing meditation. The woman and her friends worked to project *thought* and *energy* around Marianne to help her close out the astral entities. I can't say for sure that they actually succeeded. What is important here is that this is an example of one type of healing meditation.⁹

This is not a beginner's meditation. We are discussing it here because there are two things one should be careful about when dealing with healing meditations. As far as the East is concerned, healings fail because it is not karmically correct for the individual to be relieved of the teachings involved with the problem. In this light, approaching a healing from a personal, ego-bound standpoint can be a disaster if the healer refuses to do his or her best, then let karma run its course. A healer can provide energy and a certain amount of temporary auric order upon which the infirmed individual can build, but from there the infirmed individual must take responsibility for him or herself.

The other point people aren't generally aware of is that when a person goes into a meditation designed to project *thought-energy*, there is said

⁸ This is not to say you can't sit next to a roaring fire and enjoy the flames as they leap and cavort. What we've been talking about here is a concentrated effort to blank the mind, using a flame as the focal point for that effort. That is, as my mother used to say, a whole other kettle of fish.

⁹ Assuming such things are possible, and assuming the woman's group really did effect a change in Marianne's porous aura, etc., the individuals in this group must have been relatively powerful in their focus. If the East is right about such things, attempting a meditation like this without considerable training and very solid motivation can get one into BIG TIME TROUBLE. Challenging earthbounds and astral entities is not a trivial matter--it can be a deadly affair.

to be a considerable amount of auric activity--energy flows--within the personal complex of the individual. Doing this in consonance with others adds another dimension because it is not unusual for a resonance of sorts to be set up between the people within the group. If one is well tuned to the other group members, this is not a problem. If one is not, the effect can be aurically and psychologically unsettling. In general, doing group meditations with strangers, people who are highly emotional, or people with questionable motives, is not a very good idea.

A useful meditation for one who is just starting out is broadly associated with introspection. An example is the attempt to understand a possibly painful situation by asking the question, "What is it in the way I'm dealing with life that has drawn me into this situation and motivated me to react as I have? What does karma want me to see?" In other words, examining friction within one's life can lead to a better understanding of one's self.¹⁰

The approach is good in a spiritual sense because it allows the individual to see the self more clearly. You can't change inappropriate habits if you don't know they're there. This meditation gives the self a tool for getting to know the lesser-side of the child more intimately. But there is more to the situation . . .

When a not-so-good habit pattern is just beginning to form within the self (example: my fledgling assumption at North Hollywood High that I was due respect, not because I was respectable but because I was a teacher), simply identifying the out-of-line beliefs is often enough to overcome it. Why? *New* habits haven't had the time to build around themselves the thought-energy needed to really entrench themselves deeply into the self. When one is trying to move in a benevolent, spiritual sense, simply identifying such patterns is usually enough for the self to shake them loose.

¹⁰ It is interesting how the child can sense the improprieties of others but is oblivious to its own. It is even more interesting how the child tends to be almost hyper-sensitive to negative characteristics in others *that it also animates*. When you are driving on the freeway, for instance, you probably don't like being cut off by another car. It makes you mad because the other guy is thoughtlessly putting you at risk. But when was the last time you put other people in jeopardy due to your own thoughtlessness?

Most people are usually tolerant of their own shortcomings (assuming they are observant enough to see them), but they are fiercely intolerant whenever they see mirrored in another's actions their own shortcomings.

Bottom line: Look at the actions others take that send you ballistic--it can tell you volumes about qualities that reside within your own child-self.

Deeply seated, long-standing patterns are not so easy to deal with. In such a case, there needs to be an active effort to understand why the child shelters these patterns within the self. Only after one sees to the heart of the matter can the individual pull energy out of the old patterns while simultaneously directing energy into reinforcing new, constructive responses.

Unfortunately, this takes a not-so-easily-acquired ingredient to work. It takes *attention*.¹¹

There is absolutely no way you can find yourself in an emotionally tense situation, have your buttons pushed, get mad (or petulant, or whiny, or whatever), then think “OOPS” and pull out of the emotion in mid-flight. When mental energy flows into a response like that, it almost always has to run its course before sanity returns and you can look at the happening with anything close to a clear mind.

What this means is that to effect change within the child self, one cannot be mentally scattered. There has to be a constant attention-to-the-moment. Only in that way will you be awake enough to direct the child’s response into constructive channels when something irritating happens (versus having the self respond by mindlessly funneling itself into the old patterns).

Holding this kind of attention is an example of what is called a *walking meditation*.¹²

There is another side to the idea of meditation that needs to be examined before we finish. It has to do with the nature of *thought*.

Is there a difference between my thinking the thought, “Love thy neighbor as thyself,” and Christ thinking the same thought? As far as the

¹¹ There is an interesting story out of India about this: A woman went to a guru known for his compassion and wisdom and said, “I wish to move upon my spiritual path more quickly. Is there something you could tell me that would help?”

The teacher replied, “Certainly: ATTENTION.”

After a short silence, the woman said, “Thank you for that insight, but I am still a little confused. Could you say a little more?”

The teacher replied, “Certainly: ATTENTION, ATTENTION.”

The woman bowed reverently, then said, “Thank you for your time and your teachings, but could you expand on what you have said just a little more?”

The teacher replied, “Certainly: ATTENTION, ATTENTION, ATTENTION.”

¹² A *walking meditation* requires the aspirant to be constantly tuned to some attitude or discipline (in the case of *attention*, the focus is in being completely aware of what one is doing and what is going on around one’s self AT ALL TIMES). Another powerful *walking meditation* is that of *gratitude*. *Walking meditations* are quite common in Bhakti yoga (the yoga of devotion).

East is concerned, the answer is “yes.”

Thought has within its structure many subtle levels. As you attempt to envelop the idea of, say, a flower, you will certainly notice its beauty and, possibly, delicate structure. But you are also liable to find yourself musing about the flower’s relationship to the plant--how the flower attracts insects which, in turn, allow for pollination. That, in turn, might send you into contemplation about how interrelated things are--how plants need insects to procreate; how interconnected nature is in general.

On top of that (or underlying it, depending upon how you look at it), you might notice that there is emotional content there. For you, flowers might embody romance, or they could be associated with unhappiness (maybe there was a lily on your grandpa’s chest during his funeral).

Along with all this, there could be a tone of superiority around all of your mental activity. Your child may be terribly impressed with itself for the very fact that it is contemplating the question at all. “How very spiritual,” it might well think.

In short, within the *living thought* you have created around the relatively benign idea of *flower*, there will be layered threads upon layered threads of mental energy coming from all sorts of seemingly extraneous sources.

My set of threads will be different from yours. I’ve been different places, seen different things, had different experiences. The thought-patterns that I animate are spliced to my specifications.

So back to our quote about loving thy neighbor. When I think, “Love thy neighbor as thyself,” the thoughts I generate have all sorts of motives and extraneous mental chatter randomly interwoven into them. The thoughts of a Christ, on the other hand, will have within them a fabric of purity.

What this means is that if one could meditate around a precept that had been animated by a truly evolved spiritual teacher, one should be able to selectively touch the purity and power and experience of that Teacher by touching his or her *living thought*.

More on a lark than anything else, I decided to try just such an exercise a number of years ago. The meditation I chose was, “What did Christ mean when he said, ‘Love thy neighbor as thyself.’”

I chose that phrase because the words seemed self explanatory (there was no reason to choose something that was overtly obscure). My approach was straight forward: I sat down for five minutes every night just before bed and quietly considered the admonition.

During the first few nights, I looked to see how the words were related to the way I was living my life. Each night thereafter, I would quickly review what I had seen the nights before, then attempt to push into the idea more deeply. I did this for almost four weeks. Then one night, something unusual happened.

Two minutes into the meditation, my mind just elevated, rotated, and suddenly I was seeing the words from an entirely different perspective. It took me completely by surprise. One moment I was looking at the same old phrase, the next moment I found myself staring into a meaning and significance that was as different from the old as night is from day.

Just after it happened, I remember thinking, “My God, Christ didn’t mean *that*, he meant *THAT*!”

I continued with the discipline. Each night I would re-consider the superficial meaning of the words (that interpretation was still there should I choose to select it), then I would move into the more expanded perception and continue to delve from there.

Three weeks later, I was still more befuddled to find it happen again. In the blink of an eye, everything changed. From looking at the quote from what I thought was a terribly insightful perspective, I went to an even more expanded view. “I’ll be damned,” I thought in sheer amazement. “Christ didn’t mean *THAT*, he meant *THAT!!!*”

All three perspectives were complete unto themselves, but each had an entirely different level of subtlety to it. Yet if I’d been asked to choose words that most completely embodied the wisdom cradled in each, I could not for the life of me have come up with a better phrase *for any one of them* than, “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” That phrase said it perfectly for each very different case.

When a highly evolved spiritual Being puts a complex idea into the stream of human thinking, that Being builds into that subtle form wisdom and power that is beyond anything you or I could create. It isn’t evident on the surface: my “Love thy neighbor,” uses the same words as Christ’s “Love thy neighbor.” But the two are as different as apples and oranges. Why? Because a complex train of thought that is an *idea* carries within it the motives and intentions of the thinker.¹³

In short, ideas carry a kind of signature with them.

You can now understand why meditation upon the principles laid

¹³ In fact, if you take the time to look at your own thoughts, you will find that there are motives under motives in everything you do (hence, in everything you think).

down by the Avatars is considered to be such an important thing for a spiritually motivated individual to do. Successfully carrying out such a meditation quite literally touches the nature of the great Beings who put the thoughtforms into motion. This is not an intellectual process; the Truth and profound reality embodied within true spiritual teachings can only scantily be approached using words. The key is meditation and intuition. As expressed in the Hindu *Upandishads*:

There the eye goes not,
Speech goes not, nor the mind (i.e., intellect).
We know not, we understand not
How one would teach it.

Chapter 20

MEDITATION III

Oh, Lord. Why do I do what I would not?

St. Paul's lament

Giving people the chance to experience contemplative meditation in a safe, controlled environment can be a very useful teaching tool. One such meditation has been used in my E. Phil. classes for years. Originally designed to allow students the opportunity to see their own child-self in action, the approach is relatively straight forward.

During the first of three gatherings, the students are asked to close their eyes and consider the question, "Where am I?"

After five minutes, they are requested to shift their attention to the thought: "Attention." (Students often open their eyes at this junction and ask, "What do you mean?" My response is, "Meditate on it" . . . it sounds hokie, but it works).

After ten minutes of being "attentive," the students are asked to go back for two minutes to the question, "Where am I?"

At the end, I ask for comments.

The reactions are always varied. Some find that time zips by, others think the session will never end. Some take a very physical interpretation of the question, "Where am I?" thinking, "I'm in Mr. Fletcher's physics room; no, I'm the middle of campus; no, I'm in the middle of Pasadena; etc." Others are more existential as they ponder, "Where am I in my life?"¹

¹ Second semester is a very turbulent time in the lives of high school seniors. Within months they will all be leaving the security of their family, friends and high school to go off to college. For most, they don't yet know which universities are going to accept them, what it will be like being away from home, whether they'll make new friends easily, whether they'll succeed.

In short, "Where am I in my life," at least for most of the students, is a place of enormous transition and uncertainty.

As for the “Attention” part of the exercise, the students are, again, all over the map. Some hear sounds around the building: the clock ticking, the sound of water running, people talking outside the room. Others began to mentally watch themselves: some can feel their heart beating; some sit so still that they completely lose track of their body. A very few even observe their mind at work as it moves from one thought to another.

Once everyone has had a chance to speak, I make my point: Assuming *thought* has a reality of its own, what you are thinking and how you are thinking is intimately related to *where you are* in the inner worlds. Because people’s thinking is so often fractured and disjointed--going in all sorts of directions at once--most of us spend most of our time spread out all over that *inner landscape*. Rarely are we really *here*; mostly we are *there*, and *there*, and *there* . . .

What is nice about this exercise is that the students get to see first-hand exactly what this means. When they enter the meditation, they are mentally buzzing about last period’s test, about the big argument they had with mom that morning, about that hot new tune on the pop charts.

The meditation draws all the pieces of the self from *out there* to *right here, right now*. Students get to *feel* the difference between being spread out all over the universe and being to at least some degree one-pointed. *Where they are* when they exit the meditation is a whole other place than *where they were* when they entered it.

The same format is followed during the second gathering, with one big exception. A few minutes into the exercise I begin tapping my pencil on the table in a seemingly mindless way.

The history of this move is a bit exotic. A number of years ago, the clock in my room went berserk three minutes after we began one of these meditations. It proceeded to tick loudly (spell that LOUDLY) and erratically for the rest of the sitting. By the time we stopped, the kids were ready to rip it off the wall and pummel it into silence.

At the time, I had intended to spend the after-meditation period talking about avatars, but the students were so agitated by the clock that it gave me a great opening to discuss the idea of disharmony in one’s life. As I had no subsequent way of duplicating the clock phenomenon in years to come, I devised the tapping-pencil routine.

When I do this, most of the students realize in short order that I am tapping my pencil on purpose. What is interesting is how they attempt to

cope with it. A few realize that I am not playing with their minds for the amusement of it, that there must be an *educational reason* why I am being so apparently obnoxious. Once they come to that conclusion--once they *understand the situation*--everything changes and they find themselves able to focus the mind on other things (this is very similar to how *understanding* fit into the *North Hollywood High School experience* I mentioned a few chapters ago).

The majority, on the other hand, try to make themselves *not hear the sound*. Of course, the more they try, the more sensitized they become, the louder the tapping gets, and the more irritation grows. In short, fighting the experience only makes it loom larger for them.

With the students having just experienced this inner stress, the question *how does one deal with disharmony within the self* rather naturally arises.

There is an unusual quote in the Bible that seems hard to believe on the surface but that may be intimately related to this question. The quote is that of Christ saying, "Resist not evil."

If the East is correct and Christ was an avatar, then some of his teachings were surely directed at *the people* while some were inner teachings directed at the many chelas that undoubtedly came around him. It is possible that this quote is an encapsulation of one of the teachings that he directed toward that latter, select few.

How so?

When a spiritually motivated individual looks into the self in meditation, it is not uncommon for the individual to be mildly unsettled by the basically selfish, heavy thinking that characteristically underlies even the most apparently noble actions animated by the child-self. What is truly *horrifying* is how unmovable the lesser side of the child-self is when it comes time to make changes for the better (hence, St. Paul's lament, "Oh Lord, why do I do what I would not?").

Geneticists maintain that wants and desires are a consequence of heredity. They believe that people are born with propensities that catapult them mentally in particular directions.²² Behaviorists maintain that wants and desires are a consequence of one's interaction with family, friends, religion, culture; in generally, with one's surrounds. According to them, *experience* is what shapes the self.

²² There is nothing in the Eastern view we've been examining that would contradict this, assuming one doesn't take the next step and proclaim that the self has no option but to mindlessly accept and conform to those directions.

Although both genetics and environment have something to do with habitual responses and thought patterns, Eastern metaphysics suggests that humans need not be chained to environmental and genetic predetermination. Humans can think creatively; humans can choose which mental patterns they will animate. The rub comes when the lesser side of the child-self wants to follow a path that entertains one set of often perverse thoughts and actions while the higher side of the child-self wants to go another way.

An interesting example of a man who undoubtedly encountered this problem was St. Augustine. St. Augustine was a very pious man who, I'm sure, very much wanted to lead a holy life. Unfortunately, he was besieged with raging carnal fantasies. His response? He went out into the desert to cleanse himself. Three days in a cave he spent battling mental apparitions of voluptuous women who appeared all about him, each attempting to seduce him from his path.

Did he succeed in completely vanquishing the problem? Maybe. Maybe not. The *point of interest* here is in his method. By attacking the problem as he did, he focused enormous amounts of attention and energy on *dealing with sex*. In doing so, to the assured glee of the *living thought-forms* associated with that line of thinking, he made those thoughtforms even larger in his mind than they might otherwise have been. By struggling with the offending *thoughts*, he inadvertently focused energy into them and, in doing so, effectively fed them.

That is where the quote, "*Resist not evil*," fits in. I don't think anyone believes that when Christ made his statement he was telling people to allow evil to run rampant. Instead, if the East's views are accurate, it is probable that he was making a statement based on wisdom rooted in an understanding of the psychology of the child-self.

Any attempt to mentally beat the child's desires into submission only heightens the child's feeling of panic about losing something it has come to depend upon for its survival. Escalating a mental battle to get rid of such patterns only leads to intransigence on the part of the child and an enlivening of the very thoughtforms one is trying to eliminate.³

³ Interesting parallel: A noisy human child can be beaten into silence, but what do you find when the beating is ended? The child is silent, but it is also full of inner rage, full of desire to *get back* through disruption whenever possible, full of all the qualities that will undoubtedly make it a very angry adult. What *isn't* gained is a solving of the inner problems that motivated the child to make noise in the first place. If anything, the harsh treatment simply drives those problems deeper into the self.

The personal self is the same. You can temporarily beat it into submission, but sooner or later the perverse side of you is going to rebel and come back with a vengeance.

Within the subtlety of meditation, in other words, the more one actively fights to suppress unsavory thoughts, the bigger the thoughtforms get (just as the more my students tried *not* to hear the tapping of my pencil during the meditation, the more sensitized they became to it).

Christ's suggestion? Don't tussle and battle with the offending patterns. Attempt to understand the root-cause of the patterns, then put your attention on something else.⁴ In the case of my students, those who recognized that my purposefully irritating tapping was not being done on a lark--that I was intentionally doing it for what must be an educational purpose--they were the ones who, with that understanding, were able to refocus their attention away from the disturbance and onto other things.

In general, once understood, focusing one's attention and energy away from a deviant pattern moves that pattern to slowly, if reluctantly, die of starvation.⁵

The last meditation-gathering follows the same outline as the first with another big exception. Half-way through, when all is quiet and you can hear a pin drop, I take a deep breath, pray I don't blow it, then CLAP my hands once as loud as I possibly can. Students invariably rise up a

⁴ This is very similar to the yogic practice of pulling attention and energy from one chakra (the lower chakra associated with sex, for instance) and focusing it into another chakra (the heart chakra associated with compassionate action).

⁵ It isn't surprising that science might disagree with all this. *Drugs* produce physical dependency; *hormones* produce sexual obsession. Both are chemically based. *Everyone knows that mental addictions are rooted in physical chemistry*, or so they say.

Although chemical and hormonal factors may play a role in the way an individual relate to potentially addictive substances and emotions, the East suggests that there may be more to it. In the late sixties, one of Timothy Leary's cohorts went to India to find a guru who could tell him what LSD was. Upon reaching a man who might be able to give him his answer, he presented a package of twenty or thirty LSD-spiked sugar cubes--enough to kill ten men-- and asked, "What is this?"

The guru said, "May I see them?" The guru was given the package at which time he proceeded to ingest the entire bundle before the seeker could stop him. With that, the guru went into meditation.

The Indian stayed in meditation for three days with the man watching him continuously (fearing, I might add, that the guru would die from the massive overdose). At the end of the third day, the guru opened his eyes.

"Well," asked the man, "What is it?"

"It is nothing," said the guru, who then rose and walked on his way.

The moral of the story? The mind may have the potential to exercise more control over the body's chemistry than science realizes. If so, it may be the mind that has the ultimate power, and it may be the child's use of the mind that ultimately manifest addictions and obsessions.

couple of inches out of their seats when the bang comes, then they look at me indignantly. I counsel them to continue, with the last ten minutes going undisturbed.

My comments are several:

By the time the students get to this point in the three-day exercise, they are usually so bored they can hardly stand it. The child-self in most people is all-interest when it comes to new and unusual experiences, but it doesn't generally like doing things it deems unexciting or restrictive. Doing the same old meditation . . . again . . . is usually enough to send most personal selves over the top.⁶

THIS IS WHY the true spiritual teachers don't give their chelas formal meditations to do (whereas plenty of pseudo-spiritual teachers in town are busy exercising control over their followers by handing out meditations willy nilly). Suggesting *possibilities* for meditative disciplines does occur between a chela and his or her master, but the insightful teacher knows that in the long run, only SELF-DEvised disciplines will be accepted and karmically right for an individual's child self.

Getting back to my students, what this means is that by the time the CLAP comes, the kids are bored to tears and have begun to mentally float.

In this state of defocus, the clap serves to vigorously pull them out of their stupor to *attention* HERE, NOW. It focuses them so fully that they experience what is, under the right conditions, a very useful, very stimulating phenomenon; the galvanizing of the self to *one-pointedness*.

There are all sorts of stories about Zen monks who, while walking peacefully with their teacher, have been struck suddenly and violently by the teacher's staff. Why?

It is believed that when an aspirant is *ready*, after years, maybe lifetimes of effort, a *focusing of the mind beyond the norm* is needed to allow the individual to come into enlightenment. Pain can do just that.

This obviously isn't something that would work for just anyone (I can imagine myself walking around the room, whacking my physics students at appropriate intervals). When most people are attacked, their first reaction is irritation. Only a Being who has *become* compassion and harmlessness can possibly turn the focus generated by an explosive, painful circumstance like this into an extension of his or her life goal--to move

⁶ This is an interesting commentary on the child-self. The child is willing to start meditation but generally fights discipline once it has become *old hat*. On the perverse *other side of the coin*, it fights the discipline until it becomes a part of its way of life, then with time embraces the discipline even to the point of looking forward to doing it.

into deeper insight.

This is a part of the Zen tradition.

Finally, it's interesting to note that *life* is constantly providing metaphoric CLAP after CLAP as it deals us twists and unexpected turns. Why? Because karma is constantly trying to pull you and me into ATTENTION, to motivate us to think about things right under our nose, to wake us up. Just as the clap brought each student from *out there* to *right here*, so life tries hard to urge each of us from our little balls of instinctual self to the infinite spaces of awareness that exist within our greater Self.

WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN

It is better to die in battle than to emerge victorious. Is the victor not convinced that violence prevails? How seldom he perceives, until too late, that what he has gained at another's cost is nothing -- aye, and less than nothing. But he who dies in battle may have learned that nothingness. When he returns to earth for another existence, he may be wiser. He will at least be no more foolish. Whereas the victorious, convinced by violence, proceeds from one stupidity to worse.

*Talbot Mundy, from the novel
Tros of Samothrace*

Nonviolence says: No, evil is not corrected or arrested by an equal evil, but doubled, and to have recourse to it is to become a link in the chain of evil.

No, the end does not justify the means. Evil means spoil the best causes. If the end is just, the means must be so, too.

No, fear, compulsion, and force can never establish justice, any more than they can teach us truth. They can only twist conscience. The righting of conscience is what is called justice.

*Lanza del Vasto,
from Warriors of Peace (Knopf, 1974)*

We want happiness, but we forget that we live on a planet of teaching with a long chain of karma trailing us.

unattributed

In the last chapter, we talked about the psychology of the child-self and how inner disharmony might be approached within the meditations of a spiritually motivated individual. It is not uncommon for such discussions to lead to broader topics. Specifically, how should one respond to evil *out there* in the so-called real world, and how should one deal with awful happenings? This chapter will approach those queries.

The first thing people ask when they discuss terrible experiences is *why*? Why should anyone have to endure a terrible happening? What good could possibly come from such an act? How could it possibly be seen, even cosmically, as a positive thing? The Eastern view we have been examining has some interesting things to say about this.

We have all heard about people who are genuinely fine, kind, good people whose life has seen one personal disaster after another. How could this be? Ignoring the fact that there are as many paths in life as there are Beings, one interesting possibility looms large.

If this Eastern view is a true and accurate reflection of the way things are, there will be individuals who have spent effort in previous lives trying to cultivate noble qualities like compassion and lovingness. Assuming that that be the case, it would not be surprising to find karma testing such an individual to see how completely that self had made those qualities a part of the self. Testing on this level can come in many forms. There can be many small stresses that cumulatively work to strip the superficial veneer from the self, leaving bare the individual *core beliefs* (or, at least, the uncensored beliefs the child-self has built into itself). Another possibility is that the testing could come as a specific, traumatic experience that violently pressures the self into exposure. Rape is one example of the latter.

Although this is certainly not the situation with all (again, as many paths as there are Beings), I happen to know a very wealthy, very elegant woman who was attacked and raped in her home a number of years ago. She did not enjoy the experience; I did not enjoy hearing about it. Rape is an awful thing to happen to anyone. Nevertheless, what surprised me about her story was that after the fact, unwittingly, she found herself motivated by the experience to become more involved in helping others. “If someone had come to me before the experience,” she said, “and told me that my social conscience was asleep, that I was a slug when it came to thinking beyond my own small self, I’d have probably looked at them blankly and thought to myself *what’s your problem*?” With the rape and the counseling that followed, I realized that I have a common *bond of pain* with others: with women of the ghetto, with abused women, with women

from all walks of life. And it dawned on me that all of those people needed help, help that I could give them.”

In short, she told me that the experience had been horrible, but that if it hadn't happened, the high point of her week would have still been *bridge on Tuesday* and *lunch out with the girls on Thursday*. Now she spends most of her time being useful in ways she never would have considered before the attack.

Does the fact that the experience helped the woman wake up make it an OK thing to have happened? Not as far as the personal self is concerned! Rape is still a horrendous thing to have to endure. Yet without that experience, by her own admission, that woman would still be sleepwalking past the misery and despair others feel on a daily basis. From the East's perspective, it took something very bad to illicit from the inner self of that woman something very good.

Such an experience might even be directed at a chela. If a wisp of anger hides behind that Being's facade of compassionate doings, being raped will bring it out. If there is a shadow of a tendency to take revenge when crossed, rape will bring it out (think about all the rape victims who would opt for the death penalty for their rapist if caught). If there is violence anywhere within the self, rape will bring it out.

Nobody in his or her right mind would blame a rape survivor for feeling any of those emotions. But if you happen to be a Being who is attempting to move *beyond the stream of humanity in a spiritual sense*, who is trying to follow in the footsteps of the Christs and the Buddhas, then identifying even the smallest bit of negativity within the self is important (you cannot change negative qualities if you don't see that they are there). As terrible as rape is, and as severe a test as it is, and as little as the child-self would want to endure it, there are Beings for whom such an experience can bring enlightenment.

On the other hand, what about the individual who has for many lives acted solely to satisfy the desires of its own child-self. Maybe the individual has come to enjoy the exercise of power over others, often being arrogantly thoughtless about the psychological pain they have inflicted in doing so. If these patterns are deeply rooted in the child, it should not be surprising to find karma sooner or later drawing that individual into vivid experience--harsh experience, even--in which the child finds itself in the position of the oppressed (reminds me of the *Biblical* quote, “And those who would be first will some day be last . . .”).

Selfishly, maliciously exercising power over people is a penetration of their psyche, a violence done against them, a removal of their freedom,

their dignity, their peace. In short, all the things that rape does to an individual in a physical sense, the exercise of selfishness can do to its victims in an inner sense. For a person who has strongly formed patterns of selfishness around themselves, the experience of rape might force the personal self into a wider perception of the kind of pain it has created for others. It is a harsh experience, but in the long run it may be the only chance karma has to shock a myopic, in-turned self out of its self-involved doldrums and into a less mired state.

I have just presented two possible reasons why someone might be drawn into a severe experience like rape. Are there others?

As I've said above (twice), there are as many reasons as there are victims.

So how does one deal with the topic of rape? When talking to a rape survivor, you are talking to someone who is probably in a considerable amount of inner turmoil. They don't need armchair philosophizing; they need love and support. It is not up to you or me to try to psyche out the karmic root-cause of their awful experience. We haven't the information required to do so (we have no idea where the individual has been or what they have done during most of this life, much less in their past twenty-five lives), and it is none of our business anyway. As a very wise school psychologist once told me, in these cases, often the best you can do for the individual is let them tell their story. If you listen carefully, the individual will let you know what they need from you, if anything.

Switching gears a bit, if you are the person who has endured rape (or any terrible experience), asking *why* is a perfectly legitimate question. If, in doing so, you can see what the experience is urging you to see about *yourself* (remembering that cause and effect are not always linearly linked), you can come away from the experience with an understanding that not only changes the emotional quality of the happening (remember that North Hollywood High situation I talked about earlier) but also that changes the tenor of your life.

In short, if the East is right, experience in the world is not the consequence of random chance, blind chaos, or a cruel or capricious God. It is karma providing opportunities for awakening.

[Note not in the original text: What follows is a scenario that is centered around slavery. I don't think I did a very good job of presenting the important points in the original writing, so I'm redoing that section here. This is not what is found in a copy of the book, should you have one.

Hopefully, this will do a better job of making my points.]

It is interesting how this perspective tilts one's view of the world. At one point in my education, I spent a year taking graduate level classes in preparation for entrance into a Ph.D. program in western philosophy. During that time, I took an ethics class from a young Harvard educated professor who was quite brilliant and completely dedicated to the task of showing us philosophic illiterates how little we knew.

He began one session with the following query: The Bible says "Thou shalt not kill." Is killing ever justified?

Most of the people in the class answered *no*.

The professor then laid out the following scenario.

It is the late 1700's. A plantation in the deep south has an angry, violent overseer who treats the plantation's slaves mercilessly. The men-slaves are regularly beaten; the women-slaves are treated no better. In short, life for the slaves is a horror.

Through a series of unplanned occurrences, the slaves stumble into a situation in which they can arm themselves and escape. Seizing the opportunity, they make their way through the countryside until they come to a bridge that must be crossed if they are to gain safety. Unfortunately, standing on the bridge is the overseer with a gun.

The slaves huddle together to talk. They know that if they try to rush the overseer, some will be killed. They also know that if they are re-captured, their punishment will be severe (most probably death). They conclude that the only way to insure that *everyone* reaches safety is to *kill the overseer* before crossing.

Are the slaves justified if they do so?

That was the scenario our good professor dropped on us, and that was the question we spent the rest of the period discussing. I made a few remarks about western versus eastern perspectives and the possibility of questionable assumptions inherently buried within the presentation, but the professor essentially ignored the comments and proceeded merrily on his western-ethics way. By the end of the period, almost everyone who had originally said that killing was never acceptable had changed their minds.

It is interesting that nearly every recognized spiritual teacher, from the Buddha and Christ on down, have maintained that killing is not some-

thing one ought to do. Yet there are all sorts of circumstances in real life when the apparent injustice of a situation leads good Buddhists and Christians alike to sanction killing (killing is OK, for instance, when done on behalf of one's country or in defense of one's family). We say we revere our spiritual teachers, but our willingness to embrace killing under certain circumstances clearly flags a rift between their teachings and our gut-level feeling about how one should deal with personally threatening situations. Might the dissonance be the consequence of perspective, there's different than ours.

This needs a closer look.

In evaluating the scenario, the first thing to be noticed is that there are really two questions being asked. The first is, "Given the horrendous life they have been made to endure, would you *blame* the slaves if they killed the overseer to reach safety?"

Basically decent human beings don't like to see other human beings suffer, and suffer the slaves obviously did. So with what appears to be the terrible injustice of the situation, most people (myself included) would answer that question with a *hell no*.

The second question is trickier. It asks, "If, as a wise individual sitting next to the bridge, you had the ability to clearly see all of the events that led up to the slaves' predicament and all of the consequences that would follow if the slaves killed the overseer, what would you advise the slaves to do if they asked for your advice?"

Approaching a question like this from a *you only have one life to live* perspective, most Westerners respond with a predicable, "Gain freedom at all costs." On the other hand, if one doesn't believe that human experience is limited to a mere eighty-or-so years, then what? How might things look from a typically Eastern perspective (and how might you expect that wise man sitting next to the bridge to counsel)?

To answer that, it seems reasonable to begin by thinking back to an even more elementary question, "What is the purpose of human existence?"

The East suggests that you are not really your body but rather an energy-form of sorts that is alternately referred to as a *Being* or an *Awareness*. This Being (which is to say *the inner you*) is attempting to learn through experience how to act in a spiritually responsible way while being clothed in matter. Having the privilege of incarnating more than once, it is given

many opportunities to do this in many different life-circumstances over time.

As far as this view is concerned, an "enlightened" human Being is an entity whose child-self can work in the physical world without leaving a trail of disharmony in its wake. Put poetically, a perfected Being is one that *raises no dust* (in a metaphoric sense) as a consequence of its passing through the world. Given the self-oriented nature of most child-selves at this point in our evolution, very few have attained this level of purity. Nevertheless, that is the direction in which karma and our *impulse to grow* is believed to be pointing us.

From this perspective, it would be easy to say that killing is definitely a *raising of dust* along one's life-path and, hence, such action is not in accordance with the idea of *moving through life harmoniously*. Unfortunately, as is the case with everything on this level of duality, it isn't that simple.

Why? Because inherent within most situations in which relatively good people are moved to kill, there is a certain amount of apparent injustice wrapped up in the situation. The slave scenario, for example, simply screamed *injustice* from the beginning. Yet, were *all* the injustices tied to that circumstance revealed in the presentation? If the East is right, the answer is *no*. To see this, consider an expansion of the slave's story, Eastern style:

The year is 1025. The country is China. There lives a noble woman who has great wealth, social position and power. What she doesn't have is the slightest inclination to be associated with anyone who is not amongst the socially elite. As such, she can be charming to her friends while being absolutely beastly of any underling who fails to meet with her severe standards. For example, when the husband of one of her servants dies and the girl goes into a depression, the woman terminates the girl's employment because the girl is no longer performing her duties up to expectation. In another instance, a merchant promises the woman goods that are then delayed when the merchant's ships sink. Because the delay inconveniences her, the infuriated woman bitterly complains to her social acquaintances about the man's incompetence, subsequently ruining his reputation. In short, although the woman is not inherently evil, her arrogance has so set her apart from others that she has lost all concept of what it means to be a normal human being trying to deal with the pressures that comes with life.

The woman (for future reference, I will refer to this Being as *tCn*, standing for *thoughtless Chinese noblewoman*) lives long and dies with nobody mourning her passing. In *tCn's* next incarnation, that Being is born

into slavery as a female in the south of the United States in the late 1700's. This is not a punishment. It is simply karma allowing the Being to see through fairly severe experience how *the other half lives*.

The year is 1189. The country is England. A Jewish girl (not the reincarnation of the *thoughtless Chinese woman*) finds herself in the middle of racial tensions between Christians and Jews under Richard I. During her short life, she absorbs her father's deep frustration, anger, and mistrust of the Christians. As a consequence, the child builds into herself a *mistrust of others not of her kind*. (This is certainly not a damning trait, but it may be a debilitating one down the line). She dies in a massacre of Jews at a young age (for future reference, I will refer to this Being as *mJc*, standing for *mistrusting Jewish child*). In *mJc*'s next incarnation, that Being is born into a white, plantation owning family as a male in the south of the United States in the late 1700's. This is not a punishment. It is just karma allowing the Being to have experiences that might allow it to untangle itself from the belief that *other* mean *untrustworthy*.

The year is 1380. The country is Turkey. There lives a man (*not* the reincarnation of anyone above) whose hard work and intelligence has earned him a position in which he heads a wealthy man's household. He had very much loved his parents who were killed when he was young--he was raised in an orphanage--and the psychological scars from the forced separation has made him angry at life and mean. As household head, he is actively dictatorial, heartlessly bullies the man-servants while additionally makes unwanted sexual advances toward the maids, all the while threatening dismissal if resisted. Because he treats his underlings like property, he is much feared and hated. In fact, nobody can understand why God would allow so miserable a man to prosper without any noticeable, adverse consequence coming to him in his life.

He lives long and dies an angry, unloved man (for future reference, I will refer to this Being as *nT*, standing for *nasty Turk*). In *nT*'s next incarnation, that Being is born into a life as *overseer of slaves* in the south of the United States in the late 1700's. This is not a punishment. It is just karma giving the Being another chance to learn to treat fellow human Beings humanely. He may or may not pass this test.

The year is 1607. The country is Spain. There is a man (*not* the reincarnation of anyone above) who is of noble birth. Due to his wealth and

position, he has an easy life. What makes him different is that he also has a *truly kind heart*. In fact, his main inner focus is to become as kind and compassionate an individual as possible.

He lives long and dies a contented, loved man (for future reference, I will refer to this Being as *kS*, standing for *kindly Spaniard*). In *kS*'s next incarnation, that Being is born into slavery as a male in the south of the United States in the late 1700's. This is not a punishment for anything he may have done. In fact, it is a test.

The year is 1790. The country is America.

kS (who had been the kindly Spaniard) is now an adult. Aside from being a slave, he has endured one terrible experience after another during this life. His little girl dies because the owners discount the need for proper medical attention after she is struck by a carriage. His family is split up and sold when the plantation they belonged to is dissolved. On the new plantation where he finds himself, his efforts to help the other slaves earn him the animosity of an overbearing overseer (*nT*--who had been the nasty Turk). Even so, two months after arriving, *kS* saves the plantation-owner's young daughter from drowning. A friend of the family takes credit for the act. When *kS* is asked by the other slaves why he doesn't demand credit, he says, "I didn't do it for credit. I did it because I couldn't bear to see a child die needlessly . . . even the child of a family that has caused me and my family so much misery." In short, he lives a life in which he has every reason to be angry and vengeful, yet he holds to the kindness that seems to be so fully a part of his inner self.¹

The way *kS* lives his life affects many on the plantation including the eldest son of the plantation owner. The boy's last incarnation was that of the mistrusting Jewish child (*mJc*) in England in 1189. Being a white male in southern society this time around, *mJc* has always mistrusted blacks. After all, they are different from himself. Differences frighten him. All that begins to change when he sees *kS* save his sister from drowning. Even though a family friend takes credit for the saving, he knows better. Afterwards, he watches *kS*. He marvels at how kind and gentle *kS* is, even when the overseer is being unpleasant. It changes him. He stops looking at people as *us* and *them* and begins seeing people as individuals who are good and honorable, like the slave, or not-so-good and unpleasant, like the overseer. It is quite a revelation for the boy.

¹ No, he is not a complete saint. He does feel anger sometimes, but the anger comes only in the most intense of situations. He does not allow it to color his overall life--his general tone remains centered on kindness and compassion.

tCn (who had been the *thoughtless Chinese noblewoman*) has also been born of black parents and is a slave on the plantation. She has lived there from birth. She is petite and strong willed, imperious some would say. Her fellow slaves call her *the princess*, which isn't surprising given her Chinese life. It angers her to see the opulence of the plantation owner's home in comparison to the squalor in which she is forced to live. The white women wear beautiful clothes while she wears rags; the owners eat wonderful food while she eats tasteless muck. "How thoughtless they must be," she thinks, "to lead such mindlessly happy lives while I am so miserable." She wants to be free. She chafes terribly at her need to be subservient. She hates to be viewed and treated like property while being completely unaware that she, herself, had treated people in much the same way in her previous life.

nT, acting as overseer, also sees *kS* save the plantation owner's daughter, and he also overhears *kS*'s explanation as to why he (*kS*) didn't try to take credit for that act. It doesn't exactly change him, but it makes him more aware that the slaves are human beings. He is still harsh with them, thinking that is his job and the only way to keep them in line, but it begins to make him think.

Through a series of unplanned occurrences, the slaves find themselves in a situation in which they can arm themselves and escape. Seizing the opportunity, they make their way through the country-side until they come to a bridge that must be crossed if they are to gain safety. Unfortunately, standing on the bridge is the overseer with a gun. Although the slaves don't know this, the overseer has mixed emotions. He knows it is his job to keep the slaves on the plantation, and if he fails, he knows he will be treated harshly. On the other hand, he is beginning to see that their plight is really not fair. Still, somewhat mindlessly, he does his duty to his employer and stands his ground.

The slaves huddle together to talk. They know that if they try to rush the overseer, some of them will be killed. On the other hand, if they allow themselves to be captured, their punishment will be severe. They decide that the only way to insure that everyone reach safety is to *kill the overseer* before crossing the bridge.

kS says he cannot bring himself to kill, even if it means his own freedom. Led by *tCn*, the rest of the slaves disagree and choose to go forward. *kS* leaves the group and returns to the plantation.

When *kS* reaches the plantation, the first person he meets is the eldest

son (*mJc*). *kS* explains what has happened. When the plantation owner arrives, the boy tries to defend *kS* but is unable to convince the infuriated owner to be lenient. *kS* is hanged as an example to others.

The eldest son is horrified by the barbarity of the act. It reinforces in him the new-found belief that being a worthwhile person has nothing to do with *being family*.

For *kS*, the experience is terrifying . . . at least until his body dies and he moves across the line into the inner worlds. With death, the pain and pressures vanish. While in his period of introspection, he sees how the fire of his perversely difficult previous-life has tested his resolve to act in compassion, even in the most awful of circumstances. He stays in the inner worlds for a time before being drawn back into a body. This time he is born into a Hindu family in India. The family is poor, but his life is wonderful because he comes into contact with one of the real Teachers there. Through his actions, karma has presented him with the opportunity to become a chela (this not being a typical consequence of making it through a hard life, but in this case, that's what happens).

Meanwhile, back in 1790: Having killed the overseer, the slaves are now free in the north. Petite *tCn* falls in love with a black preacher in Boston and they marry. Although she still has an imperious way about her, her experience on the plantation has unconsciously motivated her to become more sympathetic to the plight of the downtrodden (this is particularly good as *indifference to the needs of others* was one of her problem in the Chinese life). As a consequence, she convinces her husband to open a kind of half-way house for the unfortunate. As for her participation in the killing of the overseer, there are no apparent consequences for that act . . . at least not in this lifetime. That will clearly need to be redressed somehow, sometime in the future.

Upon his death, *nT* moves into the inner world. He is angry at being killed. You might think that karma would move to smite him for all the harm he has done to so many people, and indeed, the thoughtforms he has built into himself will draw him away from the heaven states of devachan and into the cesspool that is the lower astral. But one has to remember how *nt* got to the place he was in, and it is important to realize that through his contact with *kS*, he was beginning to think more deeply about how he ought to treat his fellow man (and woman). The killing was a set-back on that front, but it was not terminal.

In the best interest of his spiritual evolution (which is, after all, what karma is all about), a respite is needed during which that Being might be relieved of the terrible anger the self has accumulated around itself--a

period of time during which gentler qualities might be allowed to grow. Only in that way can *nT* have any chance of dealing with the lives that will undoubtedly come in the future. As such, the skandas (i.e., the tendencies a Being brings into a life from previous times) of insecurity and anger do not manifest in *nT*'s next life.

Instead, karma draws *nT* into the body of a white girl born into a frontier family in Australia. *nT*'s parents in this life are the same Beings that were his parents in the Turkish life (the parents he loved so much but who died when he was young). With that loving support, *nT* as a girl has a good life marred solely by one seemingly mindless act of violence in which one of her brothers is killed by the town bully for a perceived slight. She is deeply haunted by the loss and cannot understand how anyone could possibly be so mean-spirited and uncaring about the lives of others. "If I were a man, I would never do such a thing," she tells her mother. In so saying, *nT* begins to confront violence and anger from an altogether different perspective. This will help him considerably as he takes in subsequent lives responsibility of all his actions in previous lives.

That is our scenario, Eastern style. It is a very simple, linear depiction of what undoubtedly would have been a very complex set of situations if the individuals discussed had been real, historical figures. Given that limitation, though, it does allow us to make a number of important observations.

1.) The first is a side-point: I should state at the outset, I can't imagine any caring person to try to convince anyone that slavery was good. It wasn't. It was a barbaric practice driven by greed, arrogance, and a rank disrespect for the dignity and self-worth of others. Nevertheless, *child-selves-run-amuck* did put slavery into motion. In doing so, those selves inadvertently gave karma a place to inject Beings who, for whatever reason, needed a severe, pressurized situation through which they could temporarily experience.²

² Remember, there are as many reasons why Beings are drawn into pressurized situation as there are Beings. In that light, I heard an interested though unverified story about the mathematician, mystic, and highly evolved spiritual teacher the west knows as Pythagoras (there is every possibility that he was a chela). It is said that he was once asked by a guest what he had been in his last life.

"A slave," was his response.

"Was it a difficult life?" queried the incredulous guest.

"Oh, yes," Pythagoras said. "I was used for the sexual pleasure of my master's friends."

Additionally, it is possible that this disassociating of race from the atrocity of slavery may irritate those whose biological ancestors experienced the indignity. This is understandable. It is not unusual for people to identify with the plight of their ancestors, taking strength from the fact that their ancestors overcame the horror. What is more, it is important that such a situation not cloud one's understanding of the idea of karma. Karma is a teacher, not a punisher. Karma should never be used as a justification for the mistreatment of others.

2.) If this scenario reflects reality, a child-self that kills to extricate itself from an uncomfortable experience does nothing to heal the inner disharmony that drew the experience in the first place. Although karma responds very strongly to motive, the act of killing usually provides nothing more than a short reprieve from an uncomfortable situation. *Unless that self comes into an understanding on its own*, karma will sooner or later have to bring to that self similarly severe experience in some other form. What's more, by killing to escape a bad situation, a Being creates a karmic knot between itself and the victim that additionally must be dealt with in time.

That is what the great Teachers were trying to say when they admonished their followers to abstain from killing. They weren't setting down law in stone. They were making an observation. They were trying to tell humanity that *when all is said and done, killing is never the best way to go*. When the child-self uses violence to get what it wants, it just makes things worse in the long run.

3.) Because, as the Buddha put it, we are ignorant of the reality of this place, we consistently misunderstand situations in life. We look at a small child and think, "How innocent," not realizing that within that new body resides a Being that has done innumerable things both good and bad over a long period of existence spanning many lives. There are no innocents on this level of existence. There are only experiencing Beings.

4.) So if killing and violence is not the way to step away from a situation in which individual rights are being stepped upon, how do bad

"How awful," said the guest. "Why were you drawn into such a terrible situation?"

Pythagoras replied, "Because I had to learn to dance in chains." (And I don't believe the *dancing in chains* was meant to convey the entertaining others, as perverse as that would be--I suspect it had to do with being able to exist in an awful situation without having it color one's dealings with life.)

situations ever change for an individual?

There are myriad ways an individual might disengage from the slave situation. For those who had learned what they needed to learn from the slaves' life, *death* at the hands of the overseer could easily have relieved them of the situation allowing them at the same time to move cleanly into a new circumstance (this was what happened to *kS*).

We don't normally think of death as an entrance into a *rest-state between lives*, and for good reason. People having trouble dealing with life might mistakenly believe that death was a way out of their misery (a big mistake!). Nevertheless, death is what relieved *kS* in the scenario, and having succeeded with the severe tests presented in that previous life, that Being went on to a situation that was more directly aligned with its spiritual quest. Even the slaves that *weren't* *kS* might have karmically benefited from moving on. And for those who weren't meant to be relieved of the pressure of this life, they would have been the ones who would have made it through the blockade if the overseer had been rushed without killing him.

There are all sorts of possibilities. The point is, interaction between individuals, karma, and events is always complicated. The fact that the slaves appeared to act as a group was significant, but not as significant as the fact that each was brought to that situation as a consequence of their particular spiritual necessity. Motive was all important. The motives that underlay each individual's actions were what laid the ground work for what would come karmically in their future.

You are your own parent, as well as your own child.

Thinking about the use of violence in a broader sense, part of what makes this view so difficult is that it cannot be pigeon-holed into a nice, concise set of ethical rules one should live by. Only a fool, for instance, would demand that a woman about to be raped adhere to the doctrine of non-violence if she didn't have a true, inner conviction that was motivating her to do so. Rape is a severe experience. Armchair philosophizing about it helps nobody.

In a little different light, a sudden, psychologically pressure-filled experience is designed specifically to give the self *no time to intellectualize* about what should or should not be done. It requires one to act, or react, at a gut level. Resisting a rape or any other violent, personal assault can result in death. Not resisting can also result in death. Which path to take? It depends. The individual in the experience must decide. If the individual's best sense of the situation is to fight, then fight she should. I would

never want to be accused of talking someone into acting non-violently in such a situation if the individual did not feel down deep that such an action was in her (or his) best interest. Besides, it may be that resisting *was* the most appropriate response. Maybe karma was pushing the individual to be more assertive. *Maybe there was no necessity for the attacker to succeed.* In that case, not fighting back would have been the wrong course of action.

The great Teachers have said that in the long run, depending upon violence to get by in life is not the way to build an immortal soul. But those same Teachers have understood the human condition. They knew that if an individual acts in the best way he or she knows, even if those actions are not truly wise in a cosmic sense, karma will work gently and lovingly to bring that individual out from ignorance and onto the path that leads to skillful living in matter. That is the beauty of this place. It is totally geared to teaching.

There is a great need for the child-self in each of us to think about violence because the child is so often prone to use violence to get what it wants. So far, we have looked at relatively violent situations as they affect individuals. How is violence to be viewed on a global scale. This last section is devoted to that question.

In discussing the psychology of the child self, we have observed that the child does not like to see mirrored in other people its own shortcomings. Very few people are free from acting in ways that are selfish. As such, very few people are willing to stomach a selfish kid, or a selfish friend, or an auto driver who mindlessly acts with only his or her interests in mind (like the person who cuts you off on the freeway).

As far as this view is concerned, whenever you respond to *emotional friction* in your life, the root-cause of the response can be found within the shortcomings of *your own self*. What is interesting is that there are Beings who, having moved ahead of the stream of humanity, have very little within them that is grossly disharmonious. When they see the atrocities of the world, very little is mirrored back at them. When they move to help, they are not hamstrung with the kind of high emotion you or I might feel. Not being fogged by the personal self's battery of knee-jerk reactions, they see situations more clearly. And with their insight, they react to life with a purity that is beyond the norm. One such individual was an Indian named Mohandas Gandhi.

It needs to be made clear from the outset that Gandhi was not perfect. He was probably a chela (this can be attested to by noting that he was hor-

rified when his countrymen called him *mahatma*, or great soul--one of the names traditionally used for a *master* in India--because he knew he was not). As is often the case with Beings at that level, his personal self was in full, arrogant cry in his earlier years before he came into control of himself (it is interesting that he credited his wife's non-cooperation in response to his *imperious behavior* as having helped him to see how powerful non-violence could be).

When he did awaken, he presented to the world an approach for dealing with other people that was, in practice, quite foreign to the majority within the so-called civilized world. He did not take credit for inventing the approach, but he did fully animate in his everyday life the practice of non-violence.

Gandhian non-violence (*ahimsa*) is predicated on the assumption that within the self, above and beyond all else, there is a higher Being. When Gandhi worked with people, he touched that Higher Self. They may have reverted back to their old, selfish ways later--they still had the *freedom of will* to do so--but when Gandhi worked with people, he was able to temporarily bring out the humanness within them.

Gandhian non-violence is not an easy approach to follow. It requires the willingness to put one's own child-self on hold, so to speak, and to put the good of one's adversary ahead of your own. Even if you have to absorb abuse or physical violence, the whole thrust of the approach is to help the offender see that his or her actions are not as they should be.³

The movie *Gandhi* showed an excellent example of the technique in practice when thousands of Indians lined up, four abreast, to walk peacefully into a salt-producing plant. The guards were not at all bashful about clubbing the men as they approached. As the advancing men were hit and went down, women came in to help the wounded stagger away so that the next four could step forward. So it continued, new men replacing their fallen comrades . . . for hours.

I don't care how cynical, angry, or hate-filled an individual is, after clubbing basically harmless people for a number of hours, even the most insensitive human is going to at least *begin* to question his actions.

That was exactly the idea: to animate the conscience, helping the offenders to touch their humanness and, subsequently, to aid the offenders in

³ Another reason Gandhian non-violence is difficult to follow is the fact that an individual using it must constantly be checking his or her *own* motives and actions to be sure that *they* are not the problem.

seeing beyond the veil of ignorance through which they peered.⁴

Gandhi treated the British that way. He acted like a good parent who was dealing with a child who just didn't understand that his actions were wrong. Gandhi was disciplined; he was firm; but he was loving. When the British left, they did not leave as enemies.

One of the more unfortunate reactions to Gandhian non-violence comes from people who really don't want to give up the use of violence as long as it provides them with an avenue through which they might get what they want. People in this boat--which is to say a fair portion of the world's population--use all sorts of arguments against the approach. One of the most popular is *Gandhi was able to get the British to leave India, but he wouldn't have stood a chance against the Nazis of World War II Germany.*

I say this is unfortunate because it signals a complete misunderstanding of the philosophic tenets upon which Gandhi's approach was based.

If the East is correct in its view of the world, there are no accidents. People make choices, which bring consequences, which bring new choices. As such, an individual is constantly shaping his or her karmic future

⁴ There have been many stories of individuals who have taken this path to the amazement of all. I remember one about a Hindu priest during the opening days of India's independence from the British. A Moslem mob approached the temple with mayhem in mind. The priests in the temple wanted to board themselves inside for fear of the mob. All, that is, except one very fine, benevolent old fellow. Though his comrades pleaded with him not to do it, he walked out of the temple into the crowd. A surprise even to the Moslems, he wasn't attacked. Why? Because he loved so deeply that his presence changed the crowd. He moved amongst them, asking about their families, seeing some hurt and helping to bandage them. He was sincerely interested in their well-being, and because when he looked into the eyes of those people he saw what they really were--Buddhas-to-be--his complete benevolence made them for one fleeting instant fully human. That was all that was needed.

But, you say, how do you do that when you are being beaten?

Lanza del Vasto, a Frenchman, was a follower of Gandhi. During the period in which France was *going nuclear*, his people used non-violence to influence the French people against nuclear arms. During one confrontation with the police, a particularly surly cop selected one of the del Vasto's group for a beating. The officer hit the man repeatedly with a night stick until the man lay motionless on the ground. But when the cop retreated, the man came to life, lifted his head, and said to the officer, "Sir, you've dropped your wallet."

In fact, during the beating the cop's wallet had flipped out of his pocket. It would have been lost to him if the beaten man had not exercised kindness and informed him of his loss.

The cop never beat another anti-nuclear member again. In fact, he counseled his compatriots to treat the dissidents better. The beaten man had, through his suffering and kindness, made a friend of one who would otherwise have been an ardent enemy.

This is characteristic of Gandhian non-violence when exercised correctly. It also helps to explain why so few people are willing or able to use it well.

right up to the moment.

What does that mean? The Beings who were in bodies during WWII were there *because it was karmically appropriate for them to be there*. Whether it be the German man who was confronted with Hitler's fanaticism and had to choose whether he would be swept up by it or not (Einstein, for one, chose not . . . and would have done so even if he had not been a Jew), or the American who had to decide whether to use the A-bomb to destroy an island off the coast of Japan or to use it to destroy a densely populated area on the mainland (Truman chose the populated area), those specific Beings were there because it was karmically correct for them to make those specific choices.

Asking questions like, "How would Gandhi have fared in Nazi Germany," is nonsensical because it obviously wasn't karmically correct for the individuals involved in that conflict (either on the Allied or Axis side) to have to deal with a highly evolved human Being (i.e., a Gandhi-type) who was primed to PUBLICLY face apparent injustice in a *spiritually peaceful way*.⁵ The presence of such a Being would have undoubtedly affected the choices of the millions of Beings who *were* involved in the war. That, evidently, was not karmically appropriate.⁶

⁵ DO NOT MISUNDERSTAND. This is not to say there weren't evolved individuals in Germany or on the Allied side who had to make very difficult choices as to how they would deal with the war. It means that they had to make those choices without the support of a Gandhi-type backing them up.

Example: I have a German friend who was a medical student when the war broke out. Having read about the Eastern philosophies when he was young (he was especially attracted to Tibetan Buddhism), he believed in reincarnation and karma. His readings also led him to vow that he would never take a human life. When the war broke out, German authorities gave him an ultimatum: either join the army or his family would be killed (he remembers that at that point, he wondered why karma had ever put him in so awful a position). He joined, but he did so determined never to kill. He was sent to the Russian front; at one point he engaged in hand-to-hand combat; but at all times he kept it in his mind that he would kill no one, and he succeeded.

The man vowed non-violence and stuck to it. He did not kill even when engaged in close-quarters combat, yet he survived. His choices were his alone, made in a hostile environment, adhered to solely through his own spiritual tenacity. Yet history knows nothing of his actions. In short, we have no idea how many men and women made spiritually sane choices throughout the war. It simply isn't something in which history is interested.

⁶ This is not to denigrate those who found themselves in that war and chose to kill in defense of their country and loved ones. Fighting is a very typical, noble, normal response to the kind of threat Germany and Japan posed. War is not good, but in war it is possible that some individuals might become even more acutely aware of the sanctity of life than would have otherwise been the case (I know a number of men who killed in war and have been haunted by it ever since). What is important to know is that karma responds to motivation more than anything else. If an individual's motive is relatively pure, if the individual acts

Put another way, if there are lines of karma that draw individuals to particular situations, you can't just plop a stray *somebody* into the middle of a historical situation and expect the individual's presence to make any sense within the context of the times and choices being made. Playing *what if* with history, as far as this view is concerned, is completely meaningless.

But unfortunately (again), people demand the right to do just that. So, for the sake of argument, let's oblige by examining three different scenarios:

Scenario #1: On Germany's side, assume there are some normal, basically good men and women who are proud of their country and do not wish to see it come to harm (i.e., people who feel about Germany the same way Americans feel about the U.S.). Add to them some competent military men, some military men who could easily let power go to their heads, and some soulless individuals holding the reins of power in Germany. Combine that with a feeling within the country that Germany had been treated very badly at the end of WWI (in fact, Germany had been vengefully humiliated and impoverished by the Allies at the end of that war) and a superiority complex characteristic of a people who are basically insecure--and you have Germany's situation. In this scenario, Germany is a totalitarian state and is clearly the aggressor.

On the Allied side, assume there are some normal, basically good individuals--people like you and me. Add to that some competent military men, some military people who could easily let power go to their heads (General George Patton somehow comes to mind), and an international group of leaders who are trying to save their countries from being over-run by a clear evil. In this scenario, this is the Allied situation.

In other words, let's assume the situation is, to a good approximation, as it actually was, with one exception. Assume there are no *people of peace* on either side in this scenario: no peaceniks, no Germans who opposed war and militarism, no Gandhi-types.

How do things proceed?

The fighting is bitter with all hell breaking loose for five or six years. Allied casualties (this includes civilians and the military, both the wounded and dead) come to approximately 34,000,000 people (the Soviet Union alone sustains 22,500,000 deaths). Casualties in the Axis countries (i.e.,

from the best that is evident to that self, karma's response will never be harsh.

Germany, Japan, and Italy) come to approximately 18,000,000. In addition, the Germans kill between 6,000,000 and 7,000,000 gypsies, Slavs, Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, mentally disabled, political prisoners, and Jews (mostly Jews) in what will become known as *the holocaust*.

The Germans lose. On both sides, men and women act valiantly in sacrificing their lives for the ideals they believe in, but on the whole just about anyone who is personally touched by the tragedy and blasted dreams leaves the war deeply scarred. As there really are no peace-makers, only warriors, heroes, war criminals and ordinary folk, the general attitude on the planet during the fifty years following the war can generally be characterized as *me before all others*. Terrible things are done in the name of selfishness, in the name of *me first, me alone*. Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge kill 1,000,000 of his Cambodian countryman in the early 1980's in the name of *political expediency*. The Hutus in central Africa kill over 100,000 Tutsi in one year at the beginning of the 1990's in the name of *tribalism*. Serbian nationalists attempt a genocide on Bosnians in the name of *ethnic cleansing*. Financial institutions all over the globe go for the jugular whenever possible.

In short, the world is not a very pleasant place in which to live. It is as though there is a blanket over the social conscience of the population, and there doesn't seem to be much chance of a let-up in sight. So goes the world in *Scenario #1*, and so goes the world without individuals who are willing to think of the other guy's good before thinking of themselves.

Scenario #2: Both German and the Allies are as outlined above, with one big exception. Scattered amongst the *normal* people are peace-makers--individuals who try to deal with conflicts peacefully.

The war rages much as outlined above. The Allies win; the casualties are, again, as outlined above. During the fifty years that follow, there is still selfishness, anger, hatred and violence. Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge still perform their atrocities, as do the Hutus and the Serbs. What is different is that there are individuals who adhere to a moral code that is not expedient, but that is spiritually sane. Some of the previously killed Gandhi-types from WWII reincarnate to help this process along, along with other evolved Beings who come into bodies because it is appropriate for them to do so. The world is not perfect, but there are at least some individuals with a moral compass that has not been completely warped by the selfishnesses of the child self. Life is lighter than it might have otherwise been; there is a tone of hope even in the midst of suffering.

Scenario #3: The German side of the story is much the same as outlined at the beginning of the first scenario (and the second). The difference is that they do not face an armed Allied force but rather a nation of Gandhis (we could have made this a group of nations, but for the sake of simplicity let's assume just one very large country is involved).⁷

When the Germans choose to invade, there are no armies waiting to repel them. They are welcomed into the country by kindly people who seem perfectly unmoved by their presence. Within a very short period of time, the Germans begin their *final solution*, attempting to round up all Jews, Slavs, etc., for extermination. What they meet is a nation of individuals who view death as a simple, natural transition from one state to another. As a consequence, these people are not in the least bit afraid of dying. The population is more than happy to cooperate whenever possible, but they are *not* willing to aid the Germans in any form of violence whatsoever. This infuriates the German commanders who begin a campaign of reprisals for the non-cooperation. 400,000 citizens are killed. Despite the carnage, the hundreds of millions of citizens left are busy acting in a kindly, benevolent way to all they come in contact with. The saner Germans in the armed forces begin to realize that what they are doing is wrong. They attempt to lighten up on the civilian population. Orders from the top demand a purge; there is rebellion in the ranks as more and more Germans come to realize that these people are not victims but rather very special people.

Even the insane Germans, after the emotional high of killing begins to wear off, start to wilt under the goodness of these people.

Germany's youth, so quick to pick up the banner of nationalism and Nazism, so willing to have their hatreds and angers energized by leaders who are truly dark, find themselves in the company of individuals who are filled with Light. Touching a Being like that is like touching God. All Germans are not changed by the experience--there are always the soulless--but enough come into a state of sanity to change the tone and attitudes of the German people. With that change, Hitler's reign ends.

Casualties on the Gandhian side come to approximately 800,000. Ca-

⁷ As was mentioned above, there are people who rather perversely maintain that Gandhi (a single man) was able to deal with the English but he never would have stood a chance against Hitler. If you think about it, the argument is moderately amusing. It took 34,000,000 Allied casualties to beat Hitler and company using military means, yet for non-violence to prove itself, critics (bright souls that they are) would demand that Gandhi accomplish the task *alone*.

sualties on the German side are insignificant. Fifty years following the war-that-was-not, a large number of Germans have been integrated into the invaded country (in fact, the Germans never leave). During that time, there is a considerable alteration in the way people deal with one another. Many of the Gandhi-types killed during the confrontation reincarnate as Germans and find themselves on the other side of the fence, so to speak. They help build within the German psyche qualities that make for a great, kindly people, and they do it *as Germans*. There are still atrocities being committed in the world, but the tone that permeates human activity is definitely more thoughtful, compassionate, lighter and kinder. There is great hope in the world . . .

Stepping away from our scenarios, World War II was a terrible conflict in which millions of people died (the statistics quoted in Scenario I were actual numbers from WWII). Allied non-violence on the order suggested in Scenario III would have required the presence of an enormous number of dedicated, knowledgeable people. It would most probably have culminated in Germans taking over the nation-of-peace only to find themselves engulfed and assimilated into the benevolence of that country. People would have died in the conflict; governments would have been re-arranged; for a short time there would have been hardship for the personal selves involved in the situation. But when all was said and done, Hitler would have stood *no chance at all* in succeeding against that nation dedicated to Gandhian non-violence.⁸ To believe otherwise is to be ignorant of the power wielded by spiritually evolved human Beings. The problem we face today--the problem we faced during World War II--is that there are very few humans in which Light of this order is obvious.

Then again, that shouldn't be surprising. This is a time of choosing, both for us and for WW II Germans. This is the Kali Yuga . . .

In general, the last thing to be mentioned about Gandhi has to do with his motives. It is true that the energies (for want of a better word) projected by a dedicated, non-violent person can *potentially* affect a belligerent adversary so as to make the antagonist more reasonable.⁹ It is also true that

⁸ Interesting thought: If there had been a nation of Gandhis during WWI, there would have been no fertile field within 1930's Germany from which a Hitler *could* have grown.

⁹ I can just hear cynics saying, "Jesus was generally non-violent (he was called *the Prince of Peace*), and he didn't seem to be able to make adversaries more reasonable." The problem with this observation is that the presence of Christ on this earth was not a normal situation. Gandhi was most probably a chela. A chela is an individual who has, to some degree,

the path of non-violence is a powerful tool when political action is desirable amongst people who otherwise have no power. But what most people don't realize is that neither of those truths were behind Gandhi's use of the approach. Gandhi followed a path of non-violence because it was the only way he felt comfortable treating other human Beings.

If you use non-violence as a means to an end, not because you have a real commitment to non-violence as a way of life but because it can get you something you want, the tone of your actions will carry at least some dissonance within it. The power of non-violence resides in one human Being dealing with another human Being in a caring, compassionate way. Anything short of that may get results, but the results will additionally bring unexpected, probably unwanted repercussions.

In short, if this view is correct, *ends* do not justify *means* no matter how much the child-self would like to believe otherwise.

moved ahead of the stream of humanity in a spiritual sense, but who is not yet a perfected Being. Christ was an avatar. As was said in an earlier chapter, avatars "hold in one hand the power to change all things, and in the other hand the power to quite literally make the world a mist." An avatar is not like a chela--someone who is doing the best they can, given their limited facility to act in wisdom--an avatar *is* a perfected Being. They sense the consequences of their actions . . . completely. The very quality of the purity and benevolence of a Being on this level could swamp humankind making everything just wonderful for a time, but that would only waylay people from coming into their own enlightenments through their own efforts. Avatars do not come to make everything right. They come to remind humankind of what it will someday be.

Chapter 22

WONDER

The operations of heaven and earth proceed with the most admirable order, yet they never speak. The four seasons observe clear laws, but they do not discuss them. All of nature is regulated by exact principles, but it never explains them. The sage penetrates the mystery of the order of heaven and earth, and comprehends the principles of nature. Thus the perfect man does nothing; the great sage originates nothing.

(Is this not a wonder?).

apologies to Chuang Tzu
(quoted from *Creativity and Taoism* by Yuan)

(Note that this chapter has been tweaked from its original form.)

In looking back at my college days, I marvel at the feeling of order and competence I got from my professors. They presented their courses like souls who knew what was what, who had things wired, who accepted no mysteries. This tendency to speak with the authority of God Almighty affected my view of the world even though I didn't realize it at the time. As embarrassing as it is to say, I wasn't the least bit aware that we humans don't know everything about everything. I didn't realize there were anomalies within the world.

What you are about to meet is *wonder* in various forms. I hope you enjoy musing about it as much as I have.

Wonder in a number: In the ancient world, certain numbers were given special, philosophic significance. They were termed *sacred numbers* and we are about to discuss one such value.

There exists a series that is generated by adding the two previous numbers in the series to get the next value. An example of such a series is 3, 7, 10, 17, 27, 44, etc. There isn't, to my knowledge, a formal name for a general series that does this, so I'll just call them *additive series*.

A *geometric series* is a sequence of numbers that is generated by multiplying the preceding number in the list by a constant to get the next

number. An example of this kind of series is 3, 9, 27, 81, 243, etc. Each number is determined by multiplying the previous number by 3. Put a little differently, the ratio of any two consecutive numbers yields the multiplier (ex: $81/27 = 3$ and $243/81 = 3$, etc.).

These two series are defined in very specific, mathematical terms, and they are independent of one another. That is, if a series happens to be geometric, there is absolutely no reason to believe that same series will be additive. What's interesting is that that statement does not hold going the other way. All additive series, as you get further and further into the series, converge on being geometric (that is, the ratio of two consecutive numbers in the series converges on a single number).

The most famous of the additive series start with 1 and is called the *Fibonacci Series* (though, interestingly, ALL additive series converge on the same number). It is presented below.

1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, 233, 377, 610 . . .

At its beginning, the series does not appear geometric as $2/1 \neq 3/2$, but as you get into the series, the ratios begin to converge on 1.618 etc., as shown (again) below:

$55/34 = 1.617647$ (rounded to nearest millionth);
 $89/55 = 1.618181$;
 $144/89 = 1.617977$;
 $233/144 = 1.618055$;
 $377/233 = 1.618025$;
 $610/377 = 1.618037$;
 etc.

A transcendental number is one that never ends or repeats itself, and this number is transcendental. It was deemed important enough to be given a special symbol, the Greek letter *phi* (ϕ), and it was this number that was, in ancient times, considered to be so significant.¹

To begin, ϕ has a slew of very odd mathematical properties. For instance, $1/\phi = .6180$ (rounded). Because this is true, it is also true that:

$$1/\phi + 1 = \phi \quad (\text{i.e., } .6180 + 1 = 1.6180).$$

¹ Referred to in ancient times as a *sacred number*, all of the information I'm providing here about ϕ is found in the book *The Divine Proportion*, by H.E. Huntley (1970).

By repeatedly multiplying this expression by either $1/\phi$ or ϕ , noting that $1/\phi^2 = .3820$, $\phi^2 = 2.6180$, $\phi^3 = 4.2360$, and $\phi^4 = 6.8540$, we find that:

$$\begin{aligned} 1/\phi^2 + 1/\phi &= 1 & (\text{i.e., } .3820 + .6180 &= 1) \\ 1/\phi + 1 &= \phi & (\text{i.e., } .6180 + 1 &= 1.6180) \\ 1 + \phi &= \phi^2 & (\text{i.e., } 1 + 1.6180 &= 2.6180); \\ \phi + \phi^2 &= \phi^3 & (\text{i.e., } 1.6180 + 2.6180 &= 4.2360); \\ \phi^2 + \phi^3 &= \phi^4 & (\text{i.e., } 2.6180 + 4.2360 &= 6.8540); \\ & \text{etc.} \end{aligned}$$

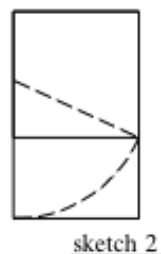
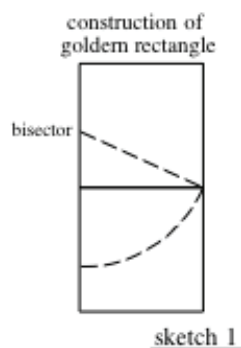
There is only one number in existence that is such that when you add it's inverse to 1 you get the number . . . and when you add the number to 1 you get the number squared, etc. This is a very strange feature, yet that is exactly what *phi* does.

Of even more interest is that in the 1930's through '60's there was a flurry of activity at the university level to pinpoint how the brain works. At one point, one research group administered a psychological test in which there were a large number of different rectangles. The question was, "Which rectangle is the most aesthetically pleasing?" (A similar test asked, "Which rectangle most closely resembles your idea of the *perfect rectangular shape*?").

The response was overwhelming. People chose the form that mathematicians call "the golden rectangle."²

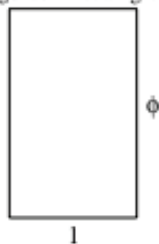
Building a golden rectangle is relatively easy. Two squares are drawn side by side (sketch 1). One of the square's side is bisected. A line is drawn from the bisect point to one of the opposite corner of the square. That length is used as the radius of an arc centered on the bisect point and extending into the second square. The resulting rectangle is a golden rectangle (sketch #2).

Why are we talking about this? We are messing with it because if the length of each square's side is defined as 1



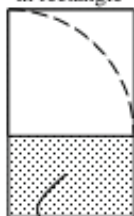
² That so many people found that particular rectangular shape the most appealing shouldn't have been a surprise to anyone. The Greeks based the Parthenon in Athens on the golden rectangle, maintaining that it was the most aesthetically harmonious rectangular shape in existence.

phi in
golden rectangle



sketch 3

square and arc
in rectangle



(this section is a
golden rectangle)

sketch 4

logarithmic
spiral



sketch 5



sketch 6

(sketch 3), the long side of the rectangle becomes ϕ .

Evidently, objects whose geometry incorporate into themselves the ratio ϕ are aesthetically pleasing to human beings . . . which is fortunate because the ratio is found throughout nature.

As an example: Take a golden rectangle and define a square within it (see sketch 4). Using that square, draw an arc from one corner to the opposite corner.

Go now to the rectangle left over. The first thing to notice is that it, too, is a golden rectangle (its sides ratio is 1 to ϕ). As such, you can repeat the process outlined above: define a square within the rectangle, then draw an arc that passes from one corner the another. Continue doing this as shown in sketch 5.

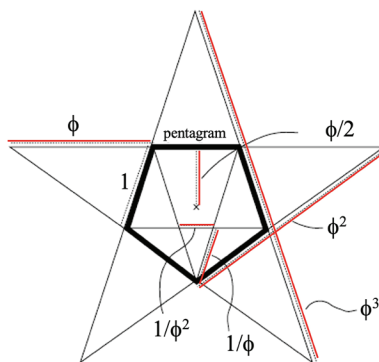
To a good approximation, what we have just created is what is called a *logarithmic spiral*, a geometric form that pops up consistently in both the animal and plant kingdoms (as an example from the animal kingdom, the prehistoric sea snail called the *chambered nautilus* is shaped according to the logarithmic spiral; as an example from the plant kingdom, the seed pattern of the sunflower--see sketch 6--is arranged in a swirling pattern that follows a logarithmic spiral).

But that's not all. The Fibonacci series is related to: the number of paths an excited electron can take as it migrates from some higher energy level down to the ground level; the structure of a honeycomb (the individual cells of a honeycomb are hexagonal, a shape that is based on ϕ); the way leaves arrange themselves as they grow up along a stem; even the genealogy of a drone bee.

Although some academicians sniff at the thought, it appears as though at least some of the more insightful men and women of antiquity knew about *phi*. For instance, the Pythagorean society at Krotona on the south-east coast of Italy was known for its

mystical leanings.³ They used the pentagram as their symbol.

The sides of the pentagram shown to the right have been extended showing some very interesting properties. As an example, if each side of the pentagram is defined as having a length of "1," then each side of the five pointed star is found to have a length of ϕ . Along with that, the pentagram has numerous other ratios and lengths within it that are related to ϕ , a few of which are shown in the diagram.



Being a secret society, the Pythagoreans did not go into much detail about the significance they saw within the pentagram, but it is known that they associated it with health, most probably in the form of a harmony between the body and spirit.

In summary, considering the way *phi* is generated (i.e., from a series that is arithmetic); the way it mathematically relates to itself and its powers ($1 + \phi = \phi^2$, etc.); the way in which it is embedded in such primary geometric forms as the aesthetically pleasing golden rectangle, the golden triangle, the pentagram, the hexagram, and the logarithmic spiral; and the way nature has incorporated it into forms like the chambered nautilus, the

³ I once heard a philosophy professor call Pythagoras, "a wiggged-out mystic." Though he may have been right, there is an even better possibility that Pythagoras was a very highly evolved Being.

Case in point: Pythagoras is known to have counseled the members of his society not to eat beans. This might seem "wiggged out" unless you happen to know something about the metaphysics of meditation. Deep meditate requires a tone within the auric complex that is not leadened with energy patterns that are heavy. In other words, it is virtually impossible to meditate very far into the inner worlds if one is burdened with (to put it in the vernacular) gross vibes. It has already been suggested that eating meat incorporates into the body a very heavy tone (this comes from incorporating meat permeated with the intense fear that grips animals at slaughter into the body; it also comes from a mind-set that allows one to be party to the mindless killing of other sentient beings), so it isn't surprising to find that those in Pythagoras's society did not eat meat.

What isn't so well known is that beans have an energetic (read this *vibratory*) quality that is very similar to that of meat. It is not to say that beans are bad; it is just to say that their vitality is believed to have an energy that, when reflected in the aura, is heavy. If Pythagoras was the spiritual teacher some believe him to have been, it would not be surprising to find that he told his more advanced members not to eat beans.

sunflower, the honeycomb, not to mention Fibonacci driven mechanisms like electron de-excitation patterns, it is hard not to be impressed when all is considered.

A wonder in stone: Having said all that, it is time to switch gears and move in a wholly different direction (we'll come back to *phi* shortly): We are about to consider one of the *Seven Wonders of the ancient world*.

Found in Egypt, the Great Pyramid is one of three major pyramids located on the Giza Plateau outside Cairo (the other two pyramids were built as tombs at a date later than that of the Great Pyramid).

Being the largest of the three, the Great Pyramid covers an area of 565,000 square feet (13 acres). Although it is hard to accurately measure with its casing stones removed, it is approximately 760 feet long (two and a half football fields) and 485 feet high. The structure has within it 2,500,000 limestone blocks the smallest of which measures 5'x7'x10' and weighs 5000 pounds. The largest of the blocks weighs 140,000 pounds (70 tons).

The Pyramid was originally covered with casing blocks 100 inches thick--20 acres worth. The casings were highly polished, so much so that in ancient times the Pyramid was called *the light* because its brilliance was evident for hundreds of miles out over the desert. In addition, the casings were so finely quarried that when placed one on top of another, their joints were, as the 1830's English adventurer General Howard-Vyse put it, "scarcely perceptible, not wider than the thickness of silver paper."⁴

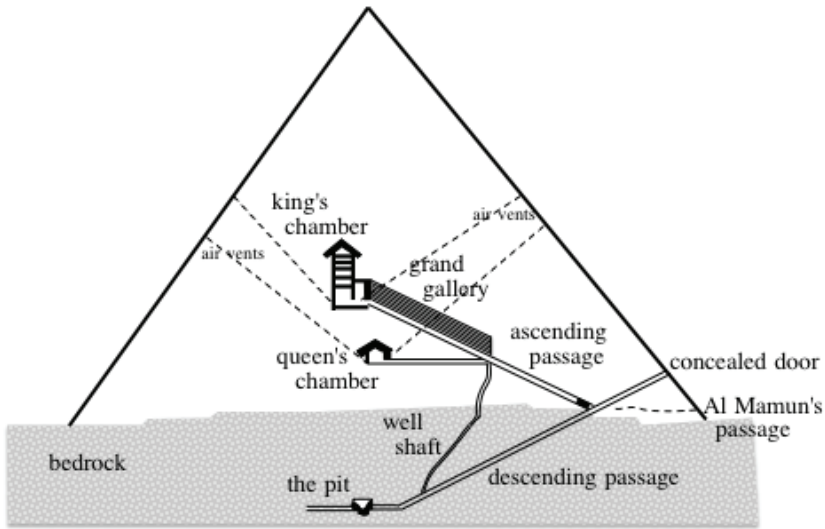
In 813 AD, the caliph Abdullah Al Mamun took local legend to heart and decided that the Pyramid was a tomb.⁵ Finding his tools unable to cut into the casings, he built huge fires against the rock bringing the rock to red-hot, then quenched the fires with vinegar. The sudden temperature change cracked the stone, thus giving his crews something to pick away at. Disheartened after burrowing 100 feet into the side and finding nothing but more rock,⁶ he tried one last time. On that last effort, or so the story goes,

⁴ This quote came from the book *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, by Peter Tompkins (1971). Most of the information in this section is from that book.

⁵ Although the other pyramids on the plateau were clearly tombs, and although almost all pyramids found in the world have been tombs, it is not clear that the Great Pyramid falls into this category (though popular belief maintains that it was).

⁶ I often wondered whether he thought the structure was like the Super Dome--break through a wall and you enter a huge space. If that was what he hoped, he was out of luck. The pyramid is almost completely solid.

his men heard a definite THUD to the left of their position. With great excitement, they dug toward the sound and, finally, broke into what is now called *the descending passage*.



Traveling along the *descending passage*, they found an offshoot passage blocked by a granite plug. Unable to cut into the granite, they dug around it into the limestone, gaining entrance to what is now called the *ascending passage*. Up the *ascending passage*, they found another junction the off-shoot of which led to what are now called the *Queen's Chamber*. Beyond that off-shoot, they found the *Grand Gallery*, and beyond the Grand Gallery they found what is now called the *King's Chamber*.

According to one story, Al Mamun entered the King's Chamber alone. Instead of finding a mummy and golden treasure, he found only an empty granite sarcophagus holder (without its lid). That was it. This was very strange. If grave robbers had gained entrance (though how they might have gotten in would have been a mystery--there was a door but the casings completely concealed its presence), they would have trashed everything in sight, including the mummy, looking for treasure. Desecrating tombs carried a penalty of death, so they would have undoubtedly moved quickly and been less than tidy.

In any case, when Al Mamun's men entered the chamber the next day, they found gold and jewels. Where did it come from? Most probably Al Mamun himself smuggled them in the night before so that his people, as

promised, could share in the booty.

No matter how it actually happened, there is one thing for sure: when the structure was opened, there was no mummy.

As strange as that may seem, there were other peculiarities about the place--properties that undoubtedly made the place a bit spooky for the caliph:

To begin with, when the caliph broke into the descending passage (and while in the Grand Gallery and King's Chamber) he found the place filled with fresh air. Al Mamun was certainly aware that the structure was ancient.⁷ How does one explain fresh air in a supposed tomb that had been sealed for, minimum, three thousand years? I doubt the question escaped the caliph . . . and it probably sent shivers down his spine.

Another oddity was the way the King's Chamber magnifies sound. I was in Cairo a number of years ago. When there, I was fortunate enough to find myself alone in the Pyramid for a short time. Standing next to the wall just behind the granite sarcophagus holder (it's still there), I began to hum a single note very softly. Within seconds, the room was completely filled with the sound. I went back a number of days later and experienced the place in the crowded presence of four busloads of tourists. With jabbering everywhere, the cacophony was deafening.

I can't image Al Mamun not noticing that his every word came back to him ten-fold. What's more, the entire structure is a resonating chamber. When in the King's chamber, you can hear conversations being had at the door. Very scary!

Over the next several hundred years, the Moslems removed the limestone casings to build the mosques of Cairo,⁸ leaving the Pyramid in the stripped state that it stands today.

Even so, it became quite an attraction for later explorers. Napoleon, for one, was fascinated by the place. As Tompkins explains:

. . . Meanwhile Napoleon, whose logistical mind enabled him to figure that the Great Pyramid and its Giza neighbors contained enough stone to build a wall 3 meters high (a little less than 10 feet) and one meter thick all around

⁷ We have papyri dating to 1500 BC that refer to the Great Pyramid as being ancient then.

⁸ If you could talk the Moslems into dismantling a few of their mosques (fat chance), we would undoubtedly find surfaces long since sealed from sight that have upon them the hieroglyphs that were on the face of the Great Pyramid.

France, had become attracted by the arcane qualities of the King's Chamber.

On the twenty-fifth of Thermidor (the Revolutionaries' August 12, 1799) the General-in-Chief visited the Pyramid with the Imam Muhammed as his guide. At a certain point, Bonaparte asked to be left alone in the King's Chamber, as Alexander the Great was reported to have done before him.

Coming out, the general is said to have been very pale and impressed. When an aide asked him in a jocular tone if he had witnessed anything mysterious, Bonaparte replied abruptly that he had no comment, adding in a gentler voice that he never wanted the incident mentioned again.

Many years later, when he was emperor, Napoleon continued to refuse to speak of this strange occurrence in the Pyramid, merely hinting that he had received some presage of his destiny. At St. Helena, just before the end, he seems to have been on the point of confiding to Las Cases, but instead shook his head, saying, "No. What's the use. You'd never believe me."

Although accounts of mysterious experiences within the Pyramid are numerous (Napoleon's included), there are things about the structure that are more quantitative but nevertheless baffling even by today's standards. For instance:

--The structure is level to 3/8 of an inch over 400 feet (not at all shabby, considering each building block has a volume of 350 cubic feet and weighed 5000 pounds);

--The structure is oriented exactly North, South, East, West. Note: we aren't talking magnetic North. It wasn't as though they inadvertently made a crude compass, saw it point toward magnetic North, attributed significance to that direction, then oriented their structure that way. The Pyramid is oriented to face *geographic* north.

--On the solstice--the day at which the sun is as far north as it will ever be--the sun swallows the Pyramid's shadow at high noon. That is, on every other day during the year, the north face of the Pyramid is in shadow. There is only one time during the entire year when that is not true, at 12 noon on the solstice.

Considering that this requires the casings to have an angle of precisely $51^{\circ}51'$, it seems incredible to believe that so remarkable a characteristic might have found its way into the structure by accident; equally incredible that it was done on a lark (especially if the structure is nothing more than an oversize tomb).

--The descending passage is a 350 foot long, four-foot square passageway (with the exception of the Grand Gallery, all the passages are square like this--when you visit, you walk in a crouch). At its ends it deviates from being absolutely straight by only $1/50$ of an inch; in the middle it deviates by a quarter-of-an-inch. Again, not bad for a structure of such heft.

--When the door is open (people visiting the Pyramid today enter through Mamun's hole and exit up the descending passage through the now-open door), one can sit at the bottom of the descending passage, look up the passageway and see a tiny patch of light coming in at the door. Doing this in the evening is even more remarkable. Looking up the passage, one sees in the middle of the tiny doorway a star THAT NEVER MOVES!

What is going on? There is only one star on the celestial plane that doesn't appear to be moving, relative to the earth: the Pole Star (also called *the North Star*). In short, the descending passage points directly toward the North Star.⁹

--And finally, there is that nagging question as to how old the Pyramid really is. Archaeologists maintain that it was built during the time of Cheops (Khufu in Egyptian--Cheops is the Greek name for that particular pharaoh). This was around 5000 years ago. The reason? Because his name was found in one place on the inside of the Pyramid. What isn't normally mentioned is the fact that the name was found as *graffiti*. It was not painted or carved on the walls in the formalized style that might accompanied a pharaoh's personal tomb. It was found up over the King's Chamber in those 140,000 pound stones that support the roof. Nevertheless, the

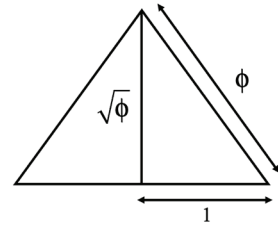
⁹ There is an interesting side point to this: The earth slowly wobbles on its axis taking 26,000 years to complete one wobble. That means the axis will point toward different stars at different times in the wobble. The Pole Star today is Polaris. It is known that the Pole Star during the time of the Pyramid's construction was Alpha Draconis (we have papyrus that says so). As Alpha Draconis was the pole star approximately 4600 years ago (circa 2600 BC), it was also the pole star $2600 + 26,000 = 28,600$ years ago. Could the pyramid be that old? Few think so, but who knows for sure?

name has stuck and the commonly accepted belief is that Cheops was the man who built it.

There has been some dissent on the matter, though. Geologists studying the weathering patterns on the nearby Sphinx have concluded that the Sphinx, and possibly the Pyramid, is considerably older than archaeologists have believed. Why? The Sphinx was buried by sand for a fair portion of its known lifetime--this means very little erosion--yet it is badly eroded. Furthermore, the erosion that has occurred appears to be more consistent with water damage than wind damage (there is also a water mark on the eleventh tier of the Great Pyramid--how did *that* get there?). There hasn't been major precipitation in the area (according to the geologic record) for 15,000 years, suggesting the Sphinx and Great Pyramid *might* have stood long *before* recorded history--long before that 2600 BC mark suggested by the north star dating.

Archaeologists don't really know (though they certainly aren't happy with the encroachment of the geologists). All that is known for sure is that both structures are very, very old.

If the information given to this point isn't enough to intrigue you, there is more. Specifically, the dimensions of the Pyramid are unusual. For instance, dropping a vertical line from the apex, you get a triangle (see to right). If we define the length of the base of the triangle to be 1, the hypotenuse is found to be ϕ and the height is found to be the square-root of ϕ . In fact, Tompkin's book has mountains of information concerning mathematical relationships that seem to be evident within the structure.



Another surprising feature: The circumference of a circle (C) is related to the circle's radius (R) by the expression:

$$C = 2\pi R.$$

What is peculiar is that the perimeter of the Pyramid (P) is related to the height of the Pyramid (h) by the relationship:

$$P = 2\pi h.$$

That is, the height of the Pyramid is related to the Pyramid's perimeter in the same way that the radius of a circle is related to the circle's circum-

ference.

This is very strange.

So what should we make out of all this?

One of the first things to note is that you won't find much of it being discussed in college classrooms. In a way, that shouldn't be surprising. University professors strive to present ideas and theories in clearly stated, logical chunks (they don't always succeed, but they try). Unfortunately, in doing so they tend to leave out anomalies--things that don't neatly fit into the theory being discussed. The physics professor talking about Newtonian physics will present it as though Newton's work was the end-all, be-all. There will be no mention of the non-Newtonian fact that *time*, for instance, is not independent of all else but rather depends upon *where* the moment's passage is measured, or that space is not a nice, dull, homogeneous, three-dimensional void but, rather, a four-dimensional entity with time occupying the fourth-dimension. Why the silence about all of this? Because although the ideas may reflect reality, they don't fit into the theories of Newtonian physics. As such, they are ignored.¹⁰

The same is true of history, or anthropology, or psychology. Even when they are mentioned, anomalies are rarely presented with force. Archeology classes that include Egyptian history will talk superficially about the Great Pyramid. Maybe the professor will state that we really don't know how it was built, but more often than not a simplistic explanation-of-construction will be given that includes giant ramps (ramps that would have taken two to four times the material used in the pyramid to build) and hundreds of thousands organized, well fed workers. And all the anomalies found in the structure? They will be left unexplored.

Put another way, there is no chance that any pyramid in ancient times could embody-by-accident the kind of mathematics and structural precision that is found in the graceful behemoth we call the Great Pyramid, yet that admission will never be made within academia. Why? Because it doesn't fit neatly into history's view of the ancients.

So who built it?

Aside from the *semi-naked primitives-with-ramps* theory, there are

¹⁰ Please note: This isn't some insidious plot to make idiots out of college students. Aside from the fact that most professors don't want to talk about anything except the topic at hand, professors may think the students are already aware of these twists . . . and in Newtonian physics, time is assumed to move at a constant rate as that is how it *seems* to act in the world..

very few answers to that question in academia. As for those outside academia who have ventured guesses, they've been shot down peremptorily. For instance, a number of years ago there was the claim that ancient astronauts were the builders. Maybe . . . though not probably.

There is another interesting possibility that arises from a different quarter. None other than the highly respected Plato wrote briefly about a conversation his uncle had with a priest in Egypt (both were undoubtedly Mystery School initiates). During that conversation, according to Plato, the priest spoke of a continent, Atlantis, that had been cleansed by water (i.e., submerged) in then-ancient times (are we talking Biblical flood?). Since then, a scenario has grown up around Plato's short notation culminating in a belief by some today that Atlantis was peopled by a highly technological society whose scientists monkeyed with Nature to such an extreme that Nature finally responded with a cataclysm.¹¹ According to those who so believe, there were some knowledgeable groups within that society who were averse to the use of science in that way, and who left the continent to colonize other areas of the world before the cataclysm occurred. The Great Pyramid is believed by some to be an artifact from one of those groups.

A more likely possibility, as least from the Eastern metaphysical perspective we are examining, is that the Great Pyramid was really a place of initiation in the Greater Mysteries. Remember, there was no mummy found in the edifice; there were air vents; the place is built with amazing insight into nature, not to mention engineering. If there was a place within the ancient world where highly evolved beings could go when they were ready to move into "the underworld" (the inner worlds?) to stand against the thoughtforms of negativity that lay like a curtain over the minds of humans, that place would have to be very special . . . and not just superficially. Who knows what harmonics are needed to send a Being into the inner world under relatively controlled conditions? Who knows? The Masters would, if Masters indeed exist.

In short, the Great Pyramid's purpose may have had nothing to do with death except, of course, in the most symbolic of ways.

¹¹ It is interesting. More scientific discovery has taken place in the last forty years than have taken place in *all recorded history* before that period. From whence do you suppose all these scientifically brilliant souls have come? And why are people so terrified about scientists pushing Nature too far (think about the possible consequences of today's delving into genetic engineering). Is this fear simply common sense, or is there a remembrance of a time when scientists--maybe some of the very same ones who are here now--twisted Nature with such mindless arrogance that karma had no choice but to cleanse. The possibility is not as outlandish as it seems (it may be wrong, but it is not outlandish).

Is this so? It is one more thing about which to wonder . . .

Another cause to wonder: The following is a story told to me by an acquaintance out of India (it was told to me in the first person--I will tell it in a similar way).

There is a guru here in the hills (the Himalayas) who is very pure. He started as a very poor young man in Calcutta--a city of great misery as well as beauty. His mother died at his birth. His father simply did not want to be bothered with him, so he grew up as one of the street children.¹² He begged for the least scrap of food, finally leaving the city in search of someplace less crowded where he would have a better chance to survive. As he grew older, he worked a bit here and there for the people with whom he took temporary residence, and they liked him because he was a good worker. They wanted him to stay but something inside him told him *no*.

"I could not let the remembrance of the misery I came into life with stop me from understanding," he said later. "I saw others in equal misery. It pushed me forward, rather, to see why and how and what I should do to help them."

As he moved through India, he came up into the mountains and there stayed in a small monastery perched on the edge of a cliff in Nepal. He stayed for a long time. Every night, he would look out of the windows of that tiny monastery that had only five monks who were very abstinent, and as he would look down into the valley through which he had walked he wondered, "What goes on in the valley? Why do people live as they do?"

With time, a series of enlightenments came. He became aware of a web of beauty in life much like Indra's web,¹³ and he came to see how much

¹² Approximately one-third of the people in Calcutta sleep on the sidewalks at night.

¹³ In *The Tao of Physics*, Fritjof Capra's discussion of sub-atomic physics includes an allusion to Indra's web. He says, "In the hadron bootstrap (this is a kind of sub-atomic particle interaction), all particles are dynamically composed of one another in a self-consistent way, and in that sense can be said to "contain" one another. In Mahayana Buddhism, a very similar notion is applied to the whole universe. This cosmic network of interpenetrating things and events is illustrated in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* by the metaphor of Indra's net, a vast network of precious gems hanging over the palace of the god Indra. In the words of Sir Charles Eliot:

In the heaven of Indra, there is said to be a network of pearls, so arranged that if you look at one you see all the others reflected in it. In the same way, each object in the world is not merely itself but involves every other object and in fact is everything else. 'In every particle of dust, there are present Buddhas without number.'

the Law (karma) gives to each human being as it supports the efforts of the soul. Having come closer in awareness to the reality of life, he thought, "What am I doing sitting in this beautiful place, looking down, seeing all from afar, when there is misery beneath it all that could be enlightened."

So he left his sanctuary and went into the villages of Nepal to try to explain the things he had seen in his enlightenment. Unfortunately, he had *sight* but not yet *wisdom*. He could clearly see the greed that was being practiced: the effort for profit without giving worth; the willingness to lie to get what one wanted. But when he pointed these things out to the people of a village, he was rebuked, often violently. "Move on," their leaders would say. They didn't like him observing, then making his observations public.

He finally decided that that was not the way. He went to a place that just happened to be very near an old monastery called Long Remembrance--one of the last of the places of the Greater Mysteries--that is not well known but that is said to exist quietly in the Himalayas. Sitting in earshot of that place (though he didn't realize it was there at the time--it was protected by illusion), he said out loud, "Tell me, oh Masters of old, what is it that I must know, for I would serve."

Then he heard a voice behind him say, "Look around you."

He did, and there to his surprise he found the monastery.

Speaking to the great door again, he said, "What is this?"

And again the voice replied, "It is a place that answers your need."

The man entered the monastery and spent many years there--it seems he was a chela unaware. And when he was done, he went out to work in the various villages in the area.

He is quite aged now, just under 100 years old. He has had a difficult life--something he needed in order to awaken him into an understanding of those for whom he would work. Greatly beloved, people wait for him as he goes from village to village counseling. And when it is time for him to leave they sometimes carry him for he finds it hard to move up and down the hilly landscape these days.

What makes him so special, so different from other ascetics?

His words are bathed in experience. He knows what it means to suffer, what it means to be alone and in a state of distress. Speaking with a

The similarity of this image with that of the hadron bootstrap is indeed striking. The metaphor of Indra's net may justly be called the first bootstrap model, created by the Eastern sages some 2,500 years before the beginning of particle physics. Buddhists insist that the concept of interpenetration is not comprehensible intellectually, but is to be experienced only by an enlightened mind in a state of meditation . . ."

voice of loving understanding, and having distilled out of his experiences the jewel of wisdom, he gives of the beauty and treasure that has been given to him. He does not just speak words about enlightenment, he *is* enlightenment.

Is it possible that there are Beings like this: Beings who have moved ahead of the stream of humanity, who have been trained by still more evolved humans, who work in the world today?

Hopefully, that question will make you *wonder* . . .

Appendix I

QUOTATIONS

(for your pleasure and contemplation)

The quotes you will find on the following pages are oriented around the philosophies of the East. They are in no particular order. The collection began from personal interest and without thought of sharing them at a later time. For that reason, I have unfortunately been sloppy about “the where and the who,” contenting myself solely with “the what.” In short, some of the quotes are documented but most are not. My apologies.

I would suggest that you not read more than a few pages at a time. As was said in the text, verses like these have within them subtleties that are not evident with the first reading (nor with the second). As it’s easy to overdose, my suggestion is that you move slowly.

However you choose to go, enjoy.

It is better to speak one word of harmony than a liturgy of unwisdom;
It is better to read one or two words that speak truth than whole volumes
that do not;
It is better to take one action that is thoughtful toward the rest of life than
to fill ten lifetimes with actions that are not.

The Buddha
(from *The Dhammapada*)

"It was given to the eye to have Light to see," says an old book. "And even though you may be blind, you can see if you have the Light. But if you have not the Light and do not believe it is there, then you see only bits and pieces of the wonders and the beauties of the universe. And you will illumine nothing inside yourself or outside either."

from an Indian sage

Two men argue.
Each is right;
Each is wrong.

a Zen thought

Men who pass what is good lose not only the good but also the ability to recognize the good. In doing so, they leave behind a monument to their foolishness.

a Sufi thought

Quietly, without stress and without fear, look at yourself as you would a beloved child who is growing and trying to understand. Then help that child. If it has toys that it likes to use such as anger, say "Let's set this aside for a time and see what else there is that we might use." If you won't play the good parent, who can it turn to?

unattributed

The Higher Law (karma) is one of change. As a human changes his or her attitudes, nature will change its response. Once you come to know that, you will need fear the growing pains of humanity no longer.

a Hindu thought

The Law (karma) gives certain powers to the obsessively evil. Why? Because on this level they are the ultimate teachers. It is not the joys that you remember as changing you. It is the presence of negativity that finally makes you see that this is not the way: not the way of lovingness; not the way to grow an immortal soul.

unattributed

I remember an old man who said to me, "It took me seventy years to find out that if I sat down without thought, there was usually a splinter waiting for me. But if I took some thought to smooth in my mind the patterns in me that were heavy and sharp, then I found that the splinters did not stick."

Take some time to smooth in your mind by understanding and lovingness the sharp places about you. Then where you sit will not be sharp, even though there may be stones everywhere.

story from India

May your thought of this day be as the sunlight, knowing no shadow in itself and giving of its light and understanding.

unattributed

Consideration for others is the basis of a good life.

Confucius

From the unreal lead me to the real;'
From darkness lead me to Light;
From death lead me to immortality.

from the *Brihad-aranyaha*
Upandishads

It is the One in the many that I love,
and the many in the One.
When I have come to see that these are the same,
then the peace and the power and the strength of Allah shall be mine.

from the Islamic tradition

Fail to honor others, they will fail to honor you.

Lao Tzu

That which resides in the heart is smaller than a seed of mustard;
smaller than the smallest grain of barley;
smaller than the canary seed;
smaller yet than the inner seed of that seed.
Yet that which lives within the heart is greater than all things.

from the Indian tradition

He who, dwelling in all things,
Yet is other than all things;
Whom all things do not know;
Whose body all things are;
Who controls all things from within;
THAT is the Soul, the Inner Controller,
The High Mind, the Immortal.

from the *Brihad-aranyaka*
Upandishads

All that we are is a result of what we have thought. The mind is every-
thing. What we think, we become.

from the Indian tradition

First comes the promise.

Then comes the discipline of the hand and the heart and the foot.
We move in the best way we know, and in that we change the stream of
energies and desires around us until the things we most admire are those
that are the better and the best.

We come at last to a vital sense of the (karmic) Law.

There is no harm in us for we hold an inexhaustible store of Love.

Nothing can shock us; nothing can cause fear.

And because we see clearly and with Love, there is no power in this
world or the next that can set us off our Way.

from the Indian tradition

It is not easy to walk the path. It needs the constant thought, the constant
decision. The personal mind says, "I do not wish to be always on guard.
I do not wish to always have this responsibility. I simply want to feel, to
live, to run like a child without care."

Yet the child must grow up, for if It does not It will go through life crush-
ing and destroying because It is a child and knows no better.

Run no longer; move upon the Way.

from the Indian tradition

Come out of the tomb of the little self.

Forget its fears; forget its limitations;

forget the little petty things that it feels so necessary.

Stand free, beautiful, serene, immortal, potent, a creative being beyond
belief.

That is the true Self

If you hold to that Self and choose all things on behalf of that Self, then
one day that Self will become evident within you.

from the Egyptian tradition

Live in harmony, which is compassion,
which is love,
which is goodness in action.

a Buddhist blessing

If there were not the spur of discomfort, we would not move. If we had not the contrast on this level between that which is good and that which is evil, we would not be able to choose to go forward. It is not by mistake that this plane is dual in every respect.

from the Indian tradition

If you do not love enough, then time changes around you and it becomes small and everything stands as a barrier to your way.
But when you love enough, you are patient with all states of encloement and consciousness.

When you love enough, you see beyond the instinctual patterns that nature uses to perpetuate itself.

When you love enough, you are full of perception.

When you love enough, there is always time enough.

from the Indian tradition

If you choose to live in the world, remember that you are a server, not a victim. There is a difference.

unattributed

There are many ways to move something out of your path. You can kick it, and that may remove it but it might also break your toe. If nothing else you will have raised a lot of dust and created a center of negativity for which you will be responsible. Or you could pick it up, bless it for doing its duty, and gently place it off the road. In that way, you will have done no harm and you will have raised no dust in your passing.

unattributed

If I could shatter each shell of self and let in the Light, I would do so. But none can break the mold of mind except the self within. The shells are the accumulated hardnesses that have grown up through karmic choices through many lifetimes. So look to see where and what the self is. Then for a moment, having given gratitude for existing within the heart of God, look to see how you can harmonize with the One.

commentary from an Indian sage

Only pursue an offender to show him the way.

Lao Tsu
(from *The Tao Teh Ching*)

Thought sticks to walls like paint.

unattributed

I was in darkness until I realized that there was light within it;
I was alone until I knew that everything touched me and was a part of me
and that I could not be separate;
I was fearful until I saw that the wheels of the universe turned in perfect
balance;
And I thought there was nowhere to go until I saw the long path among
the stars and in the invisible worlds which I had not dreamed existed.

Shall my Light go out? No, for there is no wind that can blow it out. Its
oil comes from lovingness, and that has no end.
I have the power to see the step ahead and to chose to step upon it.

What more could I ask of the gifts of life than this amazing and uphold-
ing universe that gives me the ability to participate in the choices of the
One Mind.
Let me honor the High Self.
Let me hold to that reality in the midst of the changing pressures of the
learning world.

unattributed

My bed is not comfortable while another has no bed.
My food is not nourishing unless I give full gratitude for it.
The sight of my eyes is not true sight until I can see through the eyes of
all.
My hand can do no true and lasting work until it becomes the hand of the
One.

the Buddha

Because there is darkness and storm, is the sky any less blue?

Sufi wisdom

Let the mind be large and not small;
Let the self be a server of thought rather than a demander of satisfaction;
Set yourself in the ways of wisdom that moves in the reality of your true
spirit;
For if you do, you will be able to stand in the face of disharmony and, in
doing so, be of use to those who haven't the strength.

unattributed

Whatever you think the world is, you will make the world that thing.
The drug addict, no matter where he is, will bring with him his addictive-
ness. The skid row mentality can exist within a palace.

Sufi wisdom

There are the Rings-Pass-Not that hold us in situations of distress.
What do you think these restraints are? They are the illusions we build
and set around reality. Until you can pass through them, you will not see
further.

unattributed

He who walks steadily, who is not in haste but who is neither a laggard;

He who is not fearful, yet neither is he foolhardy;

He who is not deterred in the face of any threat; who can look at anything and not be shocked for he has nothing in him which is like that which he sees so he can view it with understanding and detachment;

He is the one who will go forward, for he has come into a state of harmony.

He treads the Middle Way.

a Buddhist prayer

May the work of your right hand and your left hand be equal.

May your right hand know its duty to the left, and the left to the right.

And may they both know their duty to the One who is All.

a Buddhist prayer

A man lives either in time or in eternity.

He who lives under time lives with the prospect of irritation.

He who lives in eternity lives with the knowledge that time is enough.

He who lives in time finds his horizons moving always away from him.

He who lives in eternity has already reached the horizon and can look beyond.

Give honor in your heart, then, to eternity; and give use to time so that it does not use you.

an Egyptian wisdom

Nirvana is the emptiness that is full.

a Zen Buddhist saying

There is an eternity in which you live. This should neither make you
slothful nor hurried.

There is time enough to undertake consideration of everything around
you.

There is time enough for a kind thought.

If you think there is not, you are compressing yourself into a very small
knot of self, and this is a very small thing, indeed.

unattributed

When one pays attention to the present,
there is a great pleasure in the awareness of small things.

unattributed

Each new personality is born from the seeds of the old.
A man is his own parent.

unattributed

He drew a circle to keep me out;
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But love and I had the wit to win;
We drew a circle that took him in.

Edwin Markham

Until you can set aside the small self and enlarge yourself into principle; until you can not fear the universe but rather love it; until you can give without thought of return of any kind; until you can view all action with compassion and not allow yourself to be drawn into negative response because you are angry or disturbed; until you can see as the Sun sees--all things lighted from the fire of your own understanding; until all these things come to pass the walls of the personal self will imprison you.

And even though you will think you are free, things will annoy you; things will hurt you; you will feel depressed or you will feel over-excited; you will be too pleased with yourself or not pleased enough. You will, in short, lurch from states of change to other states of change, a kind of bouncing ball between perception and emotion--and you will never achieve the kind of satisfaction that your personal self so desperately desires. This will continue until your child self comes to realize through experience that the only real, lasting happiness it will ever have is when it aligns itself with the god-like part of you, the high mind, and move toward the higher principles.

wisdom from India

A sound man is good at salvage, at seeing that nothing is lost.
Having what is called insight, a good man, before he can help a bad man,
finds in himself the matter with the bad man.
Whichever teacher discounts this lesson is as far from the road as the other,
whatever else he may know.
This is the heart of it.

Lao Tsu (from
The Tao Teh Ching)

In the midst of what do I stand?

a meditation

When you step across the line, what is it that you will wish to present
to the Law, the clear and loving eyes of the Law?

As you stand before It and call up to It and say, "Here I am," who is
there?

What is it that is present?

Who is "I"?

What, my friends, is yourself?

unattributed

What are you?

True, you are a unit of self interest--but you are more. You are a unit that can move; a unit that can devise your own awakening.

Awakening comes in the efforts of everyday affairs.

Are you kind when you don't have to be?

Do you look with compassion in the face of negative action?

Are you mindful of how you should put your foot, that it not be harmful?

Are you mindful of your hand, that it should heal when it touches?

Are you mindful of your thoughts, that they do not reinforce negativity?

Are you mindful of your voice, that it does not cut?

Awakening comes when these gifts of right attention are yours.

a Buddhist commentary

I knew a man who had in his house in my village a very poisonous snake. The man was very familiar with the snake and the snake had not had its venom removed. Nevertheless, the snake was quite harmless because all those around him loved him and he trusted them.

The snake gave his effort to the people by threatening the rodents and things that were destructive to the property. And when anyone came into the house who had negative attitudes and fears, when they would come upon the snake suddenly he would raise his head and his hood would go out and he would gaze at them in utmost power and dignity. It almost seemed as though the snake smiled as he watched them retreat from him. He would not bite, but they didn't know that.

He rescued, one day, a child of the family, by threatening another beast that was violent. He gave up, this little being, his life in defense of the child, for he was killed by the other beast but not before the snake had won time for the rescue of the child. And so it is that in an environment of lovingness, even those with venom can become harmless, can become guardians and servers under the natural (karmic) Law.

story from a friend in India

Ignorance:

If you hold it, you will live your life waiting for pleasurable experiences.

And when they come, you will play them out and then wait for another.

This is drowning in the unreality of the personal mind.

unattributed

There is nothing that can slay the Real.

There is nothing that can divide the Real.

No sword can cut it; no flame can burn it.

The Bhagavad Gita

Sleep when you sleep,
eat when you eat.

a Zen meditation

What is the reality that does not move and yet does?

a Zen meditation

Those who know do not tell; those who tell do not know.
Not to set the tongue loose, but to curb it;
Not to have edges that catch, but to remain untangled;
Unblinded;
Unconfused;
Is to find balance.
And he who holds balance beyond sway of love or hate, beyond reach of
profit or loss, beyond care of praise or blame,
He has attained the highest post in the world.

Lao Tsu
(from *The Tao Teh Ching*)

They will come back, come back again,
As long as the red earth rolls.
He never wasted a leaf or a tree;
Do you think He would squander a soul?

Rudyard Kipling

You must be empty before you can become full.

a Zen saying

It is no more marvelous to be born twice than it is to be born once.

Voltaire

Where does the soul go when it dies?
There is no necessity for it to go anywhere.

Jacob Boehm

The following are some of the fifteen charges put forth at the trial of Bishop Origen (Bishop Origen was born in Alexandria, Egypt, in 185 AD-
-he was one of the best informed and most learned of the Church fathers, even though he was excommunicated by the church 299 years after his death):

1.) He said that man came from an original pure state and will return to purity;

2.) He said there was pre-existence before birth;

3.) He said, “the body,” or necessity of Jesus will be gone when humans comes to a fulfillment of their own understanding;

4.) He said that man and Jesus were one, and that all the qualities and characteristics that had once been in Jesus were the ones we had now;

5.) He said that the body of the Master Jesus was, in truth, an oval;

6.) He said that until we can purify ourselves, we can not understand the Master Jesus fully;

7.) And he indicated that the real power of salvation lay not in powers but in ourselves.

from
Reincarnation, the Phoenix Fire Mystery

For what do you search?
For that which is lost.
Where will you look?
At the center.

a Masonic injunction

If you do not like being unhappy, why are you unhappy?

unattributed

A man's own self is his friend;
A man's own self is his foe.

from *The Bhagavad Gita*

You think life pushes on you? It is exactly the opposite.

a Zen meditation

Let all things speak to you of the wonder and care of the creative minds
that are a part of the whole universe.

Become mindful of the upholding love that makes your being possible;

Become mindful of the search and the struggles that exist in others;

Become mindful that beyond the weeping of the lesser self there is the
great and beautiful universe.

an Egyptian prayer

As above, so below.

a Hermetic maxim

To be clear sighted, able to see the whole without the distortion of the
personal mind's desires;

To be able to help in any situation with the utmost of loving compassion;

To need no defense;

To assess one's motives for great acts and small ones alike with equal
consideration;

To be cheerful in the face of all things;

To have gratitude for all the smaller and greater consciousnesses that sup-
port me;

To see the beauty in all that upholds me.

To act in the interest of the whole of life, not in the interest of the small
self.

a meditative tone

If we look through the glasses of illusion,
some things will look like monsters while others like angels.
But when we look clearly,
we will see that even the dark angels are moving under the karmic Law.

unattributed

Contemplation is the battleground of men;
mortification the playground of children.

a Sufi saying

Do not wish ill of anyone, O man of good nature,
Whether they be people of church or of the synagogue.
What a bad place is a bad thought.

a Sufi motto

May your mind unfold, your heart beat gently.
May the work of your hands prosper and may the energies that belong to
life come to you in harmony.

a Buddhist blessing

The thirty spokes within the wheel unite upon a hole;
Yet but for that which none can feel, how could the carriage roll?

From damp clay molded into place a vessel may be wrought;
And yet without the space within its value would be naught.

Tho' wood and tile may build a hall, and roof it with a dome;
It is the empty space within that makes the hall a home.

An so from vessel, hall, and wheel this truth we may deduce;
To what existence renders real, its opposite gives use.

Lao Tzu (from Mackintosh's trans. of
the *Tao Teh Ching*)

Yield and you will not break; bent you can straighten.
Empty you can hold, torn you can mend.
And as want can reward you, so wealth can bewilder.
Aware of this, a wise man has the simple return that other men seek;
Without inflaming himself, he is kindled;
Without explaining himself, he is explained;
Without taking credit, he is accredited;
And because he does not compete, he finds peaceful competence.

Lao Tzu

There is nothing in the Law that says you must react in negative ways. If
you do, that is your choice.

Many say, "I just could not help it." There is nothing in the Law that
says that this is true.

Many say, "But I could not see." There is nothing in the Law that says
you may not.

a Buddhist commentary

The gem can not be polished without friction, nor man perfected
without trials.

Confucius

Urged by desire, I wandered through the streets of good and evil.
I gained nothing except the feeding of desire.

Sufi commentary

Each new personality is born from the seeds of the old. A man is his
own parent.

a Buddhist commentary

Be fully mindful of each moment and you shall be wise.
Be fully mindful of the various shades and degrees of concentration with-
in yourself, and pull them into useful patterns.
Be mindful of the vast concentration of that spirit within and without that
says, "There is joy; there is love; there is giving of understanding; there
is the healing of destruction; there is the ultimate enlightenment of all
things."

a Buddhist commentary

To the disciple on the Path of right action, the thought of pain and
pleasure grows less; the thought of service grows more.

a Vedantin commentary

As water develops the heat of caustic lime, so does the teaching of
true attention bring into fierce action every unsuspecting potentiality la-
tent in the chela-to-be.

Sinnett (from *The Mahatma Letters*)

Friend, beware of Pride and Egoism, two of the worst snares for the feet of him who aspires to climb the high path of Knowledge and Spirituality.

unattributed

If we understand the treasure of unity and the treasure of the many, then we will understand the form and the not-form. There has to be a flowing quality of that upon which form resides that makes it possible to be. If it were not for the universal energy, which appears as emptiness, there would be no form, nothing to uphold it, no way that it could aggregate itself into universes. It is the same within ourselves. There is fullness and there is emptiness.

unattributed

Nor Aught nor Naught existed;
Yon bright sky was not, nor heaven's broad roof outstretched above.
What covered all?
What sheltered?
What concealed?
Was it the water's fathomless abyss?
There was not death, yet there was not immortality.
There was no confine betwixt day and night.
The only One breathed breathless by Itself;
Other than It, there nothing since has been.

from the *Rig Veda*

The personal mind will tell you all its best aspirations, then in the same voice begin its liturgy of wants. It has very little spiritual discrimination.

unattributed

Can you see what you are?
Can you see where you are going?
Can you perceive what it means to exist in a universe without death?
Can you perceive the power of goodness, which looks very small up
against the blackness of negativity?

unattributed

The opposite of ego is another form of ego in which you say you are no good.

unattributed

Loving yourself has to be redefined. Certainly, love the effort your child makes, but don't say "You're OK" when in fact it isn't. That is not love; that is foolishness.

unattributed

Evolution has periods of rest, but it never fully stops.

unattributed

Karma: it will not harm your spirit but it will certainly hit upon the sore spots within the self and the ego.

unattributed

Suffering is not suffering if it is used to understand.

unattributed

The ego loves drama.

unattributed

Scientists trudge up the mountain of knowledge laboriously, then find at the top that the philosophers are already there.

apologies to Albert Einstein

Until we are pressed upon to see reality, we will stay in the pleasant delusion of unreality.

unattributed

I looked for paradise. Whenever I asked, someone would say, “Over there, up the hill and on the other side.” I was always going up and down hills in every direction. I was so busy moving from one place to another, that every time I passed through paradise I didn’t see it.

a Sufi story

Walk in the universe, not in your little place.

unattributed

No true teacher would ever give a hint as to how to develop powers to a being who, in the smallest of things was inconsiderate; who in the smallest of dealings with life was not mindful to an extreme of being as harmless as possible; who was not able to control the ebb and flow of the emotional body; who was not so rooted in principle that he would give his life out of body rather than set aside one bit of his trust.

commentary from an Indian sage

When we become completely realized--as far as we can go in this evolutionary cycle on earth--what will we leave behind? We will have left a reasonably purified envelope that can become, finally, a self determining, giving unit that can begin to inform lesser developed units as they come up. Everything is linked to what is above it, and to what is below it.

an Indian sage

Take heed of the use of the eye, for if it becomes ensnared by looking upon objects of desire and entrapped by what is believed to be beautiful, it will then be setting aside your first hope, the ability of clear sight.

Take heed of the use of the ear, for if it is not used fully and clearly and without prejudice, you will be setting aside your first prize, the privilege of hearing.

Take heed of the use of the tongue, for if it is used unwisely and wounds it will turn upon you and you will lose your first duty, the privilege of serving your fellows and the whole of life.

from an Indian sage

No matter how far we have moved within the world,
if we have not moved with steadiness and justice
we have not moved an inch.

unattributed

Do not enclose yourself in the little prisons of the self, in the distorted little cages of mind-sets that you have clung to for so long. It is time to be free.

unattributed

To be in the world but not of the world requires coolness and warmth: the coolness to see clearly with the warmth of loving compassion.

unattributed

There is something . . . which existed before Heaven and Earth. Oh how still it is, the formless, standing alone without changing, reaching everywhere without harm . . . It appears to be everlasting. Its name I know not. To designate it, I call it *Tao* . . . How unfathomable is Tao! . . . All things return to it . . . Not visible to the sight, nor audible to the ear, in its use it is inexhaustible . . .

Tao produces all things; its Virtue nourishes them; its Nature gives them form; its Force perfects them . . . [But] the Tao which can be expressed in words is not the eternal Tao. Without a name, it is the beginning of Heaven and Earth; with a name, it is the Mother of all things . . .

from the *Tao Teh King* (tr. Giles) as quoted in
Reincarnation, the Phoenix Fire Mystery

Nothing is better than the love of a pure mind sent to the whole of life.

unattributed

We dismiss the machinations and guile and just plain thoughtlessness of the personal self as being unimportant. Yet that is what keeps us from doing the work we should do; that is what jangles the nerves; that is what makes us look for thanks and recognition instead of simply doing what is appropriate, leaving the rest to God.

unattributed

We are the ones who make the future, and that have made the past. The great brooding spirit of the Divine Self moves in and around us asking us constantly to *observe this*, and *choose that*. And we way, “Yes, but that will interfere with this and this.”

Will it? Those who have truly chosen wisely are supremely happy. Then never say, “I do not have what I want.” That only comes from the voice of the child self.

unattributed

For those who carve out a place solely for themselves--a security spot--
on the edge of that place will be weeping.

unattributed

... AND AT NO TIME
WILL MY HANDS LEAVE
MY BODY
(Einstein's Physics and Illusion)

*My suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose,
it is queerer than we can suppose.*

J.B.S. HALDANE from his book
Impossible Worlds

If you look closely, you will find that *reality in nature* does not generally present itself in superficially obvious ways. What *appears to be* rarely is.

As such, wishing to delve into the unknown in a sane, controlled way is *not* a sign of diminished reason. It is the sign of an intellectually curious, questioning human being. It is, in fact, at the heart of pure science.

The problem comes when we become inflexibly tied to our common-sense notions about the way the world works. Why? Because when ideas don't fit into our possibly narrowly defined perspective, we feel threaten. Feeling threatened, we defend. And in defending, we become even more engulfed in our dogmatism, all the while claiming it is the other guy who is being unreasonable.

For those wishing to unleash the mind to explore new ideas and dimensions, there is a need to consider life and the nature-of-things in new ways. For thousands of years, for instance, mystics from both the east and

the west have maintained that our physical and mental worlds are largely made up of illusion. Understanding and coming to grips with that possibility is extremely important for anyone interested in considering the exotic philosophic ideas that have become popular in the western world in the last hundred years.

Interestingly enough, the contention that our world is steeped in illusion has been unwittingly supported by, of all disciplines, modern science. Unfortunately, most people are unfamiliar with the more provocative areas of physics from which that support comes. In an effort to better understand, we are about to take a quick and easy excursion into those required realms, seasoned with a fair portion of lively, de-mustified (sic) history. So bon appetit, and as a magician friend of mine used to say, “Please note that at no time will my hands leave my body.”

As far as the scientific community was concerned at the time, everything about the 1880’s was pleasantly comfortable. With the exception of a few pesky loose ends, all observable phenomena in nature had been explained within the framework of physics. In fact, scientists were so sure of themselves that physics was considered nearly a dead subject. Some professors even went so far as to tell their most promising students to get out of physics and go into mathematics, “a field where there is still new and exotic ground to be covered.”

Such was the scientific mood of the time. Then came the infamous Michelson-Morley experiment (gasp) and that nice, neat, comfortably complacent scientific world completely crumbled into controversy.

To understand why, we need to look at how scientists of the time viewed the phenomenon we call *light*.

Back in 1801, a gentleman by the name of Young did an experiment in which he showed that light, after passing through a pair of thin slits, behaved in a wave-like manner. Due to Young’s experiment, the scientific community of the 1880’s believed that light was a wave phenomenon.

There was a problem, though. A wave is really nothing more than a disturbance that moves through a medium. As an example, if you drop a pebble into a calm pool, the disturbance produced by the pebble entering the water moves outward in the form of a water wave. In this case, the wave’s medium is the *water*--you can’t have water waves without it.

Scientists of the time knew that space was essentially a vacuum, and they knew that light traveled 93,000,000 miles to get from the sun to the earth.

But if light was a wave and space emptiness . . . ahhh, you begin to see the problem. There did not appear to be a medium that light waves could use as they passed through the void.

Fortunately, scientists in the 1880's had an ingenious solution to the problem. They assumed that there was an underlying stuff--a kind of fixed understructure--upon which space was built. This under structure was called "ether," and literally everyone believed that it existed. They really had no choice. Without ether, there would be no medium for light waves to travel through.

Enter the Michelson-Morley experiment.

The Michelson-Morley experiment was designed to prove the obvious, to show that ether did, indeed, exist.

I have no intention of explaining the ins-and-outs of the entire experiment, though there is one important factor that I do need to mention. The experiment was centered on the idea that if ether did exist, the speed of light should vary depending upon how the light source was moving relative to the fixed ether. All the experiment had to do was to show this variability and, voila, the ether theory would be secure.

Remembering that everybody and his mother believed that ether existed, you can imagine the brouhaha that arose when Michelson and Morley's results showed just the opposite. According to their findings, the speed of light did not change no matter what the light source was doing. And that meant "no ether."

If you hate science, you would have loved watching all the commotion. The nasty little revelation hit unsuspecting physicists like a ton of bricks. Even Michelson and Morley were appalled. It meant that the accepted theories of light were badly flawed and, to add insult to injury, it meant that the theoretical underpinnings of Newtonian physics had been undermined, too (Newtonian physics is based upon the idea that there exists, somewhere, a fixed frame of reference; in the 1880's, ether was believed to be that fixed, *inertial* frame of reference). It was not until a man named Einstein published his thoughts on the subject that physicists began to sleep better at night.

The *Special Theory of Relativity* was predicated on two very basic assumptions.

The first assumption was that the laws of physics work the same in all stationary or constant-velocity frames of reference. As an example, if you were sitting in an airplane on the ground and you decided you wanted

tea, you would pick up your tea pot, position it over the cup, and pour. According to Einstein (Newton too, for that matter), if you decided to have a second cup while the plane was at 35,000 feet moving at 600 miles per hour, the *same* laws of physics would apply, just as before. You would not need to catch the liquid by positioning the cup some number of feet behind the pot, even though your frame of reference, the plane, was moving at 600 miles per hour. All you would need to do is to pour as usual and, if you were a poet at heart, “watch the freely falling liquid extend gracefully, following a typically parabolic arc from the pot to the cup.”

Nothing could be more natural.

Einstein’s second and considerably more exotic assumption was that “the measure of the speed of light will always be the same in all stationary and constant-velocity frames of reference.” Although this assumption was not as a direct consequence of the Michelson-Morley experiment, it was supported by M-M. And although it looks innocuous enough, let me assure you that its presence within Einstein’s theory produces some very peculiar conclusions.

Follow along and you will see what I mean.

For the moment, assume you are traveling in an automobile moving at 50 miles per hour when you are overtaken by a second auto traveling 60 miles per hour. How fast will the second car seem to be going, relative to you, as it passes you by? This is the same as asking, “Relative to your car--your *frame of reference*--how fast is the other car moving?”

Clearly, the other car will creep by you . . . the answer to the question is 10 miles per hour.

Now, if you pass a third car moving 60 miles per hour in the *opposite* direction, how fast will that car appear to be traveling, *relative to you*?

That car would pass you like a shot . . . and the answer to the question would be 110 miles per hour.

So far, so good. Nothing dazzling, and in each case the apparent velocity of the other cars, relative to your frame of reference, has depended upon your motion and their motion. But what happens when we look at a comparable scenario involving light?

Imagine you are sitting in a stationary space ship out in space, just dying to do something exciting. Nothing much is happening, so you are just about to give up and go home when a beam of light passes by your ship.

Naturally your ship is equipped to the teeth, so for lack of anything better to do you extend your Tom Swift “velocity-measuring device” into the beam and measure the speed of the light as it passes your motionless

ship. The device registers a speed of approximately 186,000 miles per second . . . the accepted speed of light.

Not being content with so ho-hum an exercise, you fire up the old warp-drive and accelerate your ship to a speed of 150,000 miles per second (I should probably mention how absurdly fast this is--our fastest military jets only go around three-quarters of a mile per second, and the space shuttle top end is only around seventeen miles per second when in space).

You are traveling in the same direction as the light beam when you again extend your velocity-measuring device and the device measures the speed of the light, relative to your moving ship. What would you expect the device to register?

There does not seem to be a lot of difference between this situation and the situation we looked at earlier with the two cars driving in the same direction, so common sense would lead us to believe that the device would register a speed of 36,000 miles per second. But that is not what you would find in this situation. The device would measure the passing light at a speed of 186,000 miles per second . . . again, the accepted speed of light.

Do I hear someone in the back row beginning to hum the theme to the Twilight Zone? Are you beginning to mentally twitch? Don't worry, this *is* very peculiar.

Strange or not, though, physics has substantiated Einstein's assumption. Contrary to all common sense, the measured speed of light will always be 186,000 miles per second whether you are traveling into the light beam, away from the light beam, or just standing still. The speed of light is the same in all frames of reference.

Naturally, Einstein had a perfectly simple, straight-forward explanation for this apparently mysterious behavior of light, but to understand it we will have to spend more time looking back into history.

If you were seven or eight years old, you would probably be secure in the belief that Sir Isaac Newton's main claim to fame had something to do with being hit on the head by an apple. In fact, Newton was a brilliant scientist who lived in the late 1600's. He did extensive work in the field of optics; he literally invented calculus, almost as an afterthought of some of his scientific speculations; and he developed one of physics' first coherent, workable theories centered on the mechanics of the physical universe.

In that theory, Newton presented a mathematical coupling between the ideas of *distance traveled* and *velocity*, *velocity* and *acceleration*, and *acceleration* and *force*. In other words, he was the first in the western

world to take the somewhat nebulous concepts of motion and use the language of mathematics to define and relate them.

Newton's physics was brilliant. It was so good that it is still used in "everyday life." Unfortunately, we now know that it completely falls apart when phenomena associated with the limits of the physical world are examined. That is, when we begin to delve into the world of the very small, like inside the atom; or when we look at the effects of very massive objects, like black holes in space; or when we are examining objects moving at very high speeds, speeds close to the speed of light; . . . in all of these cases, Newton's physics does not work.

Why?

Part of the problem lies in assumptions Newton made about time and space. Once again, the assumptions follow from observation and common sense. Unfortunately, science has since found that they are not true reflections of the way nature really is, and that kind of flaw inevitably leads to big-time problems somewhere down the line.

The first of Newton's assumptions had to do with time.

By *time*, we are talking about *a measure of the rate at which the moment passes*. As far as Newton was concerned, time was a universal--something that was constant and independent of all else. He saw it the way you and I would. We do not notice time running faster in the mountains than it does at the sea shore. Neither did he. We all see it as a constant thing, the same *here* as *there*.

Newton's second assumption had to do with space. As far as he was concerned, space was nothing more than a homogeneous, three dimensional void. Again, not a hard assumption to accept when you think about it. A void does seem to be the same in all directions (i.e., homogeneous), and space does seem to be associated with length, width, and height--three dimensions.

As far as everyday observations go, you and I and Newton would all have happily agreed: Newton's second assumption was a safe bet.

With this in mind, let us return to the question at hand: How can the speed of light be the same, no matter what?

Newton defined a constant speed s as the distance d an object travels, divided by the time t required for it to do that traveling. Mathematically, this ratio can be characterized as $s=d/t$.

Looking back at our space ship example, the distance the beam of light had to travel to get through the trap of our velocity measuring device

was a fixed length--it did not vary within the apparatus. On the other hand, the time it took for the beam to get through the device should have depended upon whether the device was traveling into the beam or away from the beam. Summarizing, the *time* part of the speed ratio should have depended upon what the ship--your frame of reference--was doing relative to the beam, and the *spatial* part should have been a constant.

You can see that with the *distance part* fixed and the *time part* varying from situation to situation, there is no way the speed of light could possibly be the same for all possible frames of reference.

But it is! So now what?

One of the things that made Einstein great was his ability to think simply. He took this problem, as did hundreds of other scientists around the world, and he did what none of the rest seemed able to do. He set aside all of his preconceived notions about “the way things are,” and just looked at the situation as it stood:

1.) Speed is nothing more than a ratio between two variables, a spatial measurement and a temporal measurement.

2.) The speed of light has been shown to be the same, no matter what.

3.) The only way both number 1 and number 2 can be simultaneously satisfied is if there exists a not-so-obvious relationship between spatial measurements and temporal measurements.

If the speed of light is a constant in all frames of reference, Einstein realized that we can no longer assume that space and time are independent of one another. Evidently, time is not the universal constant Newton thought it to be. Evidently, time depends upon *where* the moment passes.

And that, gentle readers, is where Einstein got the idea that real space is not a dull, three-dimensional, homogeneous void, but rather a FOUR DIMENSIONAL entity whose fourth dimension is (gulp) TIME itself.

Put another way, Einstein’s Theory of Relativity maintains that TIME IS QUITE LITERALLY A PART OF THE FABRIC OF SPACE. In physics, this *real space* is called *space-time* or *four-space*.

But it gets better. Einstein’s theory predicts that four-space does not have to be the same everywhere. Indeed, there are areas in which it is generally homogeneous. This is called *flat space*--“flat” because there is

no variation to its make-up from point to point. But there are also areas where there is considerable variation in the space-time structure. This is called *curved* or *warped space*.

(I know how mind bending it is trying to visualize curved space when we all associate space with a void, but you have to remember that we are talking about a physical model that is attempting to reflect what we know about our universe. As hard as it is to swallow, this obscure construct is the best representation we have been able to develop given what we know to be true.)

For those who are wondering, space does not just warp itself for the pleasure of it. According to Einstein, space warps in the presence of matter. Out where there are no planets or stars or other massive structures, space-time is relatively flat. But sidle up to a planet and, if you have the equipment required to measure such things, you will find that the space-time geometry around the planet varies from place to place. The closer you get to the planet's surface, the greater the warping becomes. Massive bodies curve the geometry of space-time.

Even more provocative, the more space-time is warped, *the more time slows down*. This has been observed experimentally by contemporary physicists. For instance, this slowing of time as one gets closer to the surface of the earth (i.e., as one move into more and more curved space) was experimentally observed at Harvard University. The Pound-Rebka experiment at Harvard used a gamma ray source, a Mossbauer detector and the Doppler effect to indirectly show that time on one floor of a Harvard building ran more slowly than time on an upper floor of that same building. The variation between the two readings was exactly the difference predicted using Einstein's theory, and the results have been experimentally verified by scientists all over the world.

The conclusion?

Time--the rate at which the moment passes--is not universal. No matter what your perceptions and common sense tell you, the moment does not pass at the same constant rate everywhere. Time really is a part of the geometry of space, and the more four-space is curved by the presence of matter, the more slowly the passage of the moment proceeds.

Let me re-emphasize, we are not looking at sleight of hand here. Do not expect the Amazing Randi to come hopping out of a hat, debunking this madness with a wave of his magic pinkies. Time will always pass "normally" for you, no matter where you are. But as observed by others

outside of your frame of reference, your pulse, the cadence of your speech, even the rate at which the molecules of your body vibrate--the pace of all of these time-related occurrences will be affected by *where you are*. Time on a mountain top is not the same as time at the sea shore.

Does that mean that if you leave the mountains on your way to the beach, you will be liable to arrive at the ocean ahead of their time? Or does it mean that if you work on the first floor of an office building you will live longer than if you work on the tenth floor?

OF COURSE NOT! The time difference in the Harvard experiment was predictably minuscule. The earth is not massive enough to exhibit any really obvious deviations in time over its contour. Before you begin to experience big curvatures of space-time, you have to get close to a densely massive object like a *neutron star*, with a weight density of 7,000,000,000,000 pounds per cubic centimeter as measured on earth, or better yet, a *black hole*. That is where you find truly spectacular effects on the passage of the moment.

Take a black hole, for instance.¹

¹ Background: A star whose radius is, say, *ten-million kilometers*, will typically have within it somewhere around *ten solar masses* of material (one *solar mass* is the amount of mass in the sun). When the star begins to run out of fusionable nuclear fuel in its *1,000 kilometer* radius, *1.8 solar mass* core, the core will begin to shrink forcing electrons in the core's atoms into what are called *degenerate energy states*.

When the degeneracies get large enough, the electrons are pulled out of their orbits and into the nucleus of their respective atoms where they combine with protons to make neutrons. This produces a spectacular occurrence at the star's center. Normal atoms consist of tiny electrons orbiting a tiny, proton-and-neutron-filled nucleus in a vast expanse of nothing (in fact, the volume of an atom is approximately 125,000 times greater than the volume of the protons, neutrons and electrons that constitute the material component of the atom--put succinctly, atoms are almost entirely made up of space).

When electrons are pulled into the nucleus, all that space is lost. What that means for our star is that when the degenerate electrons "fall" into their respective nuclei, the core shrinks in seconds from a radius of *1,000 kilometers* to a radius of *10 kilometers*. The implosion doesn't stop until all the space is removed (i.e., until the core is made up solely of jammed together neutrons). The super-dense core is now called a *neutron star*.

The process liberates an enormous amounts of gravitational potential energy which super-heats the gasses around the core. If the energy dumped into that region is great enough, the star's outer envelope (i.e., the eight or so remaining solar masses worth of material not found in the core) gets blown completely off leaving nothing but the *ten kilometer* neutron star. This kind of star-death is called a *supernova*.

If the star's core-mass is greater than 1.8 solar masses, the not even the core's neutrons, jammed up against one another, can stop the implosion. When that happens, you end up with a *black hole*.

The mass density of a black hole is so great and the resultant warping of four-space so radical that not even *light* can escape the “gravitational effects” of the hole. With that in mind, let us pretend that you had the opportunity of a lifetime. Let us say you were about to be sucked into a stationary black hole. How would your demise look, say, to a friend watching from a respectable distance.

To begin with, you have to remember that you, the suckee, are in a space-time geometry that is unbelievably warped in comparison to the space-time geometry of your friend. That means that your time, from her perspective, will proceed much more slowly than her own time. So what will she see?

As you get closer and closer to the hole, you will appear from her perspective to physically slow down. If she could observe your watch, its hands would hardly be moving; if she could hear your heart, there would be great spans of silence between thumps. And as she continued to watch, there would finally come a time when your motion from her vantage point would appear to come to a dead stop.

On the other hand, from your point of view, things would be quite different. Everything would proceed just as you would expect during such an event. The gravitational effect of the hole would be irresistibly strong, and if you were going in feet first it would not take more than a few seconds before the gravitational force at your feet was so much greater than at your head that you would just noodle out into a disassociated aggregate of individual atoms.

BUT, if you could look out into the universe during those last fleeting seconds, you would witness amazing things. You would see the evolution of our universe passing before your eyes at incredible speed. You would witness the birth, life, and death of whole galaxies, and it all would happen in the time it takes to wink.

In short, the incredibly massive character of the black hole would so warp the geometry of space-time around you that, as seen from *out there*, your time would slow almost to a standstill. But *you* would feel normal because you would be a part of that geometry, and what you would see occur *out there* in a few of your seconds would take incredible amounts of *out there* time to actually happen.

Hard to believe?

True.

Amazing?

You bet.

Where are we going?

The space around us is something we deal with every day. Without its void-like nature, something as unremarkable as a water-glass would be quite impossible--without the space within, the glass could hold nothing.

But while apparently empty space is an integral part of our everyday experience, we have found that our perception of space is so far off the mark that it is laughable. It is not the uncomplicated void we think it to be . . . it is something else. And in my country, a situation like that is called *an illusion*.

Reality is not necessarily a straightforward proposition. Everyone surely has beliefs about what it means to be human; about what is-and-is-not possible within the scheme of things; about the nature of reality. Each individual's perceptions may be right on the mark. Then again, they may not be. But in any case, most people so strongly *accept* their beliefs that they never, ever honestly question their validity.

Our foray into the world of physics was aimed at showing how off-target we can be and how unexpectedly deceptive the nature of the physical world really is. That, and to inflame curiosity about the possibility that there might be other aspects of our everyday lives and beliefs that are similarly shrouded in illusion.

A CASE FOR THE UNBELIEVABLE

"I can't believe all that!" said Alice.

"Can't you?" the Queen said in a pitying tone. "Try again: draw a long breath, and shut your eyes."

Alice laughed. "There's no use trying," she said. "One can't believe impossible things."

"I dare say you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

from *Alice in Wonderland*,
by Lewis Carroll

I recently had an interesting conversation with one of those dyed in the wool skeptics one finds in science departments across the country. The discussion prompted me to include this chapter with the following suggestion: If you must be a skeptic (and being one, I might add, is fine with me), do it in a Gandhian fashion. Go into every situation asking the question, "Might I be the one who is wrong?" You can still look askance at phenomenon and ideas that don't seem to make sense, but you at least won't end up falling into the trap of condemning an idea that has not-so-obvious merit simply because it does not fit into your possibly narrow view of the world.

Case in point:

—THE PROPOSITION:

Water HASN'T the ability to imprint upon its molecular structure a remembrance of its contact with other materials. Specifically, if a healing material is first dissolved in water, then removed completely, the water molecules in the solution will *not* maintain a remembrance of the “energetic quality” of the previously dissolved substance. There are no mechanisms within atomic or molecular structures to allow such an imprinting.

—THE REALITY:

Open to debate.

—THE PROBLEM:

On June 30, 1988, a *Los Angeles Times* newspaper headline read “French Scientist Produces *Unbelievable Solution*.” The article began:

Dr. Jacques Benveniste has an unbelievable problem. The French allergist has produced experimental results that other scientists find difficult, if not impossible, to believe. In essence, he has observed a biological effect produced by solutions so dilute that, theoretically, they contain nothing that could cause the effect.

. . . Today, the prestigious British journal NATURE has taken the unprecedented step of publishing Benveniste's results, even though the journal's editors themselves think that his conclusions “have no physical basis” and his findings are “unbelievable.”

Strike you as a bit unusual? It is . . . for more reasons than meet the eye. Let's take a closer look.

The first things to know is that Dr. Benveniste is a well published, well-respected member of the European medical community . . . a man once offered the position of France's *Minister of Health* by then President

Francois Mitterrand. It is probable that the only reason *Nature* did not choose to ignore him completely was due to his reputation. Similar work from a lesser individual would surely have been trashed by the magazine without a moment's thought.

A second point to consider is the fact that magazines like *Nature* don't relish the idea of being seen as a laughingstock. It is not their custom to take seemingly outrageous, unsubstantiated papers for publication. One of their greatest fears is the losing of their academic status and credibility. It is not surprising, therefore, that the magazine demanded a number of stiff conditions be met before even considering publication. The most crucial of these was the requirement that the experiment be recreated by a number of independent labs around the world.

Three did so. All verified Benveniste's findings.

Still, even with the enormously rigorous scrutiny of other scientists, the editors were skeptical. Why? A bit of history will help us understand.

In the 1880's, a brilliant German doctor named Samuel Hahnemann stumbled onto a generally accepted yet singularly peculiar bit of information while translating Cullen's *Materia Medica* from English into German. In his work, Cullen maintained that "swamp fever" (malaria) was curable using cinchona bark due to the bark's *tonic effects on the stomach*. Because Hahnemann knew that similar tonics had no effect on the fever whatsoever, he thought there must be something else happening (in fact, cinchona bark relieves malaria because it contains quinine, not due to a tonic effect).

This small, seemingly inconsequential disagreement ultimately led to what was to become Hahnemann's lifetime obsession. Piqued by the apparent disparity between Cullen's written opinion and his own observations, Hahnemann decided to use himself as a guinea pig to experiment with the cinchona bark. What he found was quite fascinating.

With the very first dose, he found himself developing all the symptoms of swamp fever, *sans* the fever itself. When he stopped taking the bark, the symptoms would leave. When he began again, they returned. He even went so far as to recruit members of his family for the experiment. In all cases, he observed the same thing. Taking small quantities of cinchona bark elicited a reaction that was characteristic of the disease the bark was purported to cure.

In his book, *INTRODUCTION TO HOMEOPATHIC MEDICINE*, Dr. Hamish Boyd said this about Hahnemann's early discovery:

. . . Here was a strange phenomenon: a remedy that was effective (as a cure) for the disease which, when given to a healthy person *induced* the symptoms of that disease. Could there be some natural method of cure there upon which he had stumbled? He went back to the ancient literature and found that Hippocrates and, after him, Paracelsus, mentioned that substances that produce symptoms could also cure them. (With that), Hahnemann started on his life's work . . .

Hahnemann spent the next years of his life building a *Materia Medica* of healthy-body symptoms produced by the ingestion of small but substantial doses of everything from benign to potentially deadly plant and mineral materials (this process he called *proving*). He found that almost all natural substances tested elicited some kind of reaction in the body, and they all proved to act therapeutically under the right conditions when given in very small micro-doses.

His approach was not widely recognized until 1812. As Margery Blackie, personal physician to Queen Elizabeth of England, said in her book *THE PATIENT NOT THE CURE*:

With the publication of his (first) two books, Hahnemann didn't stop his tireless search for verification or rejection of his theories. Doubtless he was having success with isolated cases, but these were not really enough to test his findings to the full...

The terrible winter of 1812 took its toll of Napoleon's army in Russia. The bedraggled remnants of the Grande Armee were staggering, starving, bleeding and riddled with disease while drifting across Europe on their way home. Despite their desperate condition, the French fought valiantly but lost a three-day battle at Leipzig in August, 1813. The aftermath was not only death but a fearful epidemic of typhoid. At once, Hahnemann put his hypothesis to the test. He treated 180 cases and his success bordered on the miraculous: only one patient died.

Dr. Boyd adds:

. . . A cholera epidemic invaded Europe eighteen years later (1831), and again his hypothesis was shown to work.

One of Hahnemann's pupils had only six deaths among 154 cholera patients--a little under 4%. In the same town, of the 1500 patients treated with orthodox methods, 55% died.

Homeopathy spread to Britain, and there was an attempt by the medical profession to have its practice forbidden by law. A cholera epidemic came to the rescue in 1854. When it was over, the results of treatment in the various hospitals were put before Parliament. Fortunately, a homeopathic patient was there and asked why those of the homeopathic hospital had not been included, and demanded that they be procured. They came accompanied by a letter from the Government Inspector. The death rate was 16.4% compared with 51.8% at other hospitals—these figures are confirmed in the British Museum's records. He (the Inspector) said that they were all true cases of cholera, and that he had seen cases recover who would have surely died in other hospitals. He ended by saying: "If it should please the Lord to visit me with cholera I would wish to fall into the hands of a homeopathic physician."

Since his time, Hahnemann's observations and theory have been put to the test over and over again. The results have been consistent. A good homeopathic doctor—one who really knows his or her stuff—can affect wonders with appropriate homeopathic treatment.¹

Homeopathic remedies are prepared in a very specific way. The process begins when the active substance (Hahnemann's cinchona bark, for

¹ I have a friend who found herself in a desperate position a number of years ago. It seems she was asked to adopt her brother's small, two-year old child. The brother had become a drug addict, was living on the streets, had AIDS, and believed himself to be Jesus Christ. The mother was in no better shape, though she had additionally disappeared.

From the beginning, my friend had problems. The child was bright but very angry and violent—he was ultimately asked to leave preschool because he was "torturing the other children." She knew that if she resorted to the way tens of thousands of other angry, often hyperactive children in our country are treated, the boy would be lost, so she decided to take a different course. She took him to a relatively enlightened pediatrician who prescribed a series of homeopathic remedies to treat the problem (the doctor could have had his license revoked by the AMA if it had been known what he was doing). Three years have passed. The child is now like any other normal kid. Sure, he is precocious, animated, and definitely has a twinkle in his eye, but he is *not* angry or violent. More to the point, you will *never* convince my friend that the homeopathic treatment didn't change her adopted son for the good, and I think she is right (and no, I don't think he was just naturally "going through a phase," or that the treatment caused a placebo effect . . .)

instance) is pulverized and made into an alcohol tincture. This initial solution is called *the mother tincture*. Once produced, one drop of mother tincture is mixed with nine drops of pure water. The resulting solution is then succussed . . . a process whereby the mixture is violently shaken in a prescribed manner (it is interesting to note that Benveniste’s “biological effect” was not evident with solutions that had been prepared as stated above, but that had not been properly succussed). The final product—the nine parts water, one part mother tincture—is called a *1x potency*.

A *2x potency* is produced by adding one drop of 1x solution to nine parts water, then succussing appropriately. This means that a 2x remedy has 99 parts water to one part mother tincture—an approximate ratio of 100:1 (note that in scientific notation, this is $10^2:1$). *3x* is made from 2x yielding a water-to-mother-tincture ratio of 1000:1 ($10^3:1$); *4x* is produced from 3x, etc. *With each successive potency, the solution has one-tenth the mother tincture content of the previous potency.*

In and of itself, you wouldn’t expect this to upset anyone. It is a simple procedure used to produce homeopathic remedies. But there is more. Hahnemann maintained that different potencies could have different effects on a patient. He found from observation that patients who were cured with 10x would not be affected by, say, 20x. In fact, higher potencies—remedies with *less* mother tincture in them—were found to be potentially stronger and were able to deal successfully with more severe cases than lower potencies.

Hahnemann had the following rationale for this apparent contradiction, according to Harris Coulter, Ph.D., in his book *HOMEOPATHIC SCIENCE AND MODERN MEDICINE*:

Hahnemann claimed that these high dilutions (low mother-tincture concentrations) were effective because the sick person was ultra-sensitive to the action of the “similar” remedy. He wrote, as early as 1810, that “there are patients whose impressionability, compared to that of unsusceptible ones, is in the ratio of 100 to 1.”

In other words, Hahnemann believed that an ill patient who was, say, 1000 times more sensitive to a remedy than the norm, required a remedy whose concentration was 1/1000 that of the mother tincture (i.e., a 3x potency).

Even though this “more is less” (or should it be “less is more?”) orientation is certainly different from our commonsense perceptions about what

should or should not heal a sick body, this apparent anomaly is nothing in comparison to other objections scientists currently have with the approach.

Consider the following: A remedy rated at 1000x (a potency that is available commercially) has 10^{1000} water molecules for every molecule of mother tincture. A quart of water has roughly 10^{24} molecules in it. That means that if you make up an enormous vat of 1000x solution, then removed one quart of the solution for your use, you will end up with a quart of water that will almost certainly have *no molecules of mother tincture* in it at all.

Yet if it is the correct remedy for a given patient, that solution will be curative. That was what Hahnemann believed; that is what homeopathic physicians around the world have substantiated ever since Hahnemann; that is why the United States legally recognized through the 1938 *Food, Drug, and Cosmetics Act* the equivalent legitimacy of both the *United States Homeopathic Pharmacopoeia* (i.e., homeopathy's Bible) and its allopathic (i.e., conventional medicine's) counterpart, *United States Pharmacopoeia*.

Unfortunately, legal recognition based on effectiveness is not the same as scientific recognition based on theory. Scientific theory . . . that is where the snag arises.

Scientists don't like to dwell on such things, but almost every currently accepted scientific theory has at least some aspect to it that would send any uninitiated yet self-respecting thinker right up a wall. For instance, did you know that the Big Bang theory postulates that all that now makes up our physical universe originally came from *nothing at all*; that light has the fantastic ability to do things that only particles can do but, under certain circumstances, can also do things that particles could *never* do; or that Einstein's Theory of Relativity maintains: a.) that space is not three but rather *four* dimensional with TIME being that fourth dimension; b.) that gravitational forces do not exist (there are gravitational-type effects, but the mechanism is believed to be related to the "curvature" of four dimensional space); c.) that time (the rate at which the moment passes) varies from place to place; and d.) that mass and energy are two different forms of a common quantity—a quantity that nobody can put his or her theoretical finger on.

There is hardly a cubby hole in science that doesn't have some point of belief that is completely unbelievable at first glance. In short, by modern day standards for theoretical weirdness, Benveniste's findings are relatively innocuous. So why are so many scientists put off by his work? It

is not as though he is some kind of crackpot. The problem is much deeper than that.

Water is a very unusual molecule. Made up of one atom of oxygen and two of hydrogen, its bonding polarizes its charge in such a way as to give it the ability to dissolve almost any known molecular substance. It has the peculiarity of being more dense in its liquid state than in its solid state (hence ice cubes float), and it takes a tremendous amount of energy to raise its temperature just one degree (that is why steam burns are so nasty—the energy content of water vapor is enormous).

As peculiar as water seems to be, relative to other substances, what is not currently a part of accepted scientific theory concerning its structure is the possibility that it might have the ability to absorb “energetic qualities” of other substances—healing substances for instance (cinchona bark?). If such *were* the case, homeopathy would have its scientific basis. Water used in a proper homeopathic preparation (i.e., one with appropriate succession, etc.) could, even with no physical substance present within the solution, still carry the healing property of the substance—its energetic quality—as absorbed by the water.

Whenever science collides with any experimentally observable phenomenon, science is expected to use those findings to either support already existing theory or to prompt more exploration and, if appropriate, to make changes in the current mode of thinking. In the case of homeopathy, science has done exactly the opposite. To date, science and modern medicine have ignored the apparent anomaly posed by curative homeopathic remedies by decrying their effectiveness as aberrations caused by a placebo effect. If the patient *believes* he or she will be helped by the medicine, he or she *will* be helped.

Dr. Benveniste’s experimental findings have blown that bit of questionable reasoning to pieces. Using homeopathic solutions—solutions with potencies so high that there couldn’t possibly be any active ingredients present in them—he has triggered “biological effects that are observable.”

Science’s response? “Even if the results are there, homeopathy doesn’t fit into our view of the way the world works. Therefore, we do not believe the findings.” . . . And that is that.

As a follow up, an August 8, 1988 *Time* magazine article read as follows:

THE WATER THAT LOST ITS MEMORY: A Controversial Scientific Finding Is Debunked

SCIENCE FRICTION, acidly quipped one Paris newspaper. Across the English Channel in London, Britain's *New Scientist* magazine howled, *NATURE SENDS IN THE GHOST BUSTERS TO SOLVE RIDDLE OF THE ANTI-BODIES*. After months of heated controversy and speculation, the curtain fell last week, at least for now, on one of the strangest tales of scientific controversy in recent memory. The story became public . . . when the prestigious British science journal *Nature* published a report, hedged with "editorial reservation," on a phenomenon that defied the laws of physics and molecular biology: water apparently retained a "memory" of some molecules it once contained in solution. When such water was mixed with blood cells, that phantom memory seemingly caused a reaction.

. . . The initial findings were apparently reproduced by scientists in France, Canada, Israel, and Italy (but) . . . Last week, *Nature* forthrightly rejected the idea of water with a memory and relegated it to the deep freeze, along with other intriguing scientific "discoveries" that have not panned out under scrutiny.

Its demise was the work of a highly unusual investigative team that the magazine dispatched to Paris. Besides Maddox (the editor of *Nature*), the *Nature* group included James ("the Amazing") Randi (a magician) . . . and Walter Stewart, a free-lance fraud sleuth at the U.S. National Institutes of Health. Their report was merciless: "The hypothesis that water can be imprinted with a memory of past solutes is as unnecessary as it is fanciful." The behavior of the weird water was only a delusion, they concluded, based on flawed experimentation.

. . . Benveniste (the scientist involved in the original experiment) compared the probe to "Salem witch hunts and McCarthy-like prosecutions." . . . (In the end, Maddox said,) "I'm sorry we didn't find something more interesting."

Some observations are in order here: To begin with, when was the last time you heard of a respected scientist having his or her experiment

perused by a magician? And the conclusion this so-called review board came to? At no time did they pinpoint anything wrong with the experiment aside from concluding rather speciously that “the experiments were flawed and that no substantial effort had been made to exclude systematic error, including observer bias” (this was *Time*’s summary of Maddox’s final report). Nothing was said about the bias of the investigating group. In fact, it seems that nothings was said of much substance at any point in the presentation of findings. You can bet the proverbial ranch that if Randi and company had turned up anything substantial, they would have shouted it from the rooftops. But all they could come up with was the old, weak standby—a claim that the experimental results were inadmissible due to *unspecified procedure errors*.

SO WHAT’S GOING ON HERE? Who is doing what to whom?

Tough as it may be to believe, homeopathy’s legitimacy as a form of health care is not the question we are really interested in here. Neither is it important, at least at this point in time, to determine whether those skeptical investigators were being arrogant and inflexible or responsible and thoughtful in their dealings with the matter. The importance here is our observation and ultimate understanding of science’s seemingly phobic concern over this obviously unorthodox medical possibility.

Science is predicated on the belief that there exists order within nature and our universe (even in chaos, it seems, order prevails—fractal theory?). Billions of dollars are spent every year supporting scientific attempts to uncover, understand, and exploit that order.

Under such conditions, it should not be surprising to learn that although scientists might not always agree with one another, they generally have as a group very definite ideas about what is important and relevant within the realm of scientific research and, when all is said and done, about how the universe works. So while most scientists present a facade of unbiased, unemotional reason in dealing with their work, they actually have very deep emotional and intellectual ties to their theories. An examination of history shows time and again individuals who have made monumental breakthroughs only to be thwarted on all sides by entrenched scientific minds who simply weren’t willing to look a little beyond the partial order they already perceived (or thought they perceived).²

² My favorite example: In his first printing of *On the Origin of Species*, which concerns the biological evolution of species and natural selection, Darwin’s original manuscript referenced a million-year-old fossil he claimed to have found. He apparently removed the reference due to objections put forth by the then-president of the British Royal Society (the

Couple with this the fact that a scientist's greatest fear, aside from losing his or her funding, is being perceived as a sloppy, gullible thinker, and you have an interesting situation. A scientist can be as theoretically wild and crazy as he or she likes as long as the effort is directed "appropriately." But once curiosity strays to areas not generally accepted by mainstream thought, God help the poor soul. The individual will be taunted and scorned and generally bullyragged until he or she either comes back to the fold or drops out.

Homeopathy is just one of those forbidden topics, and the reason why is easy to see. It necessitates the acknowledgment that there is something profoundly unexpected happening at the atomic level . . . something that modern-day science simply has no knowledge of. In other words, homeopathy threatens the accepted order. And when experimental evidence does come to the forefront, even by reputable sources, the tendency is to either ignore it or to conclude that it must be flawed.

The bottom line: There is nothing wrong with being skeptical about things that don't seem to make sense to you. But doing so with the inviolate belief that you are absolutely right--that you couldn't possibly be the one who is wrong--is the act of an idiot. We have enough of those in the world today, thank you. Please don't join their number.

On the other hand, if you run into an implacable skeptic, my suggestion is that you not waste your time on them. When I find myself in that situation, I remember the words of my favorite bumper sticker:

Never try to teach a pig how to sing.
It's a waste of your time,
and it just serves to irritate the pig.

Royal Society was *the* scientific authority in Britain) because the president, an astronomer, believed that the sun's energy was caused by the earlier bombardment of comets and asteroids, which meant (due to *conservation of energy*) that the sun (and hence, earth) couldn't be older than 4000 years . . . clearly eliminating the possibility of a million year old fossil. Darwin *did* include the reference in his second printing. [Note not in E.Phil. book: And, of course, we have the boatload of woman who have made significant, Nobel-worthy discoveries in science, only to be completely stonewalled by their male counterparts . . . until someone close to them, always a MALE, has grudgingly noticed the merit of the work, deigned to take credit for the discover and has accepted the Nobel prize for himself. I'm thinking specifically of Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnett who, while a graduate student working toward a PhD, discovered the first pulsar—her advisor (Anthony Hewish) poopooed the discovery for quite some time, then embraced it—she got a PhD out the episode, he got a Nobel prize in 1974 with her not being mentioned at all . . . and she is just one of many . . .]

