

Reaching Higher and Deeper

Workbook for Healing Research, Volume 3:

**Personal Spirituality:
Science, Spirit and the Eternal Soul**

Daniel J. Benor, MD



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Introduction

Everyone sees the unseen in proportion to the clarity of his heart, and that depends upon how much he has polished it. Whoever has polished it more sees more – more unseen forms become manifest to him.

– Rumi

This is a workbook to help you connect with life as it really is. Not just the surface layers, but deeper explorations of who you are and what may be your deeper purpose in living on this beautiful, wonderful planet that is now threatened by what you and I and the rest of humanity are doing to it.

I warn you ahead of time, I am going to use the 'S' word a lot in this book. This is a word that our Western society has been uncomfortable with for many reasons. *Spirituality* is something we know through our intuitive selves, through the inner sense of rightness and wrongness that goes beyond surface appearances and reasoned arguments. When we are truly awake, we connect with our spirituality through communing with nature, with the creative arts, through our dreams, our disappointments and our pains, and most importantly, with every person who touches our lives.

We also connect with our spirituality through experiences that are not uncommon but are outside of the frameworks that we learn in school and that are accepted by conventional Western science. These are experiences not only reported by many people, but experiences that are very deeply meaningful and transformative.

Spirituality encompasses diverse experiences in which people find their consciousness extends outside their physical bodies. This may be as simple as a vague, intuitive awareness that there is something vaster than ourselves (beyond our little *self* – that is contained in our physical, emotional, mental states of being), a vastness in which we participate in an undefinable, unmeasurable, yet palpable manner. This is like knowing that we belong to a family, ethnic group, nation, or to humanity as a whole – but extending to much deeper connections than we experience through social interactions. It may be much more specific, manifesting in intuitive or psychic perceptions; out-of-body experiences; near-death, pre-death, or deathbed experiences; reincarnation memories, seeing apparitions (ghosts and other visionary figures), nature spirits and angels; mediumistic (channeled) messages; deep meditative and mystical experiences; awareness

which transcends present time – to the past, future; and more. Fascinating research and anecdotal reports in all of the areas mentioned are surveyed and discussed in *Healing Research, Volume 3 – Personal Spirituality: Science, Spirit and the Eternal Soul*. I share in that book a rich feast of personal reports, surveys, observational and qualitative studies, and quantitative research in the realms of personal spirituality.

Spirituality in this category also includes interactions between people during spiritual healings. Healers and healees often feel heat, tingling, vibration and other sensations during hand-healing treatments. These sensations may occur with the healers' hands near to but not touching the body. Some healers also see *auras*, which are halos of color, around the body. All of these perceptions appear to be due to interactions of the energy fields in and around the bodies of healers and healees. In other words, our biological energy bodies extend beyond our physical bodies and interact with each other.

These perceptions of bioenergy interactions confirm the existence of the biological energy body (also called the biofields) as described by healers and other intuitives. Healers and many complementary/ alternative medicine (CAM) therapists believe this energy body animates the physical body during life. This also appears to be a vehicle for consciousness outside of the body during out-of-body and near-death experiences, and perhaps a vehicle for the spirit to continue beyond life, after physical death. The energy body is discussed in detail in *Healing Research, Volume 2, Professional Edition – Consciousness, Bioenergy and Healing* and *Popular Edition - How Can I Heal What Hurts?*

Not everybody who had the above experiences will feel they have a spiritual quality. People may have some of these without spiritual awareness, such as out-of-body experiences or encounters with apparitions. Out-of-body experiences, aspects of spiritual healing, and psychic experiences may also have natural explanations, involving subtle biological energies and psychic awarenesses that do not have to involve spiritual explanations.

Those in Western society who do not sense a spiritual component in their lives tend to dismiss these sorts of discussions as no more than wishful thinking or fantasies; imaginary explanations for the ultimate, unanswerable questions (within conventional science) about the origins of life, the universe and everything. Wedded to the material world, they see life as being a physical existence that ends with physical death.

I have to admit that I, too, started out extremely skeptical about spirituality. After studying psychology, medicine, psychiatry, and research methodology, I thought I had a pretty solid understanding of the world. I was a Freudian atheist, believing that people created and held onto a belief in God as a substitute father image; a fantasied protector who, like their fathers in

childhood, would be there for them in time of need. I was equally certain that spirits, ghosts and stories of survival of the human spirit were emotional defenses against fears of the inevitability and finality of physical death. I did not relinquish these disbeliefs readily or easily.

I was also scathingly skeptical about spiritual healing, the alleged treatment of illness through the laying-on of hands and through prayers or meditations. In 1980, I observed a Ethel Lombardi, a Reiki Master, giving healing through her hands to a young man we'll call 'Joe,' who had a lump under his nipple. She invited me to examine him. The lesion measured one by two centimeters, was rubbery firm (like an eraser), not as mobile as I'd like to see (suggesting the possibility of an invasive growth), and quite tender. Joe was a skeptic who had come only because he hoped he might avoid surgery on the lesion that was scheduled for two weeks later.

Ethel proceeded with a laying-on of hands treatment lasting half an hour, at the end of which she invited me to examine Joe again. I was astounded to find that the lesion had shrunk by a centimeter, was very soft, completely mobile, and no longer tender. Fortunately, there was another physician there with me. She and I had examined the lesion before and after the healing and had agreed on our observations. Much as I would have liked to, I could not wiggle out of this by telling myself I had mismeasured or misremembered the findings!

This was a healing of my skepticism nearly as much as it was a healing of Joe's lump. I knew instantly that this was something I would have to study further. I have been studying healing in every way I can ever since – interviewing healers, gathering anecdotal reports and research literature, and consulting on setting up studies of healing. I say it was nearly as much my own healing because I still prided myself on being an objective observer, reserving judgment on the reports of unusual responses to healing. I was still certain that numerous allegedly successful healings were mistakenly credited to healers' treatments. I was sure that many of these were due to healee's considerable powers of self-healing. I had seen people improve after treatments with placebos, let go of pains under hypnosis, and recover from severe injuries and illnesses that had appeared near-fatal – apparent witnesses to the wonderful capacity of the body to repair itself.

It took me quite a while before I was willing to go deeper into my explorations of healing – to develop my own healing gifts. I did so with the realization that after two years of studying *about* healing, I still didn't really know what healing *is*. So I studied Therapeutic Touch, LeShan healing and Reiki, gradually integrating those aspects of these methods that felt comfortable and relevant into my practice of psychotherapy. About five years further along my path of healing, my understanding was that healing is a

shift in biological energies in the healee that is facilitated by the healer. When bioenergies shift, then psychological and physical problems shift. The healees are freed from some or all of the blocks that kept them from full and normal functioning. This may be achieved by activation of healees' innate healing capabilities; by opening healees to connect with universal energies; by a transfer of healer energies; by channeling of universal energies through the healer; or by some combination of the above.

Repeatedly, healers would tell me, "It's not *me* doing the healing. It's God (or Allah, Christ, Mary, Saints, spirits, or other outside agencies). I nodded understandingly – and smiled inwardly at what I considered to be mystical or religious beliefs that were probably helpful to the healers and healees but that had no substance in reality. This was simply pushing my boggle threshold too far at that time.

However, as I deepened my practices of meditation and healing I found my intuitive awarenesses developing. Increasingly, I have felt I am a part of several series of nested hierarchies – of relationships, energies and consciousness. Ultimately, I am a part of the All, which I experience from my physical self as being somewhere 'out there,' but which I know intuitively is also 'in here.' I am a part of it and it is a part of me.

Despite all of my studies, even now, over 25 years since my interest was first kindled, I still find that healing is a mystery and I'm still curious to connect with it ever more deeply. Healees may be as good teachers to me as I am to them. Each healing encounter is another lesson, whether I'm in the role of healer or the role of a healee, with another healer offering me their caregiving presence.

My personal sense of the spiritual is that I am peeling an enormous, Sisyphian onion of life. I have been pleased to see that I am not alone in this awareness.

People with a high level of personal mastery live in a continual learning mode. They never 'arrive.' Sometimes, language, such as the term 'personal mastery,' creates a misleading sense of definiteness, of black and white. But personal mastery is not something you possess. It is a process. It is a lifelong discipline. People with a high level of personal mastery are acutely aware of their ignorance, their incompetence, their growth areas. Paradoxical? Only for those who do not see that 'the journey is the reward.'

– Peter Senge

I have been drawn to the image of the nested series of Russian matryoshka dolls to illustrate the process of personal spiritual development – where a

tiny doll fits within a slightly larger one, which in turn sits within a slightly larger one yet, and so on. Each of us is a unit unto ourself and also a member of a family, community, nation and global village. Each of us has nested levels of experiences over many series of lifetimes. Each of us interacts with all of these levels in the worlds of physical, bioenergy, consciousness and spiritual realities.

In another visual analogy, each of us is a pixel in the cosmic screen and can contribute to the All. More on this in Chapter 13 of *Personal Spirituality*.

Observations about nested hierarchies and their relevance to personal spirituality have been noted across many cultures, over many centuries.

To put the world right in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must first put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must first cultivate our personal life; we must first see our hearts right.

– Confucius

I lecture and lead experiential workshops to share many of the wonderful insights gathered over this quarter of a century of explorations. This workbook is a fuller offering of many ways the of opening to spirituality that I find are helpful to myself and others. I share more on my personal spiritual perspectives in the Introduction to *Personal Spirituality*.

I invite you to start your journey of inner explorations by examining more familiar territory first. Western society focuses much more on linear and reasoned ways of relating to the outer world, while mostly ignoring our inner worlds. Our inner awarenesses are ignored to the point that they are not only unfamiliar to most of us, they end up feeling 'different' from our outer world perceptions, and therefore strange. Many of us tend to dismiss them as being imaginary and unreal. This has become the prevalent attitude of our society towards inner perceptions.

To challenge any doubts you might have about whether your intuition and spiritual perceptions are real, I will briefly review a wealth of materials confirming the reality of many types of inner experiences. This is just a brief summary of the rich collection of personal reports, surveys and research from *Personal Spirituality*. I hope this will help you, as it helped me, to accept the logical likelihood that spirituality is alive and real in our world.

Next, I will invite you to explore your inner worlds directly. I do not expect you to accept what I tell you as gospel. This Workbook is a doorway into getting acquainted with and trusting your inner self. You will learn ways to check the reality and validity of inner awarenesses, just as you know and trust your outer ones.

We all learn to recognize and trust our perceptions of the outer world through feedback. As a child, we may have seen a shaggy brown form, reached out and touched it, pulled it towards us and put part of it in our mouth. Through explorations of this sort, we came to recognize what a teddy bear is.

Similarly, we can learn to explore and come to recognize, know and trust our perceptions of our inner worlds of awarenesses. This Workbook will help you do this, teaching you various ways of checking out your inner spiritual experiences until you are familiar with them and confident that they are real.

Preparing ourselves for spiritual experiences

This workbook invites you to explore various parts of inner, outer and spiritual worlds that may be entirely new to you or that you may have already visited in spontaneous dreams, visions, meditations, prayers, communing in nature, or other spiritual experiences that you would like to return to more regularly or to experience more deeply. The inner doorways to these experiences are available to people who seek the keys to them and who prepare themselves for these journeys.

My assumption about spirituality is that life is a classroom for the soul and the spirit. I see *soul* as the core essence of ourselves that exists beyond time and space and connects with the Infinite Source, and *spirit* as the spark of our essence that imbues our physical and biological energy body with life and that connects with soul.

As we are born into physical existence, many of us forget our connections with spirit and soul, and with the Infinite Source. Some children hold onto these memories, but their families and the rest of society often discourage them from talking about this – because the adults and other children have forgotten their connections and would rather not deal with something that they cannot explain. It is easier to silence the dissonant voice than to ask ourselves how we might adjust our hearing to understand it differently, or modulate our own voices to harmonize with it.

When our spirit is on the threshold of entering physical life, we turn to our guardian angel and ask, "But can't I hold onto my memories of the great beyond and of the Infinite Source?"

The angel answers by touching our upper lip with a finger, saying , "Shhhh!"

That is why we have a little dent in our upper lip.

– Jewish mystical tale

Western science has to a large extent rejected spiritual awarenesses because they cannot be measured or quantified objectively. To my way of thinking, this is not a valid reason for dismissing deeply meaningful experiences as mere fantasies or wishful thinking. Do we need to know how many ounces of love or inches of compassion are present in another person or in ourselves – in order to know that these are really present?

A lot of our difficulties in connecting with our spiritual awarenesses come from years of being drilled to not believe in our inner, intuitive knowing of the rightness and validity of these perceptions. We end up burying our intuition so that we can avoid conflicts with the beliefs of others around us – and eventually also to avoid inner dissonance between our intuitions and our own disbeliefs that we assimilate from others.

Unlocking the doors to the caves of our inner awarenesses may be a simple process for some people. Some of the doors to our buried spiritual awarenesses have combination locks that open automatically when we change our beliefs and disbeliefs. Our first steps may be to realize that these awarenesses are there. Chapter 1 shares anecdotes and discusses research evidence to show that each of us has intuitive abilities, even though they may be locked away outside of our conscious knowledge. Once we recognize our intuitive potentials, some of us connect with them very strongly and can use them quite readily.

Others may struggle with shackles of disbeliefs that hold us back.

CHAPTER 1. Intuitive awareness

*I am so afraid of error that I keep hurling myself
into the arms of doubt rather than into the arms of truth.*

– Petrarch

We know our spirituality in two ways. First, we know *about* it through religious teachings that provide explanations for how the world was created and how we are expected to behave within the conceptual and social structures of each religion. More on these issues in Chapter 8 of *Personal Spirituality*.

Second, we have an inner awareness of our connections with spiritual dimensions. I call this an inner *gnowing* that comes to us through intuition. (I will use *gnowing* throughout this workbook to indicate direct, intuitive knowledge of a subject.

Intuition has three main components: Pattern recognition, psychic awareness, and collective consciousness.

1. **Pattern recognition** develops through our experiences in life.

The good news:

- When we have seen a series of dogs, however different in shape and size, we will recognize another dog as probably being a dog even if it differs in some respects from other dogs we have seen. Without having to resort to analysis, our mind recognizes animals that have the qualities of 'dogginess.'
- The same is true of various types of abstract information. When new data fits patterns that are familiar, our mind identifies the new patterns within the frameworks that we know.

If we see a disheveled person walking on the street, talking loudly to himself (and not wearing an earphone), we assume he is mentally disturbed – based on our previous experiences with similar people, in person or through the media.

When a person walks into my office with symptoms that cluster in a pattern I have learned to identify as a disease, the diagnosis automatically comes up on the screen of my consciousness. This happens even with problems I have never encountered in real life before, but just read about in textbooks or journals.

The bad news:

- When we hear a new theory to explain aspects of our lives, we compare it with theories we have learned to know and trust, and assess whether the new theory is compatible or dissonant with our beliefs. If the new pattern of information is dissonant, it 'feels wrong' and we tend to reject it. The alternative, to re-examine the patterns behind this feeling of wrongness, is usually much more challenging, so we tend to avoid doing this. Such reluctance to re-examine our belief patterns has made it difficult for conventional scientists to consider (much less to accept) theories that are outside their established patterns of beliefs.

2. **Extrasensory perception (ESP)** is the second component of intuition. ESP provides information about the world through mechanisms that are beyond the spectrums of our six ordinary senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and kinesthetic (sense of position of parts of our bodies) awareness.

Collections of anecdotal reports and extensive research demonstrate that human consciousness can extend beyond our physical body and can interact with living organisms through *telepathy*, and with non-living parts of the world around us through *clairsentience*. Consciousness can also transcend what Western science perceives to be boundaries of time, connecting with information from the future or past. Scientists in many countries have studied ESP, proving beyond reasonable doubt that it is both a very common and a valid experience.

Telepathy - Telepathic information often arrives in times of urgent need or impending crisis. Families of soldiers stationed half way around the world have reported waking in the night with images of a son or husband or father in danger, or being injured or killed. Parents have had urges to check on children who were endangered or hurt while they were at some distance away and beyond ordinary sensory contact, as in the following example, a composite of dozens of stories that nurses and doctors have told me.

Example of telepathy:

'Joan' worked as a nurse in a general medicine ward. She was finishing up her charts at the nursing station after making rounds with the nurses who were relieving her shift, late on a busy afternoon. She suddenly felt an unshakably strong urge to go immediately to check on a 49 year old man at the far end of the hall who was hospitalized for severe hypertension. She found him lying on the floor of his room, unconscious and

unresponsive to any stimulus. Joan's call for emergency intervention probably saved his life, as he was found to have had a ruptured blood vessel in his brain.

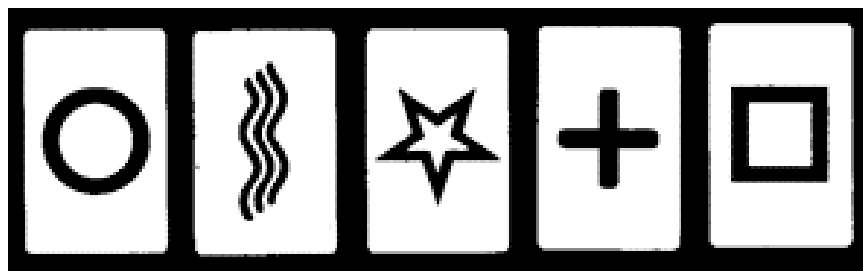
Joan has had other intuitive urges of this sort and has learned to pay attention when they stir her to action.

For those interested to explore more anecdotal reports like this one, Louisa Rhine, and Sally Rhine Feather with Michael Schmicker have collected several wonderful series of such stories.

Extensive research has been published on telepathy. Telepathy between one person and another has been demonstrated in numerous experiments with highly significant results. I share here in some detail the research on telepathy, to provide a sense of how careful and extensive this research has been.

Joseph B. Rhine ran hundreds of thousands of tests on psi abilities at Duke University in North Carolina. His basic tool for ESP testing was the deck of Zener cards, containing twenty-five cards, with five of each of five different symbols: a star, a circle, a square, a cross, and three wavy lines. (See Figure 1.) The deck of 25 cards was thoroughly shuffled, sometimes with a mechanical shuffler, prior to each test of ESP perception.

Figure 1. The images of the Zehner deck, used in tests of ESP.



In the telepathy mode of testing, an experimenter would look at one card at a time (out of the line of sight of the experimental subject), while the subject wrote down which symbol s/he intuited was on the card. Many thousands of repetitions of *runs* through the deck were performed by Rhine and colleagues, and confirmed many times over by numerous researchers around the world, over the better part of the last century. Charles Honorton analyzed the 28 most rigorous telepathy studies, showing that the odds against the combined results occurring by chance were ten billion to one.

These studies confirm that people are able to acquire information directly from other people's minds. People can also *transmit* information via mind-to-

mind communication. Distance does not appear to weaken telepathic effects, even when thousands of miles separate senders and receivers.

Animal-human telepathy has been reported anecdotally. For instance, many cat owners tell stories of feline sensitivity to when people in the home are ill or in need of comfort. Cats will regularly come and sit on the part of that person's body that is in need of healing. Animal-human telepathy has also been confirmed in fascinating studies summarized by Rupert Sheldrake, a British biologist – including dogs who behave in distinctive manners shortly before their owners return home, and telepathy between humans and cats, birds and other species.

Clairsentience: It is also possible to obtain information about a person or object through extrasensory perception (ESP) that does not involve telepathy. This knowledge seems to come to the mind of the perceiver directly from the object. It is theorized that people who have contact with the object either imprint it energetically or link with the object so that clairsentient impressions are available to people who later hold the object. The mind perceives this information as images (*clairvoyance*), words (*clairaudience*), or through any of the other six senses.

Examples of clairsentience:

- Gerard Croiset, a very gifted French psychic, was studied extensively by Jack Pollack. Croiset was able to locate missing people, particularly children, even when they were dead.
- Many people can hold an object, such as a key or a piece of clothing belonging to another person, and can report clairsentient descriptions of the owner of that object. This has been called *psychometry*.
- A common experience is to sense positive or negative 'vibrations' at a particular location, where the structures and physical objects at that location become imprinted with these vibrations. A place of worship commonly has positive vibrations; a room in which an argument occurred may have negative vibrations – even after the argument occurred and the room has been empty for a while.

In research of the clairvoyant mode, the Zehner deck was shuffled and the subject would psychically 'read'/intuit which symbol was on one card at a time, *without the experimenter viewing the card prior to their 'guess.'* After each guess was recorded, the experimenter turned over the card and re

corded the symbol, proceeding in this fashion through the entire deck. Alternatively, the subject wrote down the entire series of guesses prior to the experimenter's recording the order of appearance of each symbol in the shuffled deck. Extensive studies by Rhine and others were done in the clairvoyant mode.

J. Milton analyzed a series of the better studies on a variety of clairsentient techniques, including millions of individual trials in hundreds of studies. The level of statistical significance in this meta-analysis showed odds of 10 million to 1 above chance.

It has also been demonstrated in extensive experiments with highly significant results that people can know clairsentiently what is happening at a distant location without sensory cues or other contact (e.g., telephone or video) with that place. Charles Honorton performed a meta-analysis of 16 studies of such *remote viewing*. Eight of these studies showed significant effects. The overall statistical significance of the 16 studies was 476 million to 1 above chance.

Precognition: Many people have a measure of precognitive abilities. We may have had a 'lucky guess' that led us to pick a particular number in a lottery or a particular destination that led to rewarding experiences. We may have had dreams or nightmares that came true. Dreams are the most common vehicles for experiencing ESP.

Often, the precognitive intuitions we receive about real life events will appear on the screen of our mind with distortions that are similar to images we experience from daily life that are mirrored in our ordinary, non-precognitive dreams. For instance, we might have an angry interaction with a family member, and an angry monster will appear in our dream, repeating some variation of the altercation we experienced. In a precognitive dream, we might see the President hospitalized with a heart attack, prior to a heart attack occurring in an authority figure close to us (such as our father, older brother or boss).

Gifted intuitives are often able to read the future for themselves or others. To initiate the perception they may also hold an object belonging to a person, be in his presence, or be given her name.

Examples of precognition:

- Sally had a strong, foreboding premonition that the plane she had booked for a holiday flight was going to crash. After much hesitation, she changed her reservation – and was very glad she had done so. The plane she would have taken crashed on landing, with no survivors.

- The Boundary Institute website carries a number of premonitions concerning 9-11. Here is an anonymous report from their site:

"Most of my premonitions/precognitions come in the form of dreams. My 9/11 one was an exception. It came while I was watching TV with roommates one night, about 3 days before 9/11 happened. Also most of my premonitions occur about 3 days before the actual event; don't know why. By the way, I think we had finished watching a documentary about Pearl Harbor a little while before I had the premonition. I don't recall what we were watching at the time of the premonition. I was suddenly 'seized' by numerous disturbing emotions (hate, anger, rage, fear, etc) and then had a mental vision of a large commercial passenger jet crashing into a very tall building -- the building/location were not clear, though. I kind of got the 'willies' from this, and tried to 'shake off' the feelings, wondering 'where the heck did that come from'...as I had to assume at the time that it came from within my own psyche. Now I don't think so."

Laboratory subjects have been able to guess correctly the order of series of Zehner cards before they were shuffled. After the deck was shuffled, the experimenter recorded the order of appearance of each symbol and checked these against the earlier guesses. Honorton and Ferrari analyzed nearly 2 million individual trials, with over 50,000 subjects. Methods ranged from ESP cards to fully automated, computer-generated, randomly presented symbols. The intervals between guesses and generation of future targets ranged from milliseconds to a year. A meta-analysis of 309 studies found the odds against chance of were ten million billion billion to one.

While we have very clear evidence for the existence of each of these modes of ESP, it is still not entirely clear what ESP actually is. A few gifted subjects have been able on their own to achieve rates of success with ESP that were considerably above chance. The average person will have a low percent of correct guesses, and even the gifted will be off target some of the time. What has been consistent is that under each of the ESP modes, small but significantly greater than chance numbers of correct guesses were recorded for many individuals and for groups of people. However, it is impossible to know which guesses are on target before checking the results.

A further point of unclarity is that the modalities we have identified separately appear to have broad overlaps. Consider the following case and see which of the modalities may have been responsible for the Winston Churchill's intuitive guess that saved his life (as related by Brian Inglis).

Winston Churchill, was reputed to have had a charmed life. He related that he had always felt he had a protector. "I sometimes have a feeling – in fact I have it very strongly... a feeling that some guiding hand has interfered." At another point he credited "that Higher Power which interferes in the sequence of causes and effects more often than we are always prone to admit."

Churchill gave the example (in My Early Life) of his escape from captivity during the Boer War in South Africa. He failed in his plan to hop a freight train to Mozambique, and was left with only a hope and prayer that the local Kaffirs might help him, as he had heard that many of the Kaffirs hated the Boers... He could see the fires of a Kaffir settlement nearby. The difficulty was that he had no way to distinguish the potentially friendly from the unfriendly Kaffirs, and a wrong guess could prove fatal. He sat down to ponder his options.

Suddenly, without the slightest reason, all my doubts disappeared. It was certainly by no process of logic that they were dispelled. It just felt quite clear that I would go to the Kaffir kraal. I had sometimes in former years held a "Planchette" pencil and written while others had touched my wrist or hand. I acted in exactly the same unconscious or subconscious manner now.

Reaching the fires, he saw furnaces situated around a coal mine. He had no choice but to make a guess as to which house he would approach. He knocked on a door, excusing his disheveled clothing by saying he had been in an accident. He was admitted by a man who held a revolver and seemed obviously skeptical about his story. He felt compelled to tell the truth.

My companion rose from the table slowly and locked the door. After this act, which struck me as unpromising, and was certainly ambiguous, he advanced upon me and suddenly held out his hand.

"Thank God you have come here! It is the only house for twenty miles where you would not have been handed over. But we are all British here and we will see you through."

His host hid him in the mine until they could smuggle him to safety.

Which of the ESP modes did Churchill use? It could have been telepathy guiding him to the person who was willing to help him; or clairsentience that led him to the house with positive vibrations; or precognition that informed him of the positive outcome of his guess. We often have no way to know, as

in this case, which of the modes to credit. This suggests that the distinctions we make between these modes may not be accurate, and that we may be better off considering intuition as all of them combined.

Although not a part of extrasensory perception, psychokinesis is yet another unusual ability that is closely related and has been well studied by parapsychologists.

Psychokinesis (also called *PK* or *mind over matter*): PK has been studied in repeated, highly significant experiments demonstrating that matter can be influenced by the mind. Rhine asked subjects to roll randomly chosen faces of dice. Radin and Ferrari did a meta-analysis of 2.6 million dice throws. Although the effect size is small, with a very large group of studies the odds against chance in comparing experimental and control groups is over 1 in a billion

Helmut Schmidt developed another model for testing PK, using electronic random number generating (RNG) devices. RNGs function randomly when left alone, generating ones and zeros in chance patterns that average 50 percent ones and 50 percent zeros. The same RNGs deviate and produce significantly more ones or zeros when someone directs them to do so mentally. Radin, alone and again with Nelson, did meta-analyses of PK on RNGs, comparing experimental and control series and found the odds against chance were greater than 1 trillion to one. Interestingly, there are people whose influence on RNGs produces significant deviations but in the direction *opposite* to that which they intend

Jahn and Dunne developed yet another random model, a series of balls dropping through a symmetrical pinball device that distributes them randomly when left alone, but deviates right or left when a person wills them to do so.

Spiritual healing appears to be a sub-category of PK. In a review of 191 controlled studies of healing – including humans, animals, plants, bacteria, yeasts, cells in laboratory culture, enzymes and more – I found that 64 percent of the studies demonstrated significant results.

A sub-set of this research examined mental influence on electrodermal activity – a measure of skin resistance that is also used in lie detector tests. A healer was shown a skin resistance meter attached by a long wire to an experimental subject in another room. He was asked to alter their skin resistance, with feedback from this meter to tell him if he was succeeding. Braud and Schlitz published a meta-analysis of 400 individual sessions, in which they found odds of 1.4 million to 1 above chance for this measure of intentional effects at a distance.

Collectively, these abilities (telepathy, clairsentience and precognition) are

called *extra-sensory perception (ESP)*, and together with psychokinesis they are termed *psychic* or *psi* abilities. People who have any one of these abilities often tend to have one or more of the others as well, though they often excel in the one and may have only weak or occasional expressions of the remaining psi powers.

Psi awareness, communications and interventions have no apparent limits of distance or time. Studies of telepathy, clairvoyance and PK over distances of hundreds of miles did not diminish the significance of the results.

When we try to pick up anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.

– John Muir

3. Collective consciousness is suggested to explain intuition, psi abilities, and other manifestations of shared consciousness and interactions with the world beyond our bodies that are not experienced through physical interventions. A collective consciousness is part of the folklore of many cultures.

Western academic focus on collective consciousness dates back to Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) who was the first to use this term. His concept, and that of many social scientists today, is that this form of awareness is simply the collected conscious knowledge of a group of people, including its prevalent explanations for the world that also constitute the norms and values of social groups. This knowledge is presumed to be shared through normal means of communications, such as voice, letters, books and the media.

Traditional cultures acknowledge a collective consciousness as a matter of living fact. Shamans access this cosmic library to identify causes for problems in health, social relationships, and for spiritual directions for individuals and for the society as a whole.

Many Eastern religions and traditions of meditation teach that as we quiet our mind and detach from thinking *about* what is happening in our lives, we reach into a quiet place where we connect with the infinite source of wisdom – that is a part of us and of which we are a part. We can then become aware of information outside ourselves. While many individual reports from meditators (including myself) support these beliefs, Western science tends to dismiss them as fantasies, wishful thinking or random coincidences.

Collective consciousness has also been demonstrated recently in research. Fascinating studies have been published on perturbations in human collective consciousness. Dean Radin, Roger Nelson and colleagues have repeatedly demonstrated that random number generators deviate from their normal

random patterns during times when there are events of interest to large numbers of people. Consistent findings have been reported from a global network of 65 random event generators since August, 1998. Each RNG records several hundred random readings per second continuously. Data are collected centrally, archived and analyzed in Princeton, NJ.

Among many others, events that have registered simultaneously on RNGs around the world include the Embassy bombings in Nairobi and Tanzania on July 8, 1998; the visit of Pope John Paul II to the Middle East between March 21 and March 26, 2000; funeral ceremonies for Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau of Canada on October 3, 2000; and attacks on the World Trade Center on 9-11, to mention only a few. One might expect that the deviations would register primarily on the RNGs located near the events, but RNGs all around the world register unusual readings simultaneously during such events. The meaning of these perturbations is purely a matter of speculation at present. They are witnesses to effects of a global consciousness upon the physical world.

While the concept of collective consciousness has classically been focused on human consciousness, theory and research suggest that all individual living organisms may participate in a vaster network of consciousness within their own species.

Collective consciousness has been observed in many instances of animal behaviors. The behaviors of insects in their hives are particularly suggestive of a collective animal consciousness. Among the most striking example are the studies of termites. Sheldrake reports on studies where a steel plate was pounded part way into a termite mound, dividing it into separated portions. The termites continued building their mound up higher on both sides of the plate. Tunnels were found in the newly extended portions of the mound that precisely matched each other in placement on each side of the plate. It is difficult to explain how these insects could have known how to match up the placement of their tunnels without a guiding collective consciousness in the mound.

Eugene Marais, in a fascinating study of African termites, brings us another such example. He found that if the queen in a termite mound was killed, all the termites that were in the mound and foraging in the fields around immediately stopped their activity even though they might be many yards away and completely out of any possible sensory contact with the queen.

The movements of schools of fish and flocks of birds likewise suggest a collective consciousness. The instantaneous changes in direction of hundreds of individual animals, moving in concert as a single, collective organism are well known but as yet poorly understood and far from being explained by any theories within conventional science. A collective consciousness appears

to be a reasonable explanation, given that research has confirmed animal psi communications.

Supported by his research, Rupert Sheldrake's theory of morphogenetic fields suggests that there are species-specific repositories of memories of individual members of that species, collectively available to each member of that species. These fields are hypothesized to guide the individual members of a species in their instinctual behaviors. The existence of a morphogenetic memory bank could explain how the experiences of individuals who discover better ways to cope can contribute to the collective consciousness of their species. A sparrow that discovers a new edible seed could thus share its knowledge with others of its species, and a wild goose can access its migration route through these morphogenetic fields. It is easy to see how this could apply to behavioral and social learning. Sheldrake suggests that this can equally apply to collective awareness of physical changes in the body of an organism that confers advantages for its survival.

Sheldrake has focused on the collective consciousness of single species. There is every reason to expect that collective communications must occur between diverse species as well, considering the evidence from human-animal telepathic communications. The animal-human telepathic communications extend support for a range and possibilities of collective consciousness that link humans with all living organisms.

Human-plant communications are also described anecdotally. Gifted Western herbalists and flower essence practitioners, and herbalists in traditional cultures often report that the plants speak to them, telling them ways that the plants can be helpful in treating illnesses. Conversely, herbalists have added, "*It is not only the plant substance that helps, but what I suggest to the substance that it should do for the person who takes it that helps.*"

Anyone can explore communications with plants. Their biological energy fields are as palpable as those of animals. If we hold our hands near to but not touching a plant or a tree we can experience this. I find oak trees to have particularly powerful energy fields. Many people report they can connect with spiritual awareness and can rejuvenate themselves when tired or upset by hugging a tree.

We also have fascinating research on human-plant communications. Cleve Backster hooked up a philodendron plant to a lie detector, which measures skin resistance. When people lie, their autonomic nervous system tenses up, which is reflected in shifts in moisture in their skin that are measurable as a change in electrical resistance. Backster found that there were changes in electrical potentials of the plant's leaves when he was present in the room. He then set up a nasty experiment that he developed into an instructive

game of plant murder. He had one out of a group of ten people designated secretly as the murderer by a draw of cards. This person went into a room where there were two philodendron plants, uprooting one of them, throwing it on the floor, and stomping on it. When Backster hooked up the remaining plant to a lie detector and had each of the ten people in turn enter the room, the lie detector shifted dramatically when the 'murderer' entered the room, while it did not shift for any of the other people.

The reports of herbalists and flower essence practitioners, and the Backster experiments extend collective consciousness to include plants along with animals. In other words, all living organisms participate in collective consciousness.

The studies demonstrating clairsentience suggest that consciousness can connect with what has been considered non-living matter as well. Sensitives report that every object in the universe is alive and sentient. There is an article in the International Journal of Healing and Caring from a sensitive person in New York who channeled messages from a rock – complaining about the lack of sensitivity of the people to the land. Many healers and other sensitives have reported communications with Gaia, our planet and with nature spirits and angels that animate and facilitate the functions of various aspects of the natural world.

It appears thus that individual humans can be in psychic communications with any and all other humans as well as with all living things and with the (so-called) inanimate world. This web of psi awareness creates, in effect, a collective consciousness that includes all living beings and all non-living matter on earth. This may explain the collective consciousness that has been acknowledged by Jung and his followers, such as Marie-Louise von Franz, and by anthropologists such as Sir James George Frazer who documented the existence of amazingly broad overlaps of mythic imagery in diverse cultures around the world. Reports of psychics give us reason to believe this collective consciousness can and does extend to include the wider universe beyond our planet as well, though as yet no objective way has been devised for validation of such broader awarenesses.

*I live my life in widening circles
that reach out across the world.
I may not ever complete the last one,
But I give myself to it...
I have been circling for thousands of years,
And I still don't know:
Am I a falcon, a storm, or a great song.*

– Rilke

Spiritual awareness appears to be a part of the collective consciousness. With spiritual awareness, our consciousness extends beyond our physical bodies, as with psi. In addition, spirituality carries an intuited sense of being part of something vaster than ourselves. Much of this book will explore these awarenesses.

...for hundreds of years now all understanding of the spirit has been narrowed and restricted to what can be rationally expressed about 'the spirit.' The spirit is no longer seen as a gift that we hold in trust from life but as something that is narrowed to a conscious, willful, rational egoism. The spirit is not only reason – although it includes reason; it is not only feeling – and of course it includes feeling as well: but it is for me, above all, intuition, which is a profound compass, bearing on our origin and our destination. And this is ultimately what religion is about: 'origin and destination.' The result has been that the spirit has lost, for the moment, what made it one of the greatest of all human passions. So it has abandoned the human being in his narrowed, rational state, indulging the greatest pastime and specialty of our time, which is finding first-rate reasons for doing partial and wrong things.

Sir Laurens van der Post

In many parts of the world, spirituality is a natural part of life. In the Western world it is considered an anomaly – something that is outside our normal range of explanations. While many Western scientists have been skeptical about reports of psi and spiritual experiences, they are extremely common and, as we have seen, have been confirmed convincingly in many scientific laboratories.

6. *Biological energies* provide a basis for collective consciousness. These are the energies proposed by Einstein, the opposite side of the coin from matter. Einstein proposed, and quantum physics has confirmed that matter and energies are interconvertible. Conventional (Newtonian) medicine has been slow to absorb the lessons of quantum physics, which state that the physical body, like any other physical matter in our world, can be addressed also as energies. *Healing Research, Volumes I and II*, review substantial collections of research con-firming the existence of biological energy fields. These provide nested hierarchies of information from individuals within a species, forming an aggregate of awarenesses and experiences that become a collective biofield of conscious-ness. For example, an individual is a part of a family, which is part of a local community, which is part of a regional community, which is part of a nation, which is part of the global community.

Communications between individuals and groups at various levels occur through exchanges of spoken and written words, as well as through psi and biological energies. In addition to working in the present, these effects can extend forwards and backwards in time.

Bioenergies link people with each other through the collective consciousness. Bioenergies can also be deliberately guided and shaped by the intent of a healer and the receptivity of a healee on the individual level. These bioenergies have been reported most frequently as working over short distances of several inches to several feet – the distance between the hands of a healer and the person or animal that is being given spiritual healing. Therapeutic Touch and Healing Touch have been the focus of the largest numbers of studies of this form of healing (reviewed in *Healing Research, Volume I*).

There is no clear limit to the distances through which bioenergies may act. For instance, Vladimir Safonov, a Russian healer, reports that he gives healing from any distance by visualizing the healee sitting in front of him and giving her a bioenergy treatment with his hands as though she were present. I know numbers of other healers who work in a similar manner, reporting that their hands become hot during these distant healings, just as they would with a laying-on of hands treatment.

7. *Spiritual awareness* is another layer of collective consciousness, as confirmed in the many studies of OBEs, NDEs, reincarnation memories and possession reviewed in this book, and through spiritual healing. People who have OBEs, sensitives who channel, and healers appear able to contact other living people anywhere in the worlds of the living and the deceased. Surviving spirits are reported by mediums and healers to be able to contact other spirits and living persons. While most of these reports focus on conscious, intentional communications, there is every possibility that similar communications are constantly present as a collective, unconscious web of interconnected awareness.

People report awareness of transcendent consciousness through meditation, prayer and spontaneous mystical experiences. They may encounter angels, luminary spirits surviving their earthly existence (Christ, Buddha, saints and other enlightened spirits) and God. Those who have experienced such encounters with transcendent consciousness often have no doubts that it is real. Modern science discounts these experiences as products of imagination, wishful thinking, projections born of religious faith and fervor or even as hallucinations of deranged minds. My personal belief is that these experiences of transcendent awareness are absolutely real – based on meditative, intuitive and healing experiences of my own and of others whom I respect.

I could not say I believe. I know! I have had the experience of being gripped by something that is stronger than myself, something that people call God.

– Carl Jung

We have reviewed a substantial collection of evidence from a variety of anecdotal and researched sources suggesting that human and non-human organisms are interlinked, individually and collectively, through a vast network of consciousness. Could this collective consciousness constitute a part of the Divine consciousness, much like the electrical activity of a brain cell participates in the awareness of the entire brain; and like a person participating in the culture and traditions of her nuclear and extended family, community, broader cultural group and the whole of humanity? While no objective proof to answer such a question appears possible, subjective reports from intuitives and healers are very much in line with this hypothesis. These reports indicate personal awarenesses of a collective consciousness with several layers or levels, including humanity, Gaia (our entire planet), and many transpersonal realms that are beyond adequate description in words. Jose Ferrer takes this a step further, suggesting that as each of us perceives transcendent realities through the lens of our being, we are co-creating the Divine.

The general consensus from these diverse observations is that our earthly awareness is actually very constricted and limited, compared to transcendent consciousness.

*We live in illusion and the appearance of things.
There is a Reality.
You are that Reality.
Seeing this, you know that you are everything.
And being everything, you are no-thing.
That is all.*

– Kalu Rinpoche

Much of the enchantment of life lies in its mystery. The fact that most of us perceive and experience only dimly the Divine in ourselves and in the world around us provides a challenge for us to grow – to deepen our awareness and comprehension of our place in the cosmos.

Faith is an oasis in the heart which will never be reached by the caravan of thinking.

– Khalil Gibran

The western world must be prepared to analyze religion as a phenomenon that does not necessarily explain the unanswered questions posed by the philosophical mind but that may, in itself, cause such questions to occur to all manner of people in a great variety of situations.

– Vine Deloria Jr.

Suggestions for developing intuitive/ psychic abilities

Protection

Before starting any of the exercises in this book, it is important that we program our unconscious mind and higher self for safety. Our unconscious mind is always alert to guard us against harm. Invoking its protection will prevent harm through errors on our part or unforeseen complications or dangers in any of our quests for spiritual awakening and development. We might make a simple statement, such as suggested by Wendy Hurwitz, a gifted intuitive, "I accept only that which is for my highest good." Or, we may affirm whatever other suggestions feel prudent for our highest good.

Muscle testing

We do not have to take the word of others about the inner intuitive realms of knowing this world. Using the deeper links of our emotions, mind, intuition and spirit – in addition to our physical senses – we can check our own connections with these hosts of advisors. We can use our muscles to connect with our unconscious, intuitive awareness for a *yes* and a *no* sign in answer to questions. This has been recognized since early in the last century by hypnotherapists as an *ideomotor response* – a way to invite our inner wisdom to speak. For instance, we can rub our index finger across our thumb nail, asking in turn, "What feels like yes?" and "What feels like no?" Many (but not all) people note a distinct difference in sensations for positive and negative responses.

Another way is to link the thumb and little finger of our non-dominant hand in a ring, asking the same questions as we repeatedly pull to test the strength of the opposition of those two fingers. Most people will notice a distinct difference between their body's responses to a *yes* and a *no* mental focus. If our body cooperates in this way, we can then ask our higher self questions about our spiritual support team, about options we have for healing or about any other subject.

Yet another way is to use a pendulum. While many lovely pendulums are offered for sale, we can construct either from readily available materials. Any piece of thread or light string can be tied to a small object, such as a

ring from our finger or a medium sized nut (that screws onto a bolt). Dangling about 10 inches of string from our hand, we can bend our elbow so that it swings freely in front of us. We ask, "What is my yes?" and "What is my no?" Most people will observe distinctly different swings of the pendulum in response to each question.

Dowsing rods can also serve in the same manner, and we may purchase one or construct one from simple materials. With a piece of a drinking straw, we can make a sleeve for an L-shaped piece of light weight coat hanger. The part in the sleeve should be about 5-6 inches long, and the extension, beyond the bend in the L, about 12-15 inches long. Again, asking, "What is my yes?" and "What is my no?" we may see distinctly different swings of the dowsing rod. Some people like to work with a pair of rods simultaneously, one for each hand.

All of the above methods rely on small movements of our muscles that speak through our body to bring to consciousness whatever our unconscious mind wants to share.

Imagery for intuitive awareness

If we find no way that works for us with muscle testing, we may find imagery helpful. Closing our eyes, we make our mind a blank screen, and invite our unconscious mind to bring up a symbol on the screen that says, "Yes." Repeat that for "No."

General procedures for intuitive development

The unconscious mind is extremely literal, very much like an electronic computer. The words we use in asking our questions may shape the answers that we get. If we are ill and ask, "Will I get better?" we may get a "Yes" that is less than fully informative. What we are intending to ask may be, "Will I recover completely?" However, our unconscious mind may be answering, "Yes, you'll get a little bit better." Here is another example. At a workshop on WHEE where we worked on fears, a young man named Bob started crying. We asked him what had happened, and he responded, "I have a serious illness and I asked, 'Will I die' and the answer was, 'Yes.'" We all started laughing. (Do you get the joke?) Coming from his literal-minded unconscious, the answer had to be 'Yes' because we are all going to die. Bob had not asked his question in the way he intended to state it!

It helps to write down exactly what we say when we ask questions. If our unconscious mind is not responding the way we expect or wish it to, it may help to re-examine the words we have spoken to phrase the problem and to express our feelings. Sometimes a little shift or tweak to the wording will produce a major difference in the response that we get. Similarly, if we are

interrupted in our work, it is helpful to have the exact words we were using when we return to our inner explorations.

It helps to journal our progress. Writing down our experiences, thoughts, feelings, dreams and inner explorations in a journal helps to keep our focus. It also provides a diary of our progress, which can be helpful in tracking our growth. We can make an appointment with ourselves at regular intervals to note our changes and growth – through exploring our intuition.

It helps to be patient and gentle with ourselves as we explore and learn new approaches and move deeper in our awareness. Comparing ourselves with others who may be working on different issues at different rates of progress is not helpful. Each of us is a unique individual with our own issues and challenges and with our own ways of sorting these out. (More on acceptance later in this workbook.)

If we feel confused in our explorations, the counsel of a trusted friend or therapist can be enormously helpful. An objective review of what we want to clarify may readily produce views and suggestions we had not considered. We often get stuck in a rut of one way of perceiving or understanding our issues, and the outside help sheds the needed light on our questions.

Cautions on intuitive explorations

It is important to recall that common sense must prevail. Our inner selves also contain all of our memories, unconscious beliefs, disbeliefs, wishes and fears. All of these may contribute to the answer our body gives us, so these methods are less than fully accurate. This is why meditative states, where we quiet our minds and open to higher awareness, may contribute to more accurate intuitive perceptions. This is also why we may do well to consult impartial practitioners of various healing modalities to arrive at our best choices for treatments.

Muscle testing, dowsing and imagery as ways of connecting with intuitive awareness are discussed in greater detail in *Healing Research, Volume II*.

Patience and persistence in intuitive and spiritual development

With any of the approaches to intuitive awakening and spiritual opening, it usually takes diligent practice to get the knack of an approach and to open into a particular area of connection with our higher selves. Various times of day, different meditations or physical settings, the company of particular other people, and diverse other factors may be more conducive than others to our success. Holding a firm intent, with persistence and practice are the ways to success.

While working on our own is essential, our progress may be facilitated enormously with the help of a wise, experienced spiritual teacher. There is

no one person or one approach that will work for everyone, and no guarantee that the same person will be best for all approaches, all of the time. A part of our spiritual maturation is the learning of discernment in choosing good teachers.

One of the greatest challenges in opening to spiritual awareness is that this personal work requires inner honesty. All of us carry unconscious childhood programs for living our lives, leftover habits from growing up in a world we could not completely comprehend nor control. A child usually cannot change or escape whatever is uncomfortable, threatening or painful. The best way for a child to not suffer anxieties, fears, or pains is to take whatever makes her uncomfortable and bury it outside of conscious awareness. We end up with inner buckets and trash bins and closets and caves filled with buried materials that we found uncomfortable. Because we grow up doing this, our default habits are to continue burying feelings and thoughts we find uncomfortable – long beyond the time when we have better, more competent, adult alternatives.

Bob had been a bright, cheerful, outgoing student in first grade. He was constantly asking questions to satisfy his curiosity. His teacher, who was fresh out of university, teaching her first class on her own, was feeling overwhelmed by the demands of dealing with a class of thirty students. She had no time or patience for distractions or digressions from her conscientiously prepared lesson plans. Bob's curiosity was dampened by her repeated reprimands for interrupting the class, and when he persisted, he was further reprimanded for being oppositional and rebellious.

Bob retreated into sullen silence, feeling he was a bad boy. This became his self-image, negativity, spiraling into vicious circles of more rebelliousness, more negative responses from teachers and his parents, and worsening self-image.

As a student and in his career, Bob was an obvious under-achiever, often anxious beyond reason, and given to moodiness. When Tim, a close friend, suggested Bob might benefit from learning to meditate, he readily agreed to explore this. To his frustration, he found it difficult to concentrate or even to sit still for anything more than the briefest periods of time. Fortunately, Tim was not only experienced in meditation but also a counselor. He observed that Bob was extremely self-critical and that this might be an issue contributing to his general problems in life as well as being an obstacle to learning meditation. Clearing his negative self-image in counseling, Bob found he had more patience in meditation, as well.

Not only do we carry primary anxieties and fears, based on direct experiences, but we also build rules about dealing with these and other feelings. Common ones include: "I'm no good at..." "Stay away from..." "Nobody could ever accept/ like/ love me..." and so on. I call these meta-anxieties, because they are general anxieties *about* how we handle our anxieties and other feelings.

So long as we carry anxieties and fears of trusting the physical and social world we live in, it may be difficult for us to trust ourselves to opening into the worlds of spiritual awareness. The unknown is often perceived as being potentially dangerous. This is as true of the unknown worlds within us as it is of the world outside.

Looking for synchronicities and generating manifestations

The collective consciousness creates coincidences in our lives that are startling. It also enables us to co-create realities with the collective consciousness, through our wishes and intents. More on this in Chapter 13, in the section on spiritual healing.

CHAPTER 2. Meditation

In meditation we learn to care with a full-hearted attention, a true caring for each moment. Yet we also learn to let go.

- Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield

Quieting the chatting mind is the starting point for most spiritual paths. There are countless methods for doing this. No one method works best for all, so this workbook introduces a variety of approaches. See discussions on meditation in *Healing Research, Volume II (Popular or Professional editions)*.

General guidelines

An appropriate environment for meditation is important. All distractions and disruptions should be avoided: phones turned off; family and other house-mates alerted not to interrupt; bladder emptied; clothing loose and temperature comfortable. An aesthetically pleasing environment will create peaceful vibrations that are conducive to inner work.

Body position for meditation is important. The classical pose, with legs in the lotus position, feet folded up onto the crease of the opposite knee, appears conducive to meditative stillness. However, this requires a suppleness of limbs that many of us don't have. Some suffice with a half-lotus, folding only one foot up onto the crease of the opposite knee, the other foot on the floor, under the opposite knee. Others find that both of their feet folded under their knees is comfortable, or that sitting in a meditation stool or comfortable chair works well for them. Keeping the spine straight facilitates stillness.

Which form of meditation to use will vary with each person, and this may change over time for the same person. See which meditations feel best to you. A spectrum of meditation practices is suggested below.

How long is best to meditate is variable. Most people start with briefer periods, perhaps only 5-20 minutes at first. As we become comfortable with meditative practice, we find it easier to meditate longer. As experience builds, people often find it comfortable to meditate for 30-60 minutes regularly. Longer periods deepen our practice.

How long to persist with a given form of meditative practice can be a challenging question. When it is helpful and we are able to focus for increasing

periods of time, it is obvious that we have made a good choice. When we have difficulty focusing, it is more challenging to decide how long to use a given method. I recommend exploring several different methods, each for 1-2 weeks on a regular basis, before deciding on any of them. Without checking out several different approaches, we may not have as clear a sense of our readiness to respond to meditation. We may also find that one method is working for us for a while but then feels like it is no longer as helpful. It may then be time to switch to another approach. If we find none that we are able to focus on, including the 'meditations for a chatty mind,' we may want to explore reasons why our mind may not be open to meditation. Muscle testing (see *Chapter 1*) may be helpful in accessing our inner wisdom, to identify issues that are blocking our progress. Muscle testing may also suggest the opposite – that persistence with a given method may lead to progress over a longer period, despite the apparent lack of initial progress.

Instruction in meditation is often very helpful when we are beginning this practice, and many find it helpful periodically to attend classes or retreats. As we reach advanced levels of meditation, an instructor can guide us through potential blocks and pitfalls, some of which are discussed below.

Group practice of meditation may deepen its effects. Group prayer, chanting or meditative dance can enhance the meditation further.

Several practical issues may influence our meditation. While we may wish or need to use meditation to help ourselves deal with stress, it may be more difficult to settle into deeper meditation when we are challenged by issues that stress us. If we have practiced meditation when we are able to quiet ourselves, it is much easier to avail ourselves of the de-stressing benefits of meditation when we are facing issues that raise our concerns and our blood pressure. This is no different from any other activity. We would not go out to participate in a track meet or a basketball game without practicing beforehand. Our muscles and nervous system obey our wishes and commands much better when they are familiar with the necessary moves. The same applies in reverse – in relaxing our body – during meditation.

We can also pick times and places to practice our meditation that will make it easier for us to unwind. The classical Eastern recommendation is to wake up very early in the morning to meditate (4:00 a.m. is a common time for this), before our minds and bodies get into gear to deal with the outer world.

We can also make changes in our lives to facilitate our meditation, as well as to maximize our healthy surroundings. As we begin to feel the benefits of meditation, we become sensitive to outer and inner world issues that counteract the calming, relaxing effects of the meditation. We might learn to be less critical of ourselves and others, practicing meditations on compassion and forgiveness; decreasing our stress levels by simplifying and harmonizing

our lives, choosing new rules for living. For instance, we might, remind ourselves to take some deep breaths and practice a mini-relaxation when we come to a red light, instead of chomping at the bit, just waiting to floor the gas pedal when it turns green. If we find it difficult to release old patterns of negativity, we may seek counseling to help us understand and shift these patterns. We might choose our TV programs more carefully, giving a pass to news programs that hype the tragedies of the world in order to make us anxious – and thereby more vulnerable to the implanting of suggestions through advertisements.

Benefits of meditation are many and varied. Research shows that meditators are more relaxed and centered. Meditation has helped with psychological problems of stress, anxiety, fears and depression; and with physical problems such as hypertension, irritable bowel syndrome, asthma, chronic pains of all sorts, and much more. This research on physical and psychological benefits of meditation is reviewed in *Healing Research, Volume II*.

Most importantly, meditation opens into spiritual awareness on many levels. It reduces anxieties and fears, so that we are able to trust our inner wisdom. We are also more likely to trust other people when we come from a place of centeredness and peace. In some forms of meditation, the practice is to focus constantly on the present moment – the only point in time that is real. Both the past and the future are mental constructs, wheels within wheels in our minds that we can keep spinning endlessly without getting anywhere other than to distract and distance ourselves from the reality of the present moment. Meditation enables us to connect more strongly with our healing abilities – for others as well as ourselves. With advanced practice, we may open into spiritual awarenesses that enable us to reconnect with the All. Again, much more on the personal benefits of meditation in *Healing Research, Volume II*.

Suggestions

Getting started with meditation

Making ourselves comfortable is the first step. Sitting upright, if possible, is recommended. If we have to shift or move in order to relieve a stiffness or cramp, then we can do so and return to our meditation focus. This is not an endurance test. With time, we learn what are our best, most comfortable positions and will more quickly and easily settle into and maintain these for as long as we want or need to.

Being gentle with ourselves is another form of meditation. There is no need to criticize, argue with ourselves or get into mental discussions over

thoughts, feelings, sounds or other sensations that call for our attention. This simply locks us into the distractions. If they are important to us, we can tell each and every distraction, "I'll give you my full attention later. Right now, I'm meditating and wish to focus just on [my breath; mantra, etc]."

Breathing meditations

There are numerous variations in spiritual practices associated with breathing. We each have to find the one or ones work best for us. There is no right choice or wrong choice here, and the practice that works best may shift over time.

Silently say to yourself the word "in" as you breathe in, and "out" as you breathe out. Say this as the air is in mid-stream in each direction. Do not push your breath out or pull it in. Just observe how it flows by itself.

Watch for the precise turning point where the out-breath reverses and becomes the in-breath, saying "in" at this point, and "out" as it reverses to become the outgoing breath; or you might simply say, "now" at each of the turning points.

Sense that with your in-breath you draw in spiritual, healing energy that spreads to every particle of your being. With your out-breath you release any tensions or other inner dross that you don't wish or need to carry around inside you any more.

*Choose two inspirational words or brief phrases, such as, "I am" and "One with God." Silently say one phrase on the in-breath and the other on the out-breath. You might deepen this practice by saying, "I am" on the out-breath, picturing to yourself that you are emptying the vessel that is you, then filling your whole being with the essence of the Infinite Source on the in-breath. Other common breath-pacing phrases: I am – love/ peace; Al – lah; Christ/ God/ Allah – heals/ loves me/ is love. You can also explore how you feel reversing the timing of the phrases, to match the opposite phase of breathing. *Simply observing the breath* going in and out provides a focus for the mind. Watch your body being filled by the air and releasing it. This may not be as simple as it sounds, because there is a natural tendency to pull the air in or push it out, which interrupts its natural rhythm and flow. Just observe your breath gently coming in and out. *Imagery combined with breathing* can be a potent meditation. Picture to yourself that you breathe in *prana*, cosmic energy, along with the air that comes into your lungs. Like oxygen, it*

spreads to every particle of your being. As you exhale, it carries away any tensions you're ready to release like an ocean tide. Sense whether there is a difference if you picture the energies entering your lungs; your heart; your crown chakra (the top of your head). Sense whether you feel a difference if you picture the out-breath leaving through your feet, carrying whatever you are ready to release with your breath – deep into the earth to be composted.

Count your breaths, starting with 'and' on the in-breath, then '1' on the out-breath, then 'and,' then '2,' and so on up to 4, when you start back at 'and... 1.' If you get distracted in any way, simply return to '1.' After a round of four, return to "one."

You might reverse the order, matching 'and' to the out-breath, and the numbers to the in-breath. You might experience this as emptying your mind of ordinary reality, then inviting spiritual awareness in.

Contemplate an object you find pleasing to look at. Focus your full attention on it. Notice every detail of its beingness – its shape, its colors, its textures, and so on. Explore this with plants or flowers as well as with inanimate objects. You may deepen this practice by imagining that you *are* the object, experiencing the world as it might live it.

If you have a chatty mind, picture to yourself that you are in a bubble that is as large as will make you feel comfortable. It can be as large as a room or as small and snug as a space-suit. It can be located wherever you wish it to be. It might be in your home, out in nature, or floating in the air. It can be opaque if you want privacy and solitude, or transparent if you wish to focus on the outside world. It could be mirrored on the outside to keep others from seeing in, but clear from the inside so you can look out. (I like to have mine floating in a coral lagoon, with transparent walls, so that I can see the play of sunlight on the water surface above and the shadows of waves on the sands below, with beautiful corals and fish to watch.) Enjoy your privacy!

You can enhance this by watching as any thought or sound or other item enters your awareness, and welcoming it lovingly. Wrap it in its own bubble and then pop it through the wall of your own bubble and let it float away. You may disconnect your awareness of it as it passes through the wall of your bubble, or you may watch it as it floats away. Then return and wait for the next item to enter your awareness that you treat in the same way. This form of meditation is very helpful for dealing with distractions.

Another variation is to picture yourself by the side of a little river or a robust stream after heavy rains. Welcome any thought, feeling, or sensation that enters your awareness and gently place it on a leaf, a twig or a log

coming downstream – releasing it from our attention as it floats away. Yet another variation is to drop any such distraction into an endless series of railroad cars that pass by.

Mindfulness meditation

By becoming an observer of our thoughts as they pass through our mind, not attaching our attention to any of them, we can reach deeper and deeper levels of calmness, eventually opening into profound spiritual awarenesses.

As you notice anything coming up on the screen of your awareness, acknowledge it by naming it 'thought,' 'feeling,' 'memory,' and so on. Simply watch it; don't engage in feelings that may surround it, nor in analyzing or wrestling with it. When this is replaced by another mental visitor, simply repeat your observing and labeling.

When you are practicing Zen meditation, do not try to stop your thinking. Let it stop by itself. If something comes into your mind, let it come in and let it go out. It will not stay long. When you try to stop your thinking, it means you are bothered by it. Do not be bothered by anything. It appears that the something comes from outside your mind, but actually it is only the waves of your mind and if you are not bothered by the waves, gradually they will become calmer and calmer . . . Many sensations come, many thoughts and images arise but they are just waves from your own mind. Nothing comes from outside your mind . . . If you leave your mind as it is, it will become calm. This mind is called Big Mind.

– Suzuki Roshi

Active meditations

Meditation does not have to be a separate, introverted activity. We can extend mindfulness into our everyday lives. As we go through our day, we can pick an activity where we will constantly maintain our awareness of ourselves as observers to what we are doing. In other words, we stay aware that we are conscious of doing what we are doing. This can be particularly helpful when we engage in creative activities, such as art, music, dance or other creative externalizations of ourselves.

Group meditation

Spirituality grows with our involvement in spiritual activities. Periodic re-

treats for more prolonged contemplation help deepen meditative practice, as do meditations in the presence of others pursuing similar paths. A collective healing atmosphere is created when groups of people sit together in meditation. Having a teacher or spiritual guide who can sound a meditative note on their spiritual tuning fork to which we can resonate is also a great help.

Meditation as a path to personal spiritual awareness

Meditation allows us to quiet the mind from its chatter and its focus on everyday, outer world matters and constant inner world chatter and distractions. With prolonged practice, it helps us open into transcendent awareness.

Spirituality grows with our involvement in spiritual activities. Periodic retreats for more prolonged contemplation help to deepen meditative practice, as do meditations in the presence of others who are pursuing similar paths. Having a teacher who can sound a meditative note on their spiritual tuning fork to which we can resonate is also a help. Pir Vilayat Khan, head of the Sufi Order of the West and an experienced meditation teacher, says,

The purpose of life is to make God a reality... Making God a reality is the counterpart of one's realization, which means that awakening is overcoming the limitation of one's personal vantage point... [C]onsciousness functioning in a human being is focalized into what one calls the personal consciousness. It is really the Consciousness of the Universe, but it is functioning as though it were focalized, and consequently one is judging things from that vantage point. Awakening is being able to change one's perspective from the personal vantage point and being able to see what is being enacted beyond the appearance of things.

The word *God* may be uncomfortable to some, particularly when they were taught that God is watching their every move and tallying every sin in a book that will be used on Judgment Day to determine their place of residence for the rest of eternity. Swami Satchidananda suggests, "... God is an experience... God is not a person."

Every culture has its beliefs about a transcendent, omniscient, omnipotent consciousness. Since culturally taught and personal awareness of God are universal, it might seem logical that a universally acceptable religion could be developed. However, because cultural and religious differences shape perceptions and interpretations of inner awarenesses, this is highly unlikely.

A universal theology is impossible, but a universal experience is not only possible but necessary.

– A Course in Miracles

Jorge Ferrer takes this argument a step further. He suggests that it is actually impossible to distill a valid common denominator from diverse reports of transpersonal experiences that will accurately describe spiritual dimensions. Each person's perceptions are unique. Therefore, Ferrer argues, each person is actually co-creating transpersonal reality through her or his perceptions and descriptions of these dimensions.

Ferrer's observations are in line with the focus of this workbook – helping to explore and develop your personal spirituality. Each of us faces the challenge of deciding what our relationship with the Infinite Source is going to be for ourselves, both during our lifetime, and in our transition to whatever lies behind the veils that separate this lifetime from the next.

CHAPTER 3. Out-of-Body Experiences (OBE)

Remember him – before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

– Ecclesiastes

Ordinary people have been reporting for centuries that occasionally they are conscious of themselves *outside their physical bodies*. An Out-of-Body Experience (OBE) often occurs spontaneously during states of sleep (natural or due to anesthesia) or in crisis or trauma situations. People typically find themselves floating in the air above or standing by their beds. They might initially think that they are dreaming until they notice that their physical bodies are still in bed, peacefully asleep.

If they find themselves in an astral body, they might choose to move around with arms and legs, very much as they would in a physical body, but passing *through* material objects like doors and walls. Alternatively, they might think of going to a certain place and discover that the mere thought results in their rapidly being transported through space to the desired location, or instantaneously appearing there. While in an OBE they may observe events (even in distant locations) that they can later verify. In rare instances, they may be observed by one or more persons or be able to move objects at the distant location. Then, either with the thought that they are uncomfortable outside their bodies or without their volitional intent, they find themselves suddenly back in their physical bodies.

There are many reports of OBEs occurring during crises, particularly with physical trauma.

Composite example:

Laura was driving home during rush hour traffic. A car came through a red light and hit her broadside. Her head was slammed against the side window and she immediately lost consciousness. She found herself floating above the scene of the accident, watching as people removed her from the car and laid her on the sidewalk. She observed the ambulance crew bandaging her bleeding head, and heard one of them mutter, "I've never seen someone hit this bad who survived yet!" The next thing

she knew, she was back in her body in the ambulance, feeling the worst headache she had ever experienced. Laura asked the ambulance attendant if he really thought she wouldn't make it because her baby son and husband really needed her. The ambulance attendant was surprised and perturbed, because he couldn't believe she had heard him make his dire prediction.

Supporting the possibility that the OBE is more than a dream or imaginary experience are reports of OBEs from people who are blind. Kenneth Ring and Sharon Cooper interviewed four people who were blind from birth, plus two who were blind from below the age of five (so that their memories of visual perceptions are nil), and another four who were severely visually impaired (could not see forms clearly) – all of whom reported OBEs. During their OBEs they were able to see immediately and to make sense of what they saw. They reported seeing objects in their environment and could identify colors that they had never seen before. This is highly unusual, not only for the fact of their being able to perceive visual images but also for their being able to make sense of what they are seeing. People who have been blind from an early age due to defects in their corneas or lenses, which were later corrected, have had great difficulty learning to make sense of the visual stimuli to their eyes, and in many cases found this impossible to do.

Suggestions

OBE exercises

A few words of caution are in order here. As with any exercise in the intuitive/ psychic/ spiritual spectrum, it is important to embark on such exercises only when one is in a stable frame of mind, and to set boundaries of intent for safety. Anyone who is uneasy or frightened by any aspect of such exercises, and anyone who has schizophrenia or is on major tranquilizers should not proceed with doing the exercises without consulting a teacher, counselor or therapist who can advise them whether it is safe and in their best interests to be engaging in such activities.

While going out of body is often a spontaneous occurrence, it is possible to learn to do this intentionally. This may require practice, and appears to be a skill that some can develop but others not.

Sylvan Muldoon and Hereward Carrington describe several techniques that you can practice to develop OBEs. First, you set an intent to move your astral body outside your physical body. Practice picturing that this is happening.

Second, you prepare a dream that you will dream about moving outside your physical body. You can picture that you are simply levitating from the bed, or getting up and walking away in your astral body, or whatever other images suit you.

Third, it is important to maintain conscious awareness as you move into sleep. You can start with thinking solely about yourself. To help you stay in the space between waking and sleeping, you can lie on your back, keeping one arm pointing straight up in the air from your elbow. If you fall asleep, your arm will drop and wake you back into awareness – at which point you simply resume thinking about yourself.

Then, you dream your prepared dream of moving into your astral body. It may take several weeks of practice to achieve an OBE. We have no studies to say what percent of people can do this successfully. The Monroe Institute has detailed training programs to develop OBEs.

Remote viewing

Remote viewing is actually the same as traveling to a distant location mentally, without sensing that we are in an astral body. It is our *consciousness* that is traveling. The research laboratory of Robert Jahn, Dean Emeritus and colleagues at Princeton School of Engineering has shown conclusively that many people can do this. They have found it helpful for successful remote viewing to exclude outside distractions, which they achieve by having a person in a quiet room with a non-descript hissing noise through earphones and cloudy goggles that allow light into the eyes but screen out visual images. (This is called the *ganzfeld* method.) By simply telling people to go to a particular location it is possible for many to accurately describe a place they have never before visited. Other investigators have shown that this could even be an imaginary place that has been visualized by the experimenter.

The most accepted model for remote viewing has the viewer lying comfortable and quiet, with a trusted person acting as guide and recorder. This leaves the viewer free of distractions from the outside world and better able to maintain the remote viewing state. The guide makes suggestions for sharpening the focus of the viewer, and records all observations the viewer makes.

Physical movement as part of developing an OBE

Several methods of developing an OBE include physical movement that facilitates the process.

John Heron teaches people to picture to themselves, as they are strolling

along a quiet space, that they are walking several feet ahead of where their physical body is located. This can induce an out-of-body experience.

John Cogswell has a wonderful exercise of developing telepathy and/or clairvoyance that he calls 'Walking in your shoes.' A pair of people agree to work together, with one 'walking in the shoes' of the other, inviting intuitive awarenesses of the other to surface to consciousness. The person walking around the room provides a string of impressions over a period of several minutes. The other person may give feedback immediately, with each impression or two, or may give feedback at the end of the entire series of impressions. Both of the pair are usually deeply moved by the experience, as may be others in the audience if this is done as a group experience.

It is not clear why the physical movement seems to facilitate the OBE experience. Perhaps it provides a meditative focus.

Relevance of OBEs to personal spirituality

When we experience our consciousness extending beyond our physical selves, we can sense more strongly and clearly our connections with the All. The feedback of our personal accuracy in perceptions while in the OBE can strengthen our belief in the reality of these experiences – which we might otherwise dismiss as fantasies or dreams. It gives us confidence that there may be a continuation of life in a spirit state after the death of the physical body. These experiences also build into a sweetening spiral of positive beliefs (the opposite of a vicious circle of doubts and disbeliefs), with increasing confidence and trust in our universal oneness that can lead us to reach out and build stronger connections of awareness and more conscious participation with the All.

OBEs may accompany emotional trauma. People may leave their physical body severe stress, escaping the pain and distress of the trauma to their physical, emotional and mental selves. Numbers of intuitives who see or sense the spirit worlds have told me that they often see people who aren't fully back in their bodies after having experienced such traumas. Such people may have difficulty 'feeling themselves' and often have great difficulty establishing solid relationships with others. Clearing of the psychological and bioenergetic residues of the traumas can facilitate a person being fully embodied again. This also may facilitate more normal relationships with others.

OBEs are also a common part of Near-Death Experiences, discussed in the next section. This is a more extreme example of consciousness separating from the body in response to trauma. Occasionally, this may also occur in anticipation of trauma, without the actual trauma occurring.

CHAPTER 4. Near-Death, Pre-Death and Deathbed Experiences

"What happens to an enlightened person at death?" a student queried Master Hakuin.

"Why ask me?"

"Because you're a Zen master!"

"Yes, but not a dead one!"

– Zen Parable

Scientists have studied experiences of people who came close to death, or were actually declared dead based on total lack of responsiveness, with no breath or heartbeat (sometimes with further evidence from flat EKGs and EEGs) but returned to life. Many were cases of cardiac arrest, accidents or surgical complications. Up to 20 percent of these people may report an NDE.

Some NDEs occur under a perceived threat of danger, without actually losing consciousness. These are commonly called *Fear-Death Experiences*.

People experiencing an NDE typically feel they are moving out of their bodies in spirit form, passing through a long tunnel towards a light at the end. They may hear strange and beautiful music; may meet angels or other spirit-like beings who welcome them warmly; and may see or in other ways sense the presence of relatives who had passed on earlier.

There is a tremendous sense of wellbeing and calmness, of knowing and understanding about one's own life and relationships as well as about the meaning of existence in general. These experiences peak in an encounter with a blinding white or golden light that appears to embody an all-knowing, non-judgmental, all-accepting, all-loving being. Many experience an instantaneous but complete review of all the events in their lifetime, under the guidance of the Being of Light. The review is totally accepting and non-judgmental on the part of this Being, but people may feel regrets and criticisms of themselves over errors or poor choices around things they did or did not do.

We are punished by our sins, not for them.

– Elbert Hubbard

Some NDEers ask the Being of Light to allow them to return to physical life to complete unfinished business. Others are led to understand – in words or

just by some inner 'knowing' – that a higher authority requires that they return to their physical bodies. Many feel great disappointment upon being told this. The next awareness is usually of being back in the body, with only a partial recall for the NDE.

Experiences that appear identical with the NDE may occur without a person being close to death, for example, when undergoing surgery or when a person is afraid they might die, although their body is not mortally injured.

In and of itself, the NDE is frequently experienced as a healing. NDEers return from death's door with a markedly different, more peaceful and accepting attitude towards themselves and the world around them. They know, beyond any doubt or questioning, that consciousness transcends physical life and that death of the physical body is not the termination of a person's existence.

Research

Studies have found between 12 and 50 percent of people who are resuscitated report NDEs. The variability may relate to selected populations and to how an NDE is defined. Fascinating NDE research is reviewed in detail in *Personal Spirituality*. A few salient points are highlighted here.

Surveys in numerous cultures reveal the NDE is a very common experience. Following an NDE, people commonly report they

- feel more connected to a personal sense of the spiritual
- do not fear death
- are very likely to believe in continued life after death
- believe more in reincarnation
- believe in a universality of all religions.

Some postulate that the NDE might simply be a manifestation of fading or death of parts of the brain due to trauma or to decreased blood or oxygen supplies – as perceived by other parts of the brain that are still alive and uninjured or less injured. Research reviewed in *Personal Spirituality* does not support this theory.

Skeptics have suggested that the NDE is no more than wishful thinking to counter people's fears of death. Again, studies do not support this hypothesis.

Impressive evidence comes from reports of children who have had NDEs. Children under the age of eight usually have little understanding of death and are unlikely to have been primed with prior expectations that would lead

them to the core experience of the NDE. Yet children report identical experiences when they return from their NDEs.

Most remarkable are the NDEs in blind people who were identified by Kenneth Ring and Sharon Cooper. Of the 21 people interviewed, 10 were blind from birth and another 9 were blind from before the age of five years. Fifteen of the 21 subjects (71 percent) reported they were able to see during their NDE, and what they reported was validated.

Pre-death experiences

Melvin Morse, in *Parting Visions*, reports many stories of psychic and spiritual experiences in the days prior to a person's death. These had very broad overlaps with NDEs and deathbed experiences in many respects. These include people who are close to death or in the process of dying, having precognitive awarenesses in dreams and waking visions that their deceased relatives were near or present; simultaneous perceptions by living relatives and medical staff of the visions that those close to death perceived; and angelic presences that conveyed helpful information or even intervened physically to prevent tragedies. A variety of similar reports can be found in *Personal Spirituality*.

There is no reason to believe a person is mentally unbalanced because they have such an experience. Most people who report pre-death experiences are mentally healthy. People who are losing their minds tend to have a long history of multiple hallucinations and numerous fears in a variety of situations, with negative feelings and poor control over their emotions and behavior.

These experiences have a reality that is as valid as any other life experiences. They are not made up fantasies.

Spiritual experiences are transformative, producing more positive outlooks and beliefs about life and death and leading to commitments to work for the highest good of all. Those who have pre-death experiences are likely to

- have less anxieties
- feel more positive about the meaning of their life
- have increased spiritual awareness
- feel more certain that there is an afterlife
- live more comfortably with their physical and emotional problems
- have a quality of death that is vastly improved – for themselves, as well as for family, friends and caregivers who are able to listen to and accept their experiences

Again, studies do not support skeptics' suggestions that these experiences are unreal fantasies. The research evidence is reviewed in *Personal Spirituality*.

Deathbed experiences

Deathbed experiences, resembling the NDE and pre-death experiences, have been well documented in countries around the world. Typically, people approaching the last hours of their lives become calm and smile. They may report that they see visions of various apparitions (angels, Christ or relatives who had passed on previously) coming 'to take them away.' These apparitions explain that there is an afterlife and that they need not fear death; they hear celestial, ethereal, 'beautiful music of the spheres.' Often, following these visions, their pains and other distressing symptoms either abate or no longer bother them as much. A Gallup poll survey in 1982 found that 5 percent of dying people were reported to have experienced deathbed visions.

Deathbed experiences from America, England and India are very similar to each other. Some have queried whether NDEs and deathbed experiences might be produced by processes of brain death or of emotional disturbances. Karlis Osis and Erlunder Haraldsson, both experienced parapsychologists, identify a distinctness in the deathbed vision from physiological conditions that may produce hallucinations and the like.

In Buddhist traditions, death is a crucial state of transition. People prepare for their death over many years, through living their lives unselfishly, with regular prayer and meditation practices. At the time of death and in the days immediately following, if the spirit is properly guided and assisted through the prayers of the mourners, it may transition to higher levels of advancement. John Bockris points out that the descriptions of the dying process in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* have several overlaps with the NDE.

Difficulties and challenges surrounding NDEs

Not all NDEs, pre-death or deathbed experiences are positive. After several years of glowing NDE experience reports in the modern literature, reports of negative experiences during NDEs began to appear. People found themselves in places that resembled Dante's descriptions of Hell, with souls writhing and screaming in agonies of horrible tortures. Rather than a

pleasant experience, this type of NDE was one of fear, even to panic proportions.

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, who devoted her life to helping people deal with death, also reported several negative NDEs. These were usually in men 40-50 years old, fundamentalists who had sinned (for example in deceiving their wives), despite acknowledging to themselves that what they were doing was wrong. She speculates that people who perceive themselves to be sinners may find that their NDE life-review is a negative experience: if they are critical of themselves, the whole NDE may become negative when viewed from self-critical perspectives.

Broader implications of NDE, pre-death and deathbed experiences

The existence of a 'spirit body' is supported by evidence from the NDE, pre-death and deathbed visions, and other phenomena reviewed later in this workbook and in *Personal Spirituality*. A spirit body appears to coexist with the physical but seems able to transcend the space and time limits of the physical world as we know it in sensory reality. It may be a vehicle through which healers can give and healees can receive healing. It may be an aspect of life that survives physical death. During incarnations the spirit body may bring with it elements that participate in creation of diseases and also may include potentials for healing them.

Broader benefits of NDE, pre-death and deathbed experiences

I see many ways in which these experiences can be helpful to people other than those who experience them. Near-death and pre-death visions can be enormously beneficial to doctors, nurses and other caregivers. They can alter the commonly held perceptions of death as a frustrating failure to preserve life and a reminder of the caregivers' own mortality, shifting these negative beliefs and expectations surrounding death into an awareness of death as a portal to new, positive awarenesses. Instead of feeling helpless, caregivers can take these experiences as opportunities to facilitate deeper connections with spirituality for those they are helping. Caregivers will similarly benefit from their own resonations, becoming aware of their own spirituality. Societal attitudes towards death may also be shifted, with vast improvements in hospital care for the terminally ill and dying.

The fear of death drives most conventional caregivers to fight death at all cost. Thirty percent of the annual expenses of medical care are incurred in

the last month of people's lives, in fruitless treatments whose effects are primarily to assuage the fears of death of the caregivers and families of the dying. While they may prolong physical life for a few days, they do not enhance quality of life. On the contrary, their major effect is to prolong unnecessary suffering.

The importance of the near-death studies is not what they teach us about life after death, but rather the spotlight they shine on the spiritual impoverishment of our own lives.

– Melvin Morse with Paul Perry

Suggestions

I am obviously not going to encourage you to go out seeking a near-death experience! However, since near-death, pre-death and deathbed experiences are so very common, and so deeply transformative, I strongly encourage you to

- Read what others have written about them
- Speak with people who have had them
- Invite anyone close to you who is approaching the end of life or dealing with bereavement issues to do the same.

If these experiences are real for some people, they are probably real for all people. The more relevant question may be: Why don't *all* people experience and report them? My suspicion is that everyone actually does have these, but that our habits of sensory world perceptions and conceptualizations based on physical life inhibit our conscious awareness and memories of these experiences.

CHAPTER 5. Reincarnation

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
 The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
 Hath had elsewhere its setting,
 And cometh from afar:
 Not in entire forgetfulness,
 And not in utter nakedness,
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come
 From God who is our home:
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close
 Upon the growing boy.*

– William Wordsworth

Several lines of exploration suggest that reincarnation may, in fact, occur. Some of the most dramatic evidence comes from individual cases in which clear memories of apparent previous lives are reported spontaneously. The most convincing are those of children. In a few exceptional instances people even recall words in languages unlearned in the current life, and a few even are able to converse in those languages.

A variety of deliberate approaches may bring forth reports of previous lifetimes. Studies with hypnosis and a range of psychotherapies report that immediate symptom relief may be obtained when some patients relive experiences or release emotions from traumas they report they suffered in previous lifetimes.

Spontaneous reincarnation memories

Ian Stevenson, a psychiatrist at the University of Virginia, has pioneered the exploration of spontaneous reincarnation reports from India, Lebanon, Sri Lanka and other cultures around the world. He meticulously collected first-hand accounts of witnesses who corroborated the telling and/or demonstrating of such memories.

Cases under such circumstances have been found with multiple witnesses verifying the reported events. Particularly impressive are the cases of children who recall a previous life, in societies where there is little access to the media and little mobility. Here is a composite example.

Four year-old Ahmed reported that he was really Shari, and lived in a small town 300 miles from his own village. His parents at first thought this was childish imagination, but the persistent and detailed descriptions of persons, places and events, along with altered personality styles in the child, piqued their curiosities to the point that appropriate inquiries were made.

Ahmed, who had never visited the recalled town of his alleged past-life memories, nor had contact with anyone from there, was taken to the edge of the town. He led witnesses by the most direct route to his alleged former home. Along the way, he pointed out a place where a tree had stood (where no sign of a tree was then evident) and other changes in the houses and surroundings of the home where he claimed he had lived. On arrival at the home of his previous life, he identified relatives of Shari by name and kinship ties. He went on to disclose intimate details relating to his family's experiences that no one outside the family could possibly have known.

The family of the deceased Shari verified that Ahmed's statements were almost entirely accurate.

Stevenson has collected a large series of such witnessed reports and has a variety of books on many aspects of reincarnation.

Stevenson also found astounding physical evidence supporting reincarnation. He searched out confirming evidence that birthmarks and other physical deformities appearing in the bodies of the current person corresponded to documented traumas on body parts recalled from previous lives. A high percent of people who report they died violent deaths in previous lives have such birthmarks. For example, a person who recalls having been killed by an arrow through their chest in a previous life finds a birthmark on their chest in that spot. Satwant Pasricha independently published similar findings.

In Western society, where reincarnation is not a familiar phenomenon to most of the population, reports of past life memories are more rare than in societies where it is well accepted. Nevertheless, there is an increasing awareness about past life recall and more people are now speaking about it.

Deliberate past life memory access

Hypnosis has been used to regress people to memories from earlier times in their current lives. These memories were apparently buried in the unconscious mind but available through explorations under hypnosis. In many

cases it has been possible to validate the reported early memories. In some cases, false memories appear to have been produced under hypnosis.

Hypnosis is a strong form of suggestion where hypnotists give people permission to recall these memories. It is possible to give ourselves such suggestions through *self-hypnosis*. Past life therapists may also invite past life memories without hypnosis, just by suggesting to people that they focus on the feelings and issues they are currently dealing with in therapy, while inviting to appear on the screen of their mind those past life memories that may be relevant.

Psychotherapists find that past life regressions may help people to resolve emotional and relationship problems. Typically, people will present themselves to their therapist with a persistent pain, phobia, anxiety or interpersonal conflict that has not responded to conventional counseling approaches. The therapist helps them awaken relevant experiences apparently lingering in their unconscious mind from previous lifetimes. People will frequently experience intense emotional releases as they recall traumatic past-life experiences (such as the death of a dear one) or their own deaths. Bringing out the related memories and releasing the feelings often frees people of their presenting problems. *Personal Spirituality* reviews several such reports and references many more.

Hypnosis was also used by Helen Wambach, a hypnotherapist in southern California, to gather one series of 800 and another of 300 reports of past life regressions. She examined the congruence of details of these many reports with known historical facts, finding very few inconsistencies. She also found that the gender of people in the past life memories was half male and half female, even though about 80 percent of her participants were women. Furthermore, about 80 percent of people in the recalled past lives appeared destitute, dressed in rags. These are the percents of people one would expect to find with these characteristics. These studies confirm in yet another way the likelihood that past life memories are real, rather than fantasies.

Past life events also are often reported by psychics and mediums. More on this in a following section of this workbook.

Numerous explorers in these realms have come to the conclusion that reincarnation appears to be the process of spirits and souls taking the equivalent of elective courses in the material world, with a major in spiritual development. Explorations through reincarnation and near-death studies, along with evidence from channeled reports and possession, provide glimpses of what it is like to be alive in spirit between earthly lives.

My personal belief is that reincarnation memories are a part of our awareness of belonging to a vast collective consciousness that is beyond our full

comprehension while we are in the flesh, and only dimly perceptible through alternative states of consciousness. Alternative theories to explain reincarnation are discussed in *Personal Spirituality*.

Suggestions

Children's past life memories

If you spend time with young children, keep your ears open for statements suggesting reincarnation memories.

Example

Tamara was bemused when each of her children, three years apart in age, told her spontaneously when they were 3-4 years old that they remembered their 'real' mommy and daddy. Tamara clarified that they were not speaking of dreams or fantasies, but of memories of living in very different families, each of which they described in detail.

Write down what the children say, as it is easy to forget details. Check whether their descriptions of their previous families remain consistent over time.

If children in your family don't mention anything of this sort, you might simply ask, "Do you remember being a grownup?" Children under the age of three or four are more likely to respond with details of a previous life. You might also consider tape recording such discussions because you may notice new details in re-listening to the discussion.

Exploring symptoms and life challenges as clues to past life memories

In electing to explore our own past lives, it helps to have a serious reason and purpose for doing so. Our unconscious mind and higher self will be more likely to cooperate in this quest if we are clear with ourselves that this is not a parlor game, but rather a serious quest for psychological and spiritual enlightenment. A true need for helpful information that might contribute to the resolution of physical or psychological problems in our current life is a good starting point. Lacking these, we may still invite past life memories as part of our spiritual growth.

Choose a quiet time and place where you can be undisturbed for several hours. Prepare writing materials or a tape recorder to record whatever feels

relevant. Ground yourself and quiet your mind with meditation. Make your statement invoking protection (See Suggestions in Chapter 1). Then let your mind be a blank screen.

If you are focusing on a problem in your current life, bring up the images and feelings that are associated with your issues. If it is a relationship or other difficult experience, then replay the most intensely problematic scenes in your mind. If it is a physical symptom, bring up the feelings and memories associated with this problem. If this is a chronic challenge, you might find it helpful to return in your memory to the first time you experienced it. What you are doing here is to poke about in the file drawers of your current life memories, hoping to stir memories stored in the same drawer from one or more past lives.

When you have immersed yourself in the images and feelings of your issue, make your mind a blank screen again and invite any past life images and feelings to surface. Don't push or force your mind to produce these, but gently welcome and observe whatever comes up on your mental screen.

It is very helpful to write down whatever images appear. Very much as in dreams, you may lose many of the details back into the depths of forgetfulness if you don't do so.

Example:

While out cycling one day, I fell from my bike, hitting my left thigh on a lawn. I hardly felt the impact and rode the five or six miles home without any awareness of difficulties. However, over the next few weeks, my thigh ached very uncomfortably. I assumed it was simply muscle and tendon strains, but noted as time passed that the ache shifted from spot to spot in the general area of my hip – suggesting a bioenergetic source to the pain rather than a physical one.

In quiet meditation, asking the pain in my hip what it wanted to tell me, I came into memories of a past life as a Native American or Inuit man, trekking with a clan into which I had married, climbing a steep mountain slope covered in snow. I had injured my left thigh and was having greater and greater difficulties keeping up with the others. We paused to consider the situation. There was no way for the others to carry me, as we had no pack animals or sleds. We came to the inescapable conclusion that I would have to stay back while the others moved forward.

There were no hard feelings on my part, because this was the way of our lives. The one who could not keep up had to be sacrificed for the good of the whole clan.

However, as I settled into a niche between some rocks that protected me from the wind, I was overcome by feelings of resentment towards God for having abandoned me. I had married into this clan, and my wife and baby son had died recently in childbirth. I was left with no real reason for being with this clan, into which I had married. These were my thoughts and feelings as I succumbed to a freezing death.

The pains in my hip in my current life connected me with memories that resonated with feelings of having been abandoned in this life – by my father, when my parents separated when I was a child. The pains also resonated with resentments towards my mother for not having been there for me in ways I felt I needed her to be. As I identified and cleared these feelings (using WHEE and other energy medicine techniques, and with the help of a gifted intuitive counselor), the pains in my hip abated.

Roger Woolger suggests that an incarnating soul may be attracted to parents who resonate with the soul's unresolved karmic issues and life lessons. These parents may help the soul recreate the incoming soul's patterns, providing opportunities for all parties to work them through and resolve them. If this is so, it appears likely to me that in many cases the attraction for a soul would be strongest with souls with whom there had been earlier relationships – because the points of correspondence in unresolved conflicts would be most similar among these souls.

A variety of alternative explanations for such memories are considered in *Personal Spirituality*. For myself, the economy of the reincarnation hypothesis feels the most likely explanation, supported as it seems by evidence from numerous other sources reviewed in that book.

Therapeutic Past life regressions

If simply inviting reincarnation memories does not bring them back for us, we might choose to have the help of a hypnotherapist or other counselor experienced in past life regressions. While initially it was thought necessary to use hypnotic regressions to connect with these memories, it has been found that many people only need to invite them to occur under the guidance of a therapist in order to access them.

Consulting an intuitive/ psychic counselor or healer

There are gifted people who can connect with awarenesses beyond our physical reality, including the worlds of past lives and of spirits surviving physical life. More on these below, in Chapter 8, on Mediumistic/ Channeled experiences.

CHAPTER 6. Apparitions

*But even though the spirit world exists,
however it may act,
it cannot prove itself as fact.
And even though God shows himself
upon his throne of might,
the thought will out despite:
'hallucination!' some will insist.*

– V. Rydberg

Spontaneous sightings of apparitions (ghosts; spirits) are common. Usually these are unplanned, unpredictable occurrences. Apparitions typically have an ethereal, filmy, partly transparent appearance, although they may in some instances seem as solid as material objects. They may appear suddenly in a space, come through a wall, cross a given area, and then disappear into thin air or through another wall. They will often behave in a stereotyped manner, as though they are images in a film that is replayed. For instance, an apparition may be observed by a variety of people over months or years, traversing a particular hallway, opening a certain door, repeating various noises or words and then disappearing. In other cases they may interact with one or more observers. This is more typical of crisis or bereavement apparitions, associated with danger, trauma or death. Occasionally there are 'haunting' apparitions who seem to interact with the deliberate intention to frighten or even harm observers.

In most instances, apparitions appear to be (by clothing, information conveyed in words and use of language, etc.) the spirits of people who died well prior to the encounter. Apparitions of the living may also occur, especially around times of danger, crisis or death of the person whose apparition is seen. It is not uncommon around the time of an accident that someone closely related to the person in danger would see an apparition of that person, occasionally perceiving details of the danger as well, with no normal means of communication that could have conveyed the information. These may be labeled out-of-body experiences when the person remains alive; Near Death Experiences when a person is declared dead but revives; or bereavement apparitions when the person dies and does not return to physical life. Apparitions of dying people may appear to their dear ones near the time of their death, announcing their departure and saying farewell.

Apparitions appear very frequently to the bereaved. Vargas and colleagues published a survey of bereaved people in *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, a conservative publication not given to featuring ghost stories. Two thirds of those surveyed reported they perceived the person who had died – either seeing or hearing them, or intuitively sensing their ‘presence.’ The other important finding in this survey was that few people had mentioned these experiences to anyone. Many had worried that they were ‘losing it’ when they encountered the spirits, and most were certain that if they told anyone about it, these people would be certain they had ‘lost it.’

Apparitions are also relevant to spirit healing, in which it is claimed that spirits assist in healings. In some cases this is a spontaneous occurrence; in others it is invited by the healers.

The existence of apparitions supports mystics' and theologians' teachings that a Spirit survives physical death, that earthly existence is a lesson in life for the Soul, and that the eventual goal of existence is return to unity with the All.

Encounters with spirits may at first be startling or frightening because we are unused to contacting spirits. However, spirits some-times may behave in frightening ways. They may carry anger or resentment over dying, particularly if they were hurt or killed in passing over. In most cases they respond well to our sending un-conditional love and healing, and to directing them towards the light.

There are also occasional evil spirits with malevolent intents. It is best not to engage these ourselves, but to seek help from a knowledgeable, experienced intuitive or healer who knows how to deal with such entities. There can also be possessing entities. These are best dealt with by very knowledgeable and strong healers or clergy who are experienced in spirit releasement. This is well known in the Catholic Church, lthough not often mentioned. More in Chapter 10 of this Workbook and in *Personal Spirituality*.

The vast majority of spirit encounters are uplifting and inspiring. Their messages are often to comfort us about their departure; to tell us they will always be there to love and support us; and to promise they will be waiting for us when we make our own transition back to spirit existence

Suggestions

Bereavement apparitions

These are the most common of all apparition experiences. About 2 out of 3 people who have lost someone close to them will either see, hear, or just know with an inner certainty that their loved one is present.

If we have this experience ourselves, we can hold the spirit in our heart and mind in unconditional love. They may spontaneously communicate to us mentally in words, or through gestures. We may ask them mentally whether they have anything they wish to tell us, and we may tell them whatever we wish.

If anyone we know has lost someone dear to them, we may be of great support and help if we ask them whether they have seen, heard, or just felt intuitively that the person who passed on had been present. We have a 2 out of 3 chance that they will be very grateful for our interest and support.

Crisis apparitions

These are the next most common type. They come to us most frequently in dreams, but may appear as an image of the living person that is ghostly or that appears just as real and solid as anyone would who is still alive in their physical body, who came to visit us in person. These seem to be telepathic communications that inform or alert us about a crisis in the life of someone close to us.

Many family members of soldiers who were endangered, injured or killed have reported such apparitions. In some cases the spirits come to say goodbye as they pass into spirit existence. In other cases, our awareness simply seems to connect with them in time of crisis, due to the closeness of our relationships.

If we are visited by a crisis apparition, this is an invitation to send prayers and healing to that person. It is also helpful to write down the exact date and time and the details of what we see and hear. We may then be able to validate points of correspondence between what we perceived and what occurred at the time that person was in crisis.

Rescue work

I have heard from numbers of gifted intuitives and healers that they find themselves engaging in *rescue work* during sleep. In a dream-like state or out-of-body experience, they travel to the scene where one or more people have passed abruptly from physical to spirit existence. The spirits often are confused, because they had no idea they would survive physical death and do not understand that they are in a spirit body rather than in their physical body. The rescue worker's task is to explain this to the person who has just passed over, inviting them to look for their relatives who are in spirit existence or to turn to the light. When they do this, they are then guided on their spirit journeys.

People who make no claims to having strong intuitive or healing abilities sometimes find themselves similarly involved in rescue work. If this happens to you, you can offer your love and guidance to help the confused spirit adjust to being in its new state of existence.

Haunting apparitions

Ghosts that appear repeatedly in the same locations (often going through stereotyped motions) are often spirits who have become lost or stuck between the physical world and the worlds beyond. Some may have died suddenly, unexpectedly, and/or violently. Others remain attached to the location or to people who now live or used to live in that location. Surprisingly, many of them may not realize they are dead.

Should we sense that they are malevolent, it is best to leave the area of their haunt. We may then want to seek out someone experienced in spirit communications to help them.

With most apparitions who show no evil intentions, we can be helpful by speaking with them, holding unconditional love and healing in our hearts for them. We can ask them to tell us their story. This is more likely to come as a mental, telepathic communication than by audible, spoken words. We may seek a gentle but direct way to ask them if they realize they are no longer alive, and are now in the spirit world. We might need to be creative in helping them to understand this, as in asking questions about whether they have seen people age over time, while they did not change; whether they can move about in unusual ways that ordinary people cannot manage; or whether they need to eat and drink as they used to when they were in their physical bodies.

We can invite them to look for the light, or to call for guidance and help from their guardian angel or a relative who they know had passed on before them. In most cases, they will then be able to move on through the normal processes of adapting to being in the spirit phase of existence.

CHAPTER 7. Nature Spirits

I believe in God, only I spell it Nature... God is the great mysterious motivator of what we call nature, and it has often been said by philosophers, that nature is the will of God. And I prefer to say that nature is the only body of God that we shall ever see.

- Frank Lloyd Wright

Nature spirits are accepted as real in traditional societies but are interpreted as superstitious stories or folkloric tales in industrial society. Though descriptions vary from culture to culture, the basic patterns appear fairly consistent.

People who are very sensitive and open to communication with other realities may perceive hierarchies of nature spirits and angels. For instance, Dora van Gelder (Kunz) describes a wonderful spectrum of these entities, whom she saw and interacted with from childhood – just as she would interact with a live person. She explained that her perceptions were not through her outer senses but through clairvoyance, for these creatures are not directly of the physical world. She believed they are an evolutionary line of life forms existing in realms of more subtle substance than the physical world. Their life task is to support all aspects of nature in the physical world. There are very simple ones that support rocks and minerals; more complex fairies who attend to subtle energy aspects of the air and of bodies of water. There are spirits of individual plants; of classes of plants; of particular geographic features (such as mountains and valleys); of geographic regions; of processes of nature (such as rain, wind and storms); and more.

A nature spirit may be very simple and literal-minded, with limited tasks and responsibilities – perhaps caring for an individual plant. A more advanced example would be a tree spirit. Each tree draws its life force from its individual tree spirit, which grows and eventually dies with it. Each tree species has typical features, and each individual spirit has its own personality.

In van Gelder's experience, at the higher levels of awareness, angels with various degrees of responsibilities attend to the needs of people and of more complex aspects of nature. Some minister to the needs of individual people. Some supervise diverse nature spirits, assisted by sylphs. Sylphs have a form identical with human shape and communicate telepathically. Their task is to be of help to people as well as angels.

Having struggled myself through a long period of agnosticism and atheism, in which I formulated all sorts of rational psychological explanations and rationalizations for spirituality and beliefs in spirit survival, I can attest that life experiences and education may shift such beliefs.

My personal experience in exploring these realms through the eyes of research is that logic alone cannot explain the transpersonal realms. Any logical reasoning I apply must be based upon basic axioms of belief that cannot be tested or validated (except for internal consistency). I cannot know the mind of God in order to answer the question, "Why would God allow evil to exist?" Any educated guesses I make are based on my mortal perceptions and experiences in the world of human flesh and spirit. Relying on the words of Christ, Buddha, Allah, or any other luminary is an arbitrary preference, usually due to the teachings in one's family of birth or to conscious selection.

For example, a logical question to ask is, "Why would a Divine consciousness want or need to create mortal beings in a physical world?" To put it more skeptically, "Isn't it more likely that God is the creation of man than man the creation of God?"

You will find my answer to this question later in this workbook.

Suggestions

Inviting nature spirits and angels to work with us

While it may sound like only the most highly gifted intuitives can connect with nature spirits and guides, Machaelle Small Wright describes ways in which we can invite nature spirits to work with us in creating a garden. The garden can be a plot of land with vegetables and flowers; it can be a creative project for growing better relationships; or for ourselves for growing in our own inner wisdom. Wright suggests:

In Co-creative science, the scientist acknowledges that there is an inherent intelligence within all of nature, builds a communication bridge that allows him to access that intelligence, and then asks nature directly to explain and provide experiential insight to him so that he may understand... how something works. In co-creative science, nature becomes a fully operational, functioning, conscious partner with the scientist. Together they create a team, with each member of the team providing specific and different information that is needed for understanding and solving a defined problem.

Everyone's project will be individually designed by and for that person.

When you are working directly in partnership with nature, you cannot simply announce, "Let's put in a garden!" and expect that you will get any information back from nature regarding the garden. You must supply the definition, direction and purpose of this garden. In other words, you must supply the evolution dynamic within the balance, and you are the only one who can do that. Nature will not do your job for you. It will only supply the evolution dynamic for objects that fall within its 'natural' domain: plants, rocks, deer, lightning, etc.

Wright finds that the average class takes 4 years. You should decide how much time each week you will spend on this and set a time period as a study 'term.' Four to six months is a comfortable time in which to see progress on a project.

Wright advises that nature can sort out its lessons in a more structured and orderly way when we let the nature spirits know the parameters for our availability:

1. Verbally state your intention to nature. Out loud is best. For instance: "I would like to open a co-creative science classroom with myself as the student and nature intelligence as my teacher. My intent is to be educated and trained as a co-creative scientist. I am ready to learn."

2. Select your classroom. This can be anything that provides structure for action. "Pick something that you can do alone, and remember that whatever you choose will become a classroom and you will need to hand over all the activity, timing and rhythms to your teacher. So, don't choose something you are not willing to release control of and don't pick something that is life-threatening either to yourself or anyone else. Your classroom has to remain personal for the amount of time you and nature are using it..."

3. Wright offers a wealth of further suggestions in the Perelandra materials, especially the two workbooks. For instance: Keep detailed notes, a log for each day; be as complete as possible; keep notes organized, so you can review them periodically.

I highly recommend Wright's excellent self-help book, enriched by the author's sharing of her own path in opening to intuitive and spiritual awarenesses and learning to be a co-creative gardener.

CHAPTER 8. Angels

*But even though the spirit world exists,
however it may act,
it cannot prove itself as fact.
And even though God shows himself
upon his throne of might,
the thought will out despite:
'hallucination!' some will insist.*

– V. Rydberg

Angelic beings have been reported over thousands of years, in numerous cultures around the globe. In Western traditions, there are numerous versions of angelic and devic hierarchies – based on legends, folklore, religious teachings and personal encounters. Some of these are derived from ancient traditions whose origins have been forgotten through the centuries. Though such hierarchies may be valid to an unknown degree in other-worldly levels of reality, it is difficult to verify them other than through cross-references in dusty old tomes and through legends – of unknown value in their origins – or through sifting modern reports of personal encounters. I find the parallels of modern reports with those of the Bible of interest because they suggest that similar observations have been made over many centuries, in cultures very different from our own.

It is often said that each of us has one or more guardian angels who accompany us everywhere, from conception to our transition back into spirit worlds. Some believe these are actually aspects of a person's own *higher self*. As with most aspects of other dimensions, beliefs and expectations may shape our perceptions and experiences with them.

The credence we give to reports of angels may be strained by several factors. Many reports come from people who espouse strong religious beliefs that they feel are supported by the existence of angels. It is not uncommon to read in such books that the angel encountered was Michael or Gabriel or some other prominent angelic figure of Biblical mention. I have to report, however, that non-religious intuitives I respect have told me of such personal encounters too.

Many helpful apparitions are reported in popular literature, with the assumption that they may have been angels. Once one accepts the existence of apparitions that appear to be surviving spirits of people who have passed on, or out-of-body apparitions of living persons, any assumption that

such apparitions are angels must be questioned. However, a case can be made for the reverse argument, that apparitions, which are felt to be surviving spirits, actually may be angels. There is also the possibility that some of each – spirits and angels – appear in these unusual encounters.

Here is a composite story of an angel encounter that I have seen repeated in many variations:

Sarah was driving home along a long stretch of back roads late one cold, winter night at the end of her nursing shift. Her right rear tire started to make odd sounds, so she pulled over to check it, finding that it was flat. This was a very disturbing and potentially dangerous situation because she had left the jack in her garage several weeks earlier after lending it to a friend. She was fifteen miles at the least from the nearest house, and there was no cell phone reception where she had stopped. The temperature was well below freezing, worsened by the chill factor of a brisk wind, and she did not have enough gas to keep the car running all night, nor did she have sufficient clothing to keep herself warm. She sat in the car, praying that someone would come along and help, well knowing that this was unlikely on that particular stretch of road, late at night.

Within minutes of her starting to pray, headlights appeared behind her. She turned on her hazard lights and stepped out of the car to wave down the approaching vehicle. The driver, a young, handsome man with long, blonde hair, stopped and readily volunteered to help her. He quickly and competently changed the tire. Turning back to thank him after Sarah shut the trunk of her car, she was startled to find that neither he nor his car were anywhere to be seen. They had simply disappeared into the cold night air. The road was straight both behind and ahead of her car, so that there was no way he could have driven out of sight in the few seconds it had taken her to turn around.

Sarah felt that an angel had answered her prayer.

Encounters such as these are often transformative. They frequently follow prayers in times of need. *Personal Spirituality* discusses a variety of theories to explain angel encounters and implications of the existence of angels.

What is your personal understanding of angelic and spiritual realms?

Are you skeptical about all of these fairy tales and angel stories? I cannot fault you if you are. If you were raised in an industrial culture, as I was, you

have been taught to believe only what you see and hear with your physical eyes and ears, or what scientists tell us has been proved to be true. While science has given us a more secure and predictable world thus far, I believe we may have lost something in the process.

There never was a merry world since the fairies left off dancing...
– John Selden

After sifting the evidence, you may also choose to answer questions about angels and other spiritual matters intuitively. See discussions on how to access your intuition in the Chapter 1.

Planetary wellbeing, angels and nature spirits

The focus of modern man upon controlling and exploiting nature for the immediate enhancement of the quality of life of industrial nations is rapidly depleting natural resources, impoverishing the non-industrial societies, and polluting the planet at unsustainable rates. At the same time, the depletion of natural resources and pollution are reflected in diminished numbers of nature spirits, reports van Gelder.

Reconnecting with angels and nature spirits can be an important step in reconnecting with our planet. When we come to understand our relationships with the greater world beyond ourselves, it becomes natural to treat the world at large as a part of ourselves – and it is less likely we will abuse it.

Loving, accepting, supportive presences

Angels are messengers. If we accept that angels exist, what do they tell us about our world? First, they suggest there are realms in which intelligent beings exist that are far more spiritually advanced than humanity. Second, they suggest that the physical world may be just one of many levels of reality. Third, they are messengers from spiritual realms who invite us to reconnect with our own spiritual awareness.

Suggestions

Pray to your angels when you want or need help

Angels are messengers and teachers who are very respectful, and usually

do not intervene unless asked to do so. Even though we may not have any direct awareness of the presence of angels, we can know that they are there, watching over us with unconditional love and acceptance.

People have rightfully asked, "How can I know that I am communicating with a real angel, rather than with a dissembling, negative, and potentially malignant influence?" Several very gifted intuitives whom I respect have suggested that if the communication comes without an infectious joyousness, unconditional acceptance/ love, and a sense of humor, we should be suspicious. Angels and spirit guides have a wonderful, loving presence and a keen sense of humor, and often do not present themselves as strictly serious, all-business, no play presences.

Bernie Siegel reports he learned to call his angel "Oh shit!" so that he could call on him instantly in times of frustration and urgent need.

See more on spirit and angelic communications in the following chapter and in *Personal Spirituality*.

CHAPTER 9. Mediumistic/Channeled Experiences

Death does not make a saint of a sinner nor a sage of a fool. The mentality is the same as before and individuals carry with them their old desires, habits, dogmas, faulty teachings, indifference or disbelief in a future life.

– Carl A. Wickland

Introduction

For those unfamiliar with people who relay messages between the worlds of those in body and those in spirit, here is a brief description of what occurs when information is relayed from spirit dimensions by a person in the physical world.

A *medium* or *channel* is a person who has the ability to communicate with the spirit worlds. I prefer the more classical term, *medium*, because it suggests that the intermediary person in the communication is a part of the communication. I believe this is very much the case, and very important to any consideration of these communications.

We must always consider the contributions of the person presenting the information (doing a *reading*) along with the content. Anyone who has ever heard a simultaneous translator for a foreign language will appreciate how delicate is the task of conveying information from one cultural context to another. Mediumistic communications are ever so much more difficult to translate because they are perceived by the medium telepathically, with images and information transmitted directly, often without words. The information may also come through as specific words or ideas. The medium must then translate this information into language that will be understood by the person for whom it is intended. Not infrequently, the images and messages make no sense to the medium, as they are very personally specific for the living person who is the intended recipients of the communications.

Jack Angelo describes the development of Dennis Barrett as a medium. He shares a lovely, amusing story about how Barrett learned this lesson about trusting the channeled voices. Barrett's channeling gifts manifest as voices rather than visual imagery. While he doesn't see the spirits who are communicating to the people he is helping, his spirit guides provide descriptions of them.

He was the visiting speaker in a spiritualist church in Southwest England,

doing well with spontaneous readings for people in the audience. He felt a message coming through from the mother (in spirit) of a woman in the congregation. His spirit helpers told him that this woman was going to need lots of evidence, so they provided a very detailed description of the spirit who was there for this woman.

... I described the woman's age group, her build and her way of dressing.

Then I got to the necklace she was wearing and I described this almost bead by bead. I said: "She tells me she's proud of her beauties." Whereupon the congregation erupted into laughter. The woman smiled broadly along with the rest of them and it was a few moments before I could continue... The woman accepted that it was her mother and her mother was able to give her a moving message of love and comfort.

When I sat down, I asked the chairwoman why there had been so much laughter earlier on about the necklace.

"When we say 'her beauties' down here, we're not talking about 'her necklace,'" she said. "We're talking about *these!*" and she cupped her hands under her bosom. No wonder my words had prompted such laughter.

After the service, the woman spoke with Barrett. She reported that this was the first time in several spirit communication readings that she felt able to believe her mother was really the one who was speaking. Although the previous mediums had said that her mother was speaking through them, they had given little information that was evidential. Barrett asked why her mother would mention her 'beauties.'

The woman explained that her mother had had a good figure and would spend a lot of time admiring herself in a mirror, being especially proud of her bust. She used to accuse her mother of being vain. Her mother would typically reply, "What's the matter with you, I'm proud of my beauties." These were the precise words she had heard her mother say on many occasions.

This is a typical example of the type of communications that can be very meaningful to the person for whom the message is being transmitted, but totally missed by the medium and anyone else in the audience.

The medium may work in a trance state induced by concentration, hypnosis or meditation. Some mediums are conscious while channeling information, while others 'step aside' and allow the communicating guide and/or other spirits to take over their conscious mind while conveying their messages. In such cases, the channeled words may be spoken in tones of

voice and styles of speech very similar to those of the deceased, and the medium is said to be *obsessed* or *briefly possessed* by the spirit(s). When this occurs, the medium will often not recall anything that has been said. Gifted mediums may be aware of the spirit world constantly, either alongside or interpenetrating everyday reality.

I shall focus the following discussion primarily upon communications from spirits assumed to be entities that survived after having lived within living memory in the physical world. Communications from other sources, such as Christ, Mary, saints, God and extraterrestrial sources have also been reported, but these will be mentioned only briefly, as it is far more difficult to establish the validity of the latter sources.

Sometimes the medium visualizes the spirit and can describe physical details, such as stature, color of hair and eyes and other physical details that are verifiable by the sitter as having been characteristic of the channeled person prior to their passing from the physical world.

A spirit channeled by the medium is referred to as a *guide* or *control* when this spirit acts as a mediator between the medium and other spirits. Guides have explained that it is difficult for spirits to match their energies to those of people who are still in physical life, in order to communicate. It is for this reason that guides who can do so will channel information from other spirits who are unable to match their energies in order to communicate in this way. When psychokinetic (*physical*) phenomena are demonstrated, such as objects in the room moving or raps resounding from the table or walls, the guide is sometimes called an *operator*. Substances seen to materialize outside the medium's body during the séance are called *apports*; those extruding from their body, *ectoplasm*.

In group séances, spirits may communicate through movement of objects, such as the tilting of a table, or through audible raps. Typically, the participants in the séance ask that the spirits indicate answers of 'yes' with one, and 'no' with two raps or tilts. Physical phenomena were more common in the late 19th and early 20th centuries than they are today.

Some mediums transmit their spirit messages in writing while in partial or full trance (*automatic writing*). A pencil is held in a relaxed manner and the spirits are felt to be writing the messages, using the mind and body of the medium as their vehicle for communication.

Spirits have been credited with passing vital messages through mediums to living relatives and friends when such information was available to no one but the deceased.

Mediumistic readings are very similar to reports from some healers of interventions by spirits in healings. Healers may have spirit guides who inform them of the diagnosis and suggest treatments, sometimes guiding

healers in operations on the energy body or on the physical body. It is not uncommon for healees to report that they continue to feel the touch of healers on a particular part of their body, when the healers have moved on to hold their hands on other parts of the body. This has sometimes been suggested to be evidence of spirit participation in healings.

Mediums were extensively investigated by researchers in England and North America over the past century. A variety of reports and studies are shared in *Personal Spirituality*.

Suggestions

Several approaches allow ordinary people to communicate directly with spirits. It is particularly important if you pursue mediumistic communications that you always program yourself for protection, to avoid unwanted attachments of spirits to your energy field. For greatest safety, communications with spirits are best explored under the guidance of an experienced teacher of intuitive development and mediumship.

The Ouija board

A common method for spirit communication is the *ouija board*, commonly available as a game for adults in toy stores. The board has the letters of the alphabet, 'yes' and 'no,' and the numbers 1-10 on it. Several people sitting around the board place their fingers on a pointer, letting the collective pressures of their hands move it spontaneously. They all focus on the same question, and let the pointer move to the letters, spelling out the answer or answering, 'yes' and 'no.' While I have heard of positive results with the ouija board, I have also heard many cautions from knowledgeable intuitives: it is possible to open oneself to possession by negative entities and spirits through using the ouija board.

Scrying

Ordinary people can also develop their intuitive abilities, including contact with spirits, using variations of *scrying* – looking into a crystal ball, or gazing while in a meditative state at their reflection in a mirror or on the surface of a container of water. It is not uncommon to see the reflection of one's face transformed into the apparent face of communicating spirit. A quiet, darkened room, and a space of uninterrupted time are conducive to success. Again, the cautions about invoking appropriate protections are advised.

Automatic writing

After asking for protection, invite your spirit guide(s) to communicate. It helps to have specific questions that are of true interest and importance to you. Hold your pencil or pen gently in your hand and relax your mind, opening to any messages, ideas or images that surface to your awareness. Allow your hand to move across the page, one line at a time, writing whatever flows spontaneously through you. You may produce scribbles or barely legible writing at first. Be gentle with yourself and don't be critical of what appears on the paper. Likewise, don't start analyzing anything that comes through, while you are involved in this process. At this point, you are just a human fax machine, transmitting the messages from spirit domains. With time, you may find you are able to use this method to receive and record spirit communications.

Some people find this works better if they hold the pencil or pen in their non-dominant hand. I have also heard creative writers, who have no beliefs in spirits or guides, report that this method helps them connect with their creativity and inspiration – which they attribute to their unconscious mind or their own higher self.

Induced After-Death Communications (IADC)

Allan Botkin is a psychologist who specializes in treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) with Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR). This is a method that involves alternately stimulating the right and left sides of the brain, through stimulating the right and left sides of the body. He discovered that people who had been traumatized by the death of another person will spontaneously connect with the spirit of that person when that communication is relevant to their self-healing. He calls this Induced After-Death Communications (IADC). People report that the IADC includes the sensation of going through a tunnel towards a bright light that emanates love and acceptance, and encountering the people with whom they had unfinished business; they are able to converse with the spirit of the deceased to clear up old angers, guilts and hurts; they nearly always come away from the IADC encounter with an immense immediate sense of relief; and unresolved grief from bereavements or traumas that may have been carried for many years are usually cleared in a single session.

While I have yet to explore this myself with people who come to me for help with issues of grief and bereavement, I see no reason why this would not occur also with the self-healing practice of WHEE (Whole Health – Easily and Effectively, AKA Wholistic Hybrid derived from EMDR and EFT) that I developed and teach.

The 'Philip' approach

Iris Owen and Margaret Sparrow have a lovely book describing a playfully serious approach to spirit communication through table tilting, levitating, and audible raps. They found that an atmosphere of light humor, with joking and singing produced the best results. A group of people who were seriously interested in spirit communication and believed in this possibility met regularly to invite spirit communications. After several meetings, table tiltings and rappings occurred in response to questions they asked. The movements of the table and sounds could not be accounted for by physical actions of the participants. The presence of skeptics blocked communications.

Careful checking of the responses they obtained showed that the information communicated was attributable to the information known to individual participants. This is a caution against giving uncritical credence to what may appear to be spirit communications. It may also be an indication of communication through the collective unconscious – as an alternative explanation for some communications that are attributed to spirits.

Attending public demonstrations of mediumship

This is the safest exploration of channeling, and potentially one of the most educating – as long as you keep your critical powers of observation active and are not asked to dig deep into your pocket to contribute to the medium.

In public and privately organized meetings, and in spiritualist churches, mediums hold forth with fascinating messages for many in the audience. The better ones will give the name of a person on one side or another of the veil by name – inviting someone in the audience who recognizes the name to identify themselves. The medium will then channel minutely specific information that that person in the audience identifies as confirmation that a particular relative from the spirit world is communicating with them. Supporting details may include names and physical descriptions of family members, pets and friends; odd phrases or terms of endearment that were specific between the deceased and the person in the audience; unusual incidents from many years past; and further items of this sort – trivial in their own right, but therefore all the more convincing because they would not have been likely to be known to others.

These demonstrations of mediumship serve to convince and support those who are in the audience as well as those who receive the channeled communications in their beliefs in survival of the spirit and in an afterlife to come. Many of the messages also contain information that is reassuring and helpful in dealing with fears of the transition process from this world to the

next, and of the nature of the life beyond. If you are inclined in this direction, I wish you many wonderful explorations and enlightening experiences.

The less convincing mediums will give vague details, such as, "I see a blonde woman of sturdy build whose name begins with 'F,' inviting anyone in the audience who 'recognizes' the spirit to raise their hand. The medium then proceeds to convey further generalities, such as, "She says she misses you and sends you all her love, forgiving you for something you said or did towards the end of her life. Can you relate to that?" It is surprising how people will take such unspecific details to be clear identifications of a dearly departed person – witness to the strong wish to re-establish contact and sort out unfinished business on the one hand, and to abandonment of critical thinking on the other.

Preying on the gullibility of bereaved folk, many a fake medium has defrauded people of considerable sums for subsequent private channelings.

Literature

There are many fascinating, enlightening, inspiring books available on mediumistic revelations about the nature of life in the afterworld, the relationships between those in spirit and those in the flesh, and the meaning of life as best we can understand it. *Personal Spirituality* contains many such references.

CHAPTER 10. Possession/ Spirit Releasement

He cast out the spirits with his word, and he healed all that were sick.

– Matthew 8:16

Throughout the world, in cultures of many varieties, there is a commonly held belief that spirits can mischievously, misguidedly or maliciously interfere in the lives of people. Some medical traditions hold that many aspects of existence, including many conditions of health and illness, are due to spirit interventions. In such cultures the cures of disharmonies in one's body, as well as the harmonization of relationships with people and nature, require negotiations with and propitiation of the spirits.

In this section we shall consider reports that a specific discarnate entity has taken over (*possessed* or *obsessed*) the mind and/or body of an individual for its own purposes. This is in contrast with mediumistic experiences, described in the last chapter, in which the medium may *invite* a spirit to communicate by taking control of the medium's body.

There is evidence that such reports may be more than simply tales of horror created by authors who write scary stories. A number of scientific explorations of possession are reviewed in *Personal Spirituality*.

Pains, allergies and other symptoms have been alleviated through spirit releasement. For instance, Carl Wickland, a physician, describes many years' work with a medium (his wife) who helped him treat numerous cases of apparent spirit possession, which had caused a wide variety of emotional and physical problems.

Wickland presents detailed discussions between himself and the possessing entities. In many cases he did counseling of a simple nature, helping spirits to accept that they were dead and could find better things to do than trying to hang on to life in the physical world through an energetic attachment to someone who was still alive in another physical body. In some cases, he helped them process unresolved feelings that were still lingering from physical life, such as anger towards a living person. Advising the spirits to turn towards the white light and to ask for aid from other spirits also helped. In essence, he helped the spirits to resolve residual earth-existence emotional problems as well as confusion engendered by transition to spirit planes of existence.

Many more details and discussions about possession can be found in *Personal Spirituality*.

Suggestions

In contrast with other sections in this Workbook, not only do I not recommend personal involvement as a releaser in spirit possession, I seriously caution you not to be involved with this if at all avoidable – unless you have a very ethical, reliable, knowledgeable and experienced mentor. With most spirit releasements, it is generally a simple matter for the healer or priest (the Catholic Church has many experts in this area) to be of help to the misguided spirit and to the person suffering the attachment. In some cases, however, the spirit entity is malevolent and the intervention of multiple releasers is required.

Should you have reason to believe that you are the subject of spirit attachment, again I caution you. There are unscrupulous charlatans who claim to identify possessing entities and charge considerable sums for alleged spirit releasement. Having stated that caution, I hasten to add that I fully believe that it is possible to have psychological and physical symptoms that are caused by spirit attachment to a living person, and to find healing through spirit releasement.

A further caution in this regard. I have been contacted numbers of times by people who are suffering from paranoid fears or schizophrenia, suffering from delusions of spirit attachment. While it is possible to have both a serious psychological disorder and a spirit attachment, in my experience the psychological disorder needs attention as much as the spirit attachment.

CHAPTER 11.

Nurturing and developing personal spirituality

Each spiritual shore is independent and needs to be reached by its appropriate raft.

– Jorge Ferrer

We have considered a variety of experiences in our lives that can enhance our spiritual awareness. There are many ways in which we can approach our spiritual quests directly.

Many in Western society find that there is something palpably missing from their existence. Joseph Felser suggests that we may suffer from 'spiritual malnutrition,' a lack of spirituality in our lives. It may take a spiritual quest, an illness, a trauma or other major event to force us to look where we haven't explored before.

Until science challenged religious explanations of the world, nearly everyone found their spiritual identification within religious institutions. Religion provided explanations for the world and everything in it. Science discovered explanations for aspects of nature which demonstrated that many religious teachings were not supportable in the light of scientific understandings of the world. This has led many to abandon religion – and with it, spiritual awareness, as well as the belief that spiritual awareness is valid.

In modern Western society, people are redeveloping their spiritual lives through meditation, communing with nature, and involvement in healing activities. Many are coming to trust the inner knowing that accompanies spiritual awareness. This is probably seen most dramatically in the transformations that occur with NDEs and other strong mystical experiences. Less dramatic experiences, such as a moment of beauty or caring, can also be doorways into spiritual opening. Spiritual healings commonly open into spiritual awarenesses. In fact, many healers suggest that illness and other forms of suffering are commonly stimuli from our higher selves to awaken us to our spirituality.

In religions of traditional cultures, where mythical and clairsentient realities are accepted aspects of everyday life, healing is a natural part of existence. All aspects of life are directly related to each other, to the physical world, as well as to spirits and/or God/gods in other dimensions. In these cultures, illness is understood as a state of being out of tune with one's world. Healing

in these cultures is a harmonizing of oneself with the total environment, including one's inner self, relationships with family and friends, and interactions with all of the cosmos. Healing is a return to wholeness and harmony on all levels of one's being.

In Western societies many of us have relegated religion to a portion of our lives that is largely separated from our everyday existence. Western religions are frequently practiced primarily as rituals of worship on particular 'holy' days of the week or year but bear little influence on working days or secular holidays. Religion in the West is no longer connected with medical treatment (which itself is also compartmentalized from the rest of our lives in a focus upon the physical body). Religion in Western society may thus be distanced or even devoid of personal spiritual awareness and spiritual practice.

I make a distinction between spirituality and religion. Religion is for people who are afraid of going to hell; spirituality is for people who have been there.

– Timothy J. Mordaunt

In traditional societies, religion is an integral part of life. Living closer to nature, people sense the spirits in the land, the waters, the air, the growing plants and the animals that sustain their lives. They pray to spirits and to God or gods for guidance, trusting their intuitive knowing of the responses they receive.

In Western society, many have rejected religious authority as a source for explaining the physical world. In doing so, they have rejected religious explanations for spiritual matters. This is an error – of applying the rules for dealing with the physical world to matters of the spirit.

At the same time, *scientism* has become in many ways the religion of the Western world, in an existence focused on and explained by materialistic theories. Science claims the ability to explain the workings of the world and all that it contains. It assumes that increasingly refined linear analyses of all matter and of all of nature's processes will ultimately explain every aspect of the cosmos.

In traditional societies, shamans embody in one person the priest, doctor and counselor. In some societies a shaman may also provide an alternative to the functions of judge, jury, and police force. Western society has split up these functions into sub-specialties. Physical problems are addressed by doctors; psychological ones by social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists (and by default, bartenders, hairdressers, and other good listeners); and spiritual questions by clergy. Inevitably, this leaves people who need such services feeling fragmented.

There is a growing movement away from this fragmenting approach in segments of Western society. Wholistic medicine seeks to address body, emotions, mind, relationships (with other people and the environment), and spirit. Clergy are including counseling in their ministries, and some churches are taking more seriously the spiritual healing component in their services – going beyond ritual prayer to healing services where healing is offered for physical, psychological and relational problems by the laying on of hands and prayer. An occasional doctor will address spiritual issues. Spiritual healing is becoming more accepted and more openly advertises itself as a doorway to spiritual awareness. This 'S-word' can now be spoken in many medical, nursing, counseling, and educational forums – where previously spirituality was uncomfortable to the point of being shunned.

My personal experience with healing has convinced me that it is impossible to describe fully or define spirituality and healing experiences to anyone who has no similar frames of reference. Such efforts are extremely helpful in culturel and sociological studies, where they can contribute to our understandings of how people report their spiritual experiences. But much as we would like to distill common denominators accurately defining spiritual experiences, I believe these efforts are of limited value because spiritual experiences are impossible to describe or define completely or adequately in words.

I am in favor of the approach advocated by Jorge Ferrer. He suggests that each of us is a co-creator of spirituality through our experiences in transpersonal realms. Spirituality therefore cannot be described for yet another reason – it is a growing and evolving phenomenon, one that cannot be grasped in any permanent way through linear descriptions.

I propose that for purposes of analysis in sensory reality terms we adopt an *alternate reality uncertainty principle*: We are limited to partial explanatory statements when we seek to qualify the nature of other realities in linear language and concepts. Because such explanations are of limited scope and suffer from errors of translation from the realities of other dimensions into sensory reality concepts, our explanations will necessarily represent only approximate truths. In linear terminology we will often find contradictions between various statements. These are not due to misperceptions of observations but rather to the impossibility of explaining fully the realities of other dimensions in linear terminology. The apparent contradictions are a function of applying linear logic to non-linear dimensions. We must accept the experiences reported by travelers in other dimensions, just as we have learned to accept the explanations of quantum physics as having a logic that is counter-intuitive when judged by the yardsticks of classical, Newtonian physics.

Religious paths to personal spirituality

Religions have wonderfully rich traditions of prayers, rituals, teachings and luminary, inspiring examples for spiritual development. Sadly, spirituality is often observed more in the breach than in adherence to these teachings and teachers.

Q: If there were an eleventh commandment, what would it be?

A: To obey all the others!

– Anonymous

Suggestions

Here are general options for finding spirituality in religious teachings:

- We may learn and grow and open to our spirituality through these rich traditions, when we dedicate ourselves to their lessons and pursue spiritual paths of learning and living our lives in healing manners. We can:
 - Seek a congenial group for study of religious texts and teachings, and other mutual support on our paths of spiritual development

Most houses of worship have study groups specific to their religious teachings. The *Course in Miracles* is a rich source for non-denominational Christian universalist perspectives, providing inspiration and discussion, with a major text and various workbooks.
 - Seek religious leaders whose teachings resonate with our paths, particularly those who live their lives in congruence with their teachings
 - Seek a house of worship that matches our personal views, beliefs and preferences

Unity Church and Buddhist meditation groups are among the strongest in promoting pursuit of our personal spiritual paths and among the most tolerant of diversity in personal spirituality.
 - Attend a variety of church healing services.

These may range from simple prayers for good health, to individual healings by a priest or gifted healer (not always the same), to healings of the masses in large auditoriums. Beware in the latter that there are some who prey on the gullibility of people in distress,

creating staged illusions of healings in order to solicit donations from the crowd. Having said that, I caution from the other side to not dismiss out of hand some of the dramatic effects of church healings, such as *slaying in the spirit* – in which healees fall backwards in an ecstatic faint following a touch by the healer.

- Schedule ourselves into our own diary daily for a spiritual break of contemplation, meditation or prayer

Regular, daily practice and periodic intensive experiences can take us a long way into our personal spiritual awareness.

Exploring spirituality with generic spiritual principles

- Whatever our religious beliefs and practices, we can devote ourselves to the principles of doing to others as we would have them do unto us – practicing spirituality in our personal awareness and our relationships.

- Catch ourselves when we are being judgmental and look for reasons behind the actions of people towards whom we are critical

- Respond from a place of acceptance, forgiveness and unconditional love in all of our actions and interactions

- Seek teachers whose teachings resonate with our paths, particularly those who live their lives in congruence with their teachings

- Keep a book of inspirational writings by our bedside so that we hold spiritual thoughts in mind as we fall asleep

- We can work to bring more love and healing into the world. When we serve in these ways, we are rewarded with blessings of satisfaction in our being channels for light, which lights up our own lives in the process.

- Smile often. This one costs little and contributes much.

- Reach out at least once daily to help someone who didn't ask for assistance but obviously could use it

The Random Acts of Kindness website is a good place for ideas, as is HelpOthers.org.

- Volunteer to help someone in need. Soup kitchens, homes for the elderly, and hospitals are usually eager to have our help.
- For one of the most spiritual experiences, prepare yourself to work in a hospice or hospital, being present when people make their transition from physical life to spirit life
See especially Cindy Clair on the *No One Dies Alone* program.
- We can thank the universe for its blessings of whatever abundance and nurturing we are given
 - Do whatever we are doing as a meditation and acknowledgment of our being a piece of the Divine, interacting with other pieces of the Divine in a cosmic dance of love and unconditional acceptance
 - At the evening family meal, take turns sharing what you are thankful for from your journey through life since you last sat together
 - As we snuggle into bed, give personal thanks for the blessings of that day, including lessons in ways that we might do even better (rather than critiquing and criticizing ourselves for things we *didn't do* to our satisfaction)
- We can thank the universe for its blessings of whatever lessons we are given through challenges and adversity. We would not appreciate the light were it not for the darkness. Extending this thanks to the agents for negativity in our lives is perhaps one of the greatest spiritual challenges.
 - When faced with adversity, we can clear our negative feelings (such as stress, anxiety, fear, anger, hurt) and then ask, "What in my life, present and past, might have invited this experience as my teacher?"
Techniques such as WHEE, detailed in my WHEE Workbook, are particularly helpful in releasing negative feelings and memories.

I expect to pass through the world but once. Any good, therefore, that I can do, or any kindness I can show to any creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer it, for I shall not pass this way again.

– Stephen Grellet

Spiritual healing as a path to personal spirituality

Western religions commonly include sorely attenuated elements of healing. Prayers for healing are often perceived as rituals that express our kind wishes, but little more. Spirituality is pursued through reports, parables and studies *about* spirituality – often as they were experienced by other people, many miles and centuries removed from ourselves.

Prayer is actually a potent agency for healing, used in several fashions that are discussed below. Research reviewed in *Healing Research, Volume I* confirms that prayer is a potent intervention that can produce physical changes in humans, animals, plants and other organisms.

In its truest and deepest sense, healing is about connecting with spiritual awareness. This may be through healing offered for illness, or through healing our lives – individually and collectively.

The cosmic religious experience is the strongest and noblest mainspring of scientific research.

– Albert Einstein

Spirit healing is another dimension of spirituality and religion. It is practiced in spiritualist churches, where members invite information, advice and aid from surviving entities of people who died ('passed on') and who are now living in spirit.

Spiritual healing is the most potent way I know to connect regularly and frequently with personal spirituality, and the one that is most likely to produce palpable results. There are numerous variations on the themes of spiritual healing. It is offered most commonly as prayer healing, Therapeutic Touch, Healing Touch, Reiki, and Qigong.

Suggestions

Experience a healing from a good spiritual healing practitioner

I have received healing from numerous healers around the world. The experience has been most instructive when I had specific issues to sort out. This provides the stage upon which the healing interactions and lessons unfold. I have been treated by healers who focus primarily on the body, and by others who focus on psychological, bioenergetic, relationships, past life and whole-person issues. Many have been able to help me shift something inside myself that appears to unblock a stuckness, remove excesses, or provide boosts of bioenergies; clears old psychological dross, opens insightful awarenesses; and may work on many other levels of which I have

no clear understanding. I have found that in several sessions with the same healer I may experience totally different responses. So, I recommend going with an open mind and a readiness to experience whatever may unfold.

My personal impression that individual healer factors are far more important in determining the efficacy of healing than particular rituals, beliefs, practices or the name given to the divinity to whom the prayers are addressed.

The experience of spiritual healing as a healee can be helpful on many levels in any or several of the above (or numerous other) traditions and variations. Spiritual healing will often induce relaxation and a distinct shift in consciousness. This experience may be difficult to describe but is frequently reported to open into spiritual awarenesses.

- The relief of symptoms and suffering may bring us into a state of deep gratitude for the blessings experienced through the healing.
- Spiritual healing commonly helps us find deep insights into our issues that invited the trauma or illness, which then brought us for a healing experience.
- Awarenesses of life lessons may surface, helping us appreciate choices we have made in our incarnation; influences of past life experiences and relationships upon our current situations; to open to the collective consciousness and spiritual awareness; and to some sense of the part we play in a larger plan.
- Spiritual healing brings us into a stronger connection with our higher selves and the Infinite Source. This awareness may take many and varied forms, including: a peaceful, inner knowing of the unconditional acceptance of the healer, which helps us know and trust the unconditional acceptance of a higher power in our lives; a direct sense of being part of a loving, higher consciousness; and an inner certainty that we are serving a higher plan.

I (DB) had a wonderful experience of healing in a very simple encounter. At a meeting of the American Holistic Medical Association, a nurse was pointed out to me as a good healer whom I might like to speak with. I asked her if she would be willing to let me experience her way of healing. She had me sit opposite her and she just looked at me. I immediately felt the most profound sense of unconditional acceptance I have ever known in the presence of another human being. This was a

healing experience – helping me to counter my sense (at that time) of being unloved and unlovable.

Attending workshops and courses to learn methods of self-healing, healing for others, and to develop spiritual healing gifts

The same advice applies with seeking a teacher as is recommended in seeking a spiritual healer for treatment. The person who offers the teaching may be as important as the methods taught.

Learning a method involves theory, methods and practice. After more than 25 years of studying spiritual healing in every way I could, I am impressed that there is no one approach that is better for everyone than any other. My personal preference is for approaches that address all levels of our being, but I do not disparage methods that focus on one layer or another. Each has its place for some people for some problems, some of the time. My experience is that the qualities and wisdom of the teachers are as important as the teachings.

Most of us can develop our healing abilities with study and practice. It is very much like the development of any gifts, such as playing the piano. Some have natural gifts that enable them to heal with ease without study, while others can become reasonably proficient healers with diligent efforts. Some would probably be better off staying away from the piano.

- *Reiki* is one of the most popular modern Western methods of healing, taught in weekend courses. In Level I you learn healing through using your hands, visualizing symbols that convey healing essence, and in Level II you learn healing from a distance. In addition, there is an induction of healing abilities that is conveyed by the Reiki Master. In many Reiki teacher lineages, you may become a Master with another weekend course. In others, becoming a Master is still taken more seriously, with extended apprenticeship, study and practice required before this title is granted. (In Eastern traditions, one would study and practice for many years before being acknowledged as a Master.)

- *QiGong* is a Chinese method that is popular world-wide for self-healing and healing from a Master. The self-healing exercises involve various movements of the body and limbs, with attention to breathing and practices of meditation. QiGong has thousands of different variations. Most QiGong masters teach self-healing exercises, and may encourage or even insist the people practice these prior to receiving healing treatments from the Master.

- *Therapeutic Touch (TT) and Healing Touch (HT)* have thorough certification courses, with extended periods of study and practice. These are the methods that have generated the most research which confirms the effectiveness of healing for a wide variety of problems.

- *Private schools* for healing, such as Barbara Brennan, The University of Spiritual Healing and Sufism, and Rosalind Bruyere offer modular courses of study over periods of several years. Bruyere also offers ordination.

- *Prayer healing* is the most widely practiced of any form of spiritual healing.

We may offer healing by prayer individually. This might be expressed as the recitation of a traditional religious prayer; a wish for improved health of someone who is ill or in distress; a hope for gentle healing lessons; an invocation to a higher power to intervene; or any of countless other ways of asking for the betterment of ourselves or of someone else who is in need.

We may participate in groups for prayer healing at many houses of worship. For the most part, there is no instruction given. It is assumed that people's prayers of whatever sort will find their ways to a higher source for healing, or will be directly helpful to those in need through spiritual dimensions. In other instances, there are accepted rules and procedures for the prayer group, such as mentioning the names of those in need out loud and focusing simultaneously on sending them healing and reciting specific prayers. Those who participate in group healings often feel it is easier to engage in prayer healing with others present. This lightens the burden of perceived responsibility upon any one person who is sending healing. In other words, it removes the performance anxiety about how successful any one person might be in sending healing, thereby freeing us to concentrate better on the sending of healing itself.

From years of explorations in healing, my impression is that it is best to pray for the highest good of the person in need rather than praying for a specific outcome. We cannot know whether it might not be best for the person's highest good to continue to face the challenge of an illness rather than be cured of it at any given time. The illness may be a message from the person's higher self, or a product of stresses in a person's life that the person needs to address. Without the illness, they might overlook these issues, bringing greater suffering upon themselves and others in the process of being healed prematurely.

- *Clearing the vessel through which healing flows* is major part of learning the most productive and ethical approaches healing.

When we seek healing for our problems, we often look outside ourselves for the help we feel we need in order to uncover and process our issues. While spiritual healers can be of great help to us, we ourselves can contribute to the process by working to clear our own issues. Methods that can be helpful include WHEE, relaxation, meditation, imagery, qigong, and t'ai chi, among others. *Healing Research, Volume II* discusses self-healing approaches in great detail.

We also release negativity that could potentially block our abilities to be fully available as healers for others when we work on our own blind spots, psychological and physical traumas, and habit patterns of responses to various situations,. For instance, if a healer (or other therapist) has not cleared the hurts, depression, angers and guilts of a bereavement, she might not be comfortable ministering to other people who are going through the pain of bereavement. It would be easier (often totally unconsciously) to not encourage clients to discuss and process their grief – thereby saving the therapist from feeling the distress of her own grief.

- *Healees and students come to teach the healers and teachers* – through raising issues that stimulate the clearing of old dross - as much as the healers and teachers are there to offer help and instruction.

Every event in our lives is a potential lesson. This is particularly true of the heightened energetic and spiritual interactions between holistic therapists and clients. Therapists often are offered lessons through the issues raised in therapy by their clients.

- *Developing our intuitive and spiritual awarenesses* is a part of the benefit of studying, offering and receiving spiritual healing.

Healers are challenged to reach into the collective consciousness in order to identify the issues that healees need to address in the process of their healing. The responses of healees provide feedback on the accuracy of healers' intuitive impressions. Healees learn to recognize and understand spiritual dimensions of life in the process of experiencing spiritual healing.

I participated in a healing group that was practicing Rosalind Bruyere healing. In one of my turns of offering healing, I had an intuitive impression that the healee might benefit from grounding exercises – in the form of a visualization of being a tree, with roots reaching deep into

the earth. The healee was moved close to tears by the suggestion, which resonated deeply with her own sense of needing to do this. I had not been acquainted with this woman prior to the healing session, and had perceived no outward indication that she was feeling ungrounded prior to the healing. Such intuitive images come to me often during psychotherapy and healing sessions. I have learned to ask my higher self, using muscle testing, whether the images are messages intended from the collective consciousness for me or for the client/healee, or for both of us.

Finding a good teacher or healer

If at all possible, it is helpful to get recommendations for good teachers and healers from friends or colleagues who have had a positive experience of with that person. While this is still no guarantee that our experience will be similar to theirs, it is often better than going 'cold' to someone unknown. Spiritual healing is an art, and the 'chemistry' between healer and healee can make a major contribution to the experience – in positive or negative ways.

Remember that teachers and healers are human. Most of them are on this planet learning lessons just like the rest of us are, though they may have been studying for many more years and lifetimes, and may have unusual gifts that we might learn from. Remember also that the teacher is not the teaching, although when the two are congruent, the teaching is that much clearer and deeper – allowing us to learn from the teachers' modeling and demonstrations of the teachings. I have many a time had to take a deep breath and bite my tongue rather than insert a dissonant note of criticism of teachers who were jarringly dissonant with their otherwise marvelous and inspiring teachings.

Mystical experiences and mystical teachings

Throughout human history there have been inspired individuals who appear to have regular, very deep awarenesses of mystical realms, often claiming to have received their knowledge from a Divine source. Their teachings have inspired many generations of followers. Believers find wisdom and guidance in these teachings.

Others of us may have mystical experiences as single or occasional openings into spiritual consciousness, such as a near-death other sorts of experiences discussed in earlier chapters. (My understanding is that mystical and spiritual experiences are essentially equivalent. The choice of labels

seems to depend on one's cultural and educational traditions for discussing these awarenesses that are, in fact, beyond adequate descriptions in words.)

Believers will point to the subjective knowing of being in an inspired state – an awareness that has qualities that are self-validating – of being in contact with some aspect of the Infinite Source. Skeptics will say that transpersonal perceptions may simply represent subjective experiences of a quiet mind; particular electrochemical states of specific portions of the brain; wishful thinking or fantasy; or denials of the finality of death.

My personal experience in exploring these realms through the eyes of research is that logic alone cannot explain the transpersonal realms. Any logical reasoning I apply must be based upon axioms of belief that cannot be tested or validated (except for internal consistency). For instance, any reasoned, logical argument rests on a premise that reason and logical analysis are valid approaches to exploring transcendent experiences and the realities that may inspire them, rather than intuitive, inner explorations.

...mathematics is effective in describing the universe because that's where we got it from... we seem to get more out of mathematical theory than we put in, even though all we do is draw logical conclusions from initial assumptions... God is a geometer. But never forget: She's much better at it than we are.

– Ian Stewart and Martin Golubitsky

Skeptics, atheists and agnostics have also questioned the existence of a God who would allow evil to exist, especially on a scale such as the horrors of Nazi atrocities. I cannot know the mind of God in order to answer questions such as, "Why would God allow evil to exist?" or "Why would God allow the innocent to suffer?" Any educated guesses I make about such questions are based on my mortal perceptions and experiences in the world of human flesh and spirit. Relying on the words of Christ, Buddha, Allah, or any other luminary is an arbitrary preference, usually due to the teachings in one's family of birth or to conscious selection. (Much more on addressing these questions in *Personal Spirituality*.)

Believers, particularly those who have personal reincarnation and NDE memories or other mystical and spiritual experiences, will often say that these are more real than anything they have known in physical life.

I find that there is a distinct quality of engagement with transcendent realities in my personal use of intuition in psychotherapy and of offering and receiving spiritual healing. It resembles sensory aware-nesses of perceiving distinctive odors that identify particular experiences, such as the smell of wet, cut grass that accompanies the fresh mowing of a lawn or the smell of

fearfulness in a tense, traumatic situation. There are times when this transcendent 'smell-like sense' is strong and unmistakable, and other times when it may be weak to the point that it is difficult to be certain whether it is actually there.

My clinical impression is that a rough consensual validation among healers can often be achieved regarding such perceptions of the transcendent. More formal studies on consensual impressions of multiple healers from diverse healing traditions are needed, however, to provide firmer assessments of the reliability of observations associated with these noetic impressions. It may be that those assessments and interventions with a noetic quality are the more accurate or successful ones.

Are mystical experiences identical with spiritual experiences? I believe this is probably so. My impression is that both represent an opening of awareness into the transcendent realms, with people from secular backgrounds or agnostic and atheistic beliefs interpreting and labeling these experiences as mystical, while those who are open to religious beliefs and who trust in their personal awareness of the transcendent identifying these as spiritual.

Suggestions – Mystical and spiritual experiences

Awareness of beingness

When we are open to the wondrous mysteries of existence, every experience in every moment, every breath and every stimulation of our senses can stir our awareness of being an intimate part of the All. As you next reach for your pen or your fork, sense the mystery of your intention manifesting through your mind, brain, nerves in your spine and arm, muscles, tendons, bones, joints and tactile sensations in your hand and fingers.

Let every sight, sound, smell, taste and touch, every kinesthetic movement of your body be reminders of the miracle of life. If you practice this regularly, you will come into a deeper appreciation of your connection with the All. This can open into deep spiritual awarenesses.

Awareness of relatedness

When we are open to spiritual awareness, our spirituality is awakened through all of our relationships with other people, with any living organism (animal, plant, and even microorganisms), with what we call inanimate objects – with the living earth, waters and air – which actually have very strong spirit and spiritual aspects.

To awaken our spiritual awareness, we must look with newborn eyes; listen with innocent hearing; touch, taste and smell as though we came from another planet, addressing everything we encounter as a fresh and new experience. We must reach into the essence of each encounter, sensing the path that brought this object to us and the steps that brought us to it. Then we can regularly celebrate the miracle of existence, the dances of events that made all life possible!

Look for extraordinary relatedness through the collective consciousness

Synchronicities are meaningful coincidences that knock on the doors of our ordinary home of inattention, inviting us to wonder at the sublime choreography of our lives. They remind us that there are layers and meanings to our existence that are beyond our understanding, yet just perceptible enough to be appreciated. They hint at a guiding intelligence in the universe that is so far beyond our comprehension as to make us simpletons by comparison.

Boris Pasternak said, 'When a great moment knocks on the door of your life, it is often no louder than the beating of your heart, and it is very easy to miss it.'

– John O'Donohue

Example:

I had two clients in my practice who were very similar in their personalities, interests and life styles, and had similar problems. Both were middle-aged women, single parents, each having a single son under ten years old. Both had been living on welfare for years, both had drinking problems. 'Ann' had been in therapy with me for about six months and was doing extremely well - controlling her drinking, being much more consistent in disciplining her son and seeing nice changes in his hyperactivity and attitude. 'Bobby' had only been in therapy for two months and seemed to have much less motivation (though no less potential) to make changes in her life.

I suggested to Bobby that it might help her to talk to Ann, explaining that Ann had been through similar straits and might have a few ideas which could help. Ann was agreeable to this. I kept after Bobby for a month but she gave one excuse after another and never followed through on her promises.

Ann came one day for her regular appointment, chuckling about a coincidence. She had been sitting in her doctor's waiting room when an unfamiliar woman sat next to her and they started up a conversation. The woman mentioned my name, and you can guess the rest. It was Betty and they enjoyed talking with each other, agreeing that they had a lot in common.

Bobby goes to the doctor frequently but Ann does not. Ann was there for a urinary infection of a serious nature. The chances of this meeting of two of my clients seem very small. (This might be considered an example of 'manifestation,' discussed below.)

Time and again, in my own life as well as that of others in my diverse circles of interactions, we encounter highly unlikely, magical synchronicities such as the above that awaken us awareness of deeper levels of realities in which we are participants – but which are usually outside our awareness. The more we start to pay attention to these improbable coincidences, the more they occur.

Here are some ways we can invite more of these magical synchronistic occurrences into our lives:

- Record the synchronicities in our lives. As we take them more seriously, more will occur.
- Share these mystical experiences with others, and invite them to share theirs with us.
- Read some of the many books written on synchronicity. Brian Inglis, David Peat, Marie Von Franz, LaVonne Harper Stiffler and Tess Castelman are among my favorites.

Manifestations are the invitation for events in our lives to come together in propitious, helpful, and often surprising manners. In effect, they are synchronicities that we create through our intentions, along with our conscious invitations.

Here are helpful general recommendations:

1. Be specific regarding requests. For instance, if we are asking for a new home, we may get better results if we specify the number of rooms, size, location and all other features of the house that are important to us.

2. Add, with trust in our higher guidance, that we allow that what is granted may be even better than we have wished for.
3. State why this wish is for our higher good and the higher good of others.
4. Add that our request should turn out only for our highest good and for the highest good of all.
5. Release our wish to the hands of our higher self, our spirit guides and angels, and the Infinite Source.
6. Trust that our wishes will be granted. Repeated requests are actually a statement of disbelief in the power of the initial request. Once we get into that loop of doubts, there is no end to our distrust in the processes of manifestation.

It is helpful to development of our spiritual awareness and the growth of trust in our connection with a higher power when we find that the universe responds to our needs. The responses we get may be truly astounding and beyond our expectations and beliefs. It is instructive to convince ourselves that these manifestations can be generated by our wishes and needs. To this end, we may find it more convincing if we:

- Record in detail the manifestations that reflect our wishes.
It is easy to forget details we have included or excluded in making our wishes, and most instructive when we compare that which manifests with that which was requested. We may be surprised to see how literal the universe can be in listening to our words.
- Small, even playful requests are allowed!
These help us learn to trust in the manifestation process. For instance, asking for a parking space to be available at your destination is a commonly granted request.
- Those of our wishes that are not granted are often as instructive as those that are.
I learned lessons in being specific with this parking spaces, as I several times made the request – with the result that a space was available right in front of my destination, but someone else was pulling into it as I arrived!

- Share these manifestation experiences with others, and invite them to share theirs with you.
- Read some of the books written on manifestation. David Spangler and Machaelle Small Wright are among my favorites.
- As we take them more seriously, more manifestations will occur.

Read books on the lives and experiences and writings of enlightened people

There are countless shining examples of human spiritual development through the centuries. Whether you prefer examples from religious literature, such as Christ, Buddha or Allah; Thomas Aquinas or Hildegard of Bingen; or the more recent Aurobindo, Matthew Fox, or Mother Theresa; or countless others – you will be enriched and inspired by reading about their lives and studying their teachings. You might find inspiration in reading about people who overcame adversity, as told by and about Helen Keller, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela and countless others. The list is endless.

Find inspiration through the creative arts

Art, music, poetry, theater, films, dance and other creative activities are doorways into intuitive awarenesses. As we explore new varieties of creative arts forms, we may often be surprised to discover new experiences that resonate with our spirit. Similarly, as we deepen our spiritual sensitivities through meditation, prayer and other practices, we may find new spiritual resonations with creative arts we have experienced before.

- We can make it a point to attend a creative arts performance that is recommended as a spiritual experience – by someone you know and respect. Tastes differ. What pleases and inspires some, may not resonate in the same manners with others.
- We can look for poetry, music and films to enjoy at our leisure and at our own pace. Savoring and re-reading a phrase or a line, or replaying a moving segment on a tape can heighten its effects.
- Music in religious settings can be particularly inspiring, as in Handel's *Messiah*.

- Participating in creative arts can involve us more personally and deeply. We might explore and develop our artistic, musical or theatrical talents for our pleasure and inspiration.

Peak/flow experiences

When we are totally immersed in our activities, we may sometimes enter a mystical state of oneness with what we are doing and with the universe as a whole. This seems to occur more often when our body is engaged in the activity, though it may also occur through a focus of our senses as well. These are commonly termed *peak* or *flow* experiences.

- In jogging, dance and other activities with repetitive movements, we may, in effect, be entering a deeply meditative state through focusing only on the physical movement, to the exclusion of other distractions.
- In archery, dressage (intricate horseback maneuvers), flower arranging and other activities that involve a focus on objects outside ourselves, we may similarly enter a meditative state.
By focusing intensely on the world outside ourselves, we move towards a spiritual connection with an external object, animal or plant we may then connect with everything that is outside ourselves.
- In pushing ourselves to and beyond the limits of physical endurance, we may move into a state of transcendent awareness.
Again, jogging is a common experience of this sort.

Religious healing rituals, ceremonies and prayers

Most religions prescribe rituals and ceremonies as part of their healing practices. These may involve prayers, chants, dances, drumming, particular postures for prayer and meditation, anointing, immersion in water, as well as rites of passage at times of birth, attaining adulthood, marriage and death.

Many in Western science have viewed prayers and rituals as aids to attainment of alternative states of consciousness (ASCs) through monotonous sensory stimulation (similar to hypnotic inductions) or have dismissed them as magical beliefs, worth no more than a placebo. You may be surprised to learn there is evidence to suggest that prayers and rituals can produce effects in the physical world and can convey healings for body, emotions, mind, relationships and spirit – detailed in *Personal Spirituality*.

Rituals are prescribed procedures for smoothing our dealings with each other and with the world at large. They often acknowledge and invoke the presence of higher powers to help us deal with problems that are greater than any one person can master – such as illness that leads us to seek

healing; life changes that are acknowledged individually and communally; and social wrongs that need redressing. Ceremonies are combinations and series of rituals – often quite elaborate – that link the present landscape with teachings and traditions from the recent and distant, mythical past; rooting our awareness in the history, beliefs and traditions of our people; providing a common language for naming and dealing with the winds or challenge and change that blow gently or storm through our personal lives, our communities and nations; and teaching us strokes for paddling our communal canoe through the rivers and seas of life.

A novel approach for research of rituals was developed by Felicitas Goodman, an American psychological anthropologist. Goodman studied positions assumed by healers depicted in cave drawings, hieroglyphs and photographs. Some postures appeared repeatedly in independent sources that were separated by continents and centuries of time. She then exposed naive, Western subjects to the rhythmic sound of a rattle for fifteen minutes while they assumed some of these postures. She found that each different posture elicited many common sensations and subjective psychological states, among a wide sample of participants. For example, some reported that with particular postures they experienced time distortions, and with other postures they saw colors, felt stimulation of the base of the spine, heat or other sensations. Different clusters of elements were reported with different body positions.

The fact that different naive subjects reported similar experiences suggests that these are not due to cultural expectations. The researcher could not have caused or suggested the effects because she herself did not know what responses to expect. This research hints that humans may be able to activate or open themselves to various energies and/or subjective states of consciousness and experience through particular rituals. The postures may inherently produce these effects or they may have acquired their efficacy through the collective consciousness.

Prayers have also been shown to produce distinct effects on people, animals, plants and other organisms. Research suggests that prayer healing is an intervention that can produce improvements in other people's physical problems, even when they cannot know whether prayers were being sent for their conditions. The carefully controlled, double-blind studies, some of them

published in peer-reviewed, conventional medical journals, suggest it is highly unlikely that this is a placebo effect. *Healing Research, Volume 1* reviews this research in great detail.

It is difficult to explain within conventional scientific paradigms how prayers from a distance could influence physical or psychological problems. This cannot be a placebo effect when people who were being prayed for did not know whether prayers were being sent. Nor is suggestion a likely explanation for prayers sent to animals or plants. The findings are sufficiently impressive to suggest that there are aspects of our world that we need to study further, and theories yet to be proposed to explain these.

Suggestions

Confirming some of the many effects of prayer

We can demonstrate the direct effectiveness of prayer on plants. We can fill three pie tins or shallow bowls of equal size with equal amounts of potting soil from the same source, and number each one clearly with a label or marker. We then sort out corn seeds of equal size from the same seed packet, and place an equal number of seeds in the soil of each container. We must be careful to position each seed with its pointy end down and rounded end up, and to bury each to the same depth. We then water each container with the same amount of water, from the same source (tapwater is ok) every one to three days, depending upon how fast they dry – being certain not to let the containers dry completely. We then assure that each container gets an equal amount of light. We think positive, loving thoughts, pray, meditate, or project the wish to send healing to the first container; ignore the second; and think angry or negative thoughts about the third. (Some prefer to omit the third) If our healing ability with plants is strong, we would expect to see a noticeable difference between the speed at which seeds germinate and the amount of growth at the end of two weeks. Results may vary when we give healing at different times of day, and under different phases of the moon.

Exploring the effects of rituals and ceremonies

We can check out the indirect effects of prayer, acting through a vehicle that conveys healing effects. Using the same model of plant growth, we take two identical bottles of water from the same source (tapwater is ok). We give healing or say prayers over one of the bottles, to the point that we intuitively feel the water has absorbed our positive thoughts/ prayers/ energies. We

keep the second in another room until we are through with the first bottle. We put a removable label on each bottle and give the bottles to a trusted friend, with the instructions that they should be relabeled with new numbers or symbols so that we cannot identify which bottle is the one we imbued with healing. We make sure our friend writes down what was on the original label and what the new symbol is for each one.

We take several pots, seeded identically as detailed in the direct prayer effects experiment. We water one pot or set of pots with water from one bottle, and another pot or equal number of pots with water from the second bottle. We keep all other variables equal. We then see if we can identify which bottle had the healing water in it, according to the greater growth of seedlings in one pot or set of pots.

Drumming or rattling rituals

We can get a copy of Felicitas Goodman's descriptions of her studies, to check out our own sensations when we hold one of the described postures while we listen to ritual drumming or rattling. Drumming recordings are available on CD to facilitate such exercises, as well as other inner journeys.

Reports reviewed in *Personal Spirituality* suggest that specific postures and movements may not only produce changes in consciousness, but may also contribute to self-healing.

A spectrum of prayers

- Intercessory prayer for the benefit of someone in need is widely practiced around the world.
- Prayers for healing are among the most frequent prayers offered. Healing prayers may be an essential factor in distant healings that have been confirmed in research on humans, animals, plants, bacteria, and yeasts. Prayers for healing may be offered as petitions for intercession from a higher source, or may be a personal wish or intent of the person praying to invite healing to occur. The approaches and nuances of intent may contribute important ingredients to prayer healing. While prayer healers are certain that prayers are more powerful than intent alone, this has yet to be confirmed in research.

The intent of the healer may vary in prayer healing, ranging from "Thy will be done." to "My will be done," or when ego is involved, to "Heal, dammit, heal!"

My personal preference, and that of many other gifted, experienced healers I admire and respect, is for "Thy will be done." We feel this is the more ethical way to offer healing. Requesting specific outcomes may not be in the best interests of the healee. Our limited perspectives as humans in the flesh does not begin to encompass the vastness and complexities of human existence. While we may feel that it cannot be anything but good for a person who is ill or suffering to recover rapidly and completely, there could be spiritual extenuating circumstances that are beyond our awareness or comprehension. It might be for the highest good of that person, and/or of people surrounding him, for him to continue being ill or even to transition back into spirit existence. He might have important spiritual lessons to learn, which he would not learn in any other way. He may be inviting others who are close to him to learn lessons of compassion and healing by ministering to his needs.

Sending our love and healing wishes/ prayers/ energies "for the highest good of all" will add our energies to the processes that higher powers are guiding. We are also connecting with our higher selves in the process of praying – which may offer us much healing in and of itself.

When we are open to whatever healing may bring us, we may be pleasantly surprised at how healing acts in very unexpected ways.

For example, Sharon came for Therapeutic Touch treatments for her chronic pain from cancer. While there was very modest improvement in the pain, her insomnia and depression were dramatically improved. I have known many like Sharon who came for healing of one problem, receiving much or little or even no apparent benefits for that problem, but marked improvements in other problems.

- Prayers of thanksgiving, likewise, bring us into communion with our higher selves and the Infinite Source. Such prayers acknowledge our interrelationships with everything in our world for which we are giving thanks.
- Prayers of repentance and forgiveness help us to process our feelings when we feel we behaved in ways that are hurtful or in other ways not up to our expectations or those of others. Such prayers are also healings through the transpersonal dimensions of collective consciousness, as they reach the higher awareness of those we have wronged.
- Unanswered prayers are often reminders and lessons that we are not privy to the fullness of the wisdom and plans of the Infinite Source. If we

make it a habit to write down our wishes and prayers, we may well find in the light of hindsight (as I have, not infrequently) that we were far better off not having had our prayers granted. Unanswered prayers are also lessons in acknowledging our limited vision in asking for blessings and good fortune. In retrospect, the cards we are dealt are often far better than those we would have chosen.

A poor farmer in China, a Zen practitioner, had a single horse. This horse was essential to his work. It pulled his plow, brought his produce to market, and provided transportation for his family.

One day, the farmer woke to find the gate open and the horse gone. His neighbors came around to commiserate with him over his loss. He responded only with, "We'll see."

Two days later, his stallion returned with a herd of 20 wild mares. His neighbors came around to congratulate him on his wonderful good fortune. Again, he responded only with, "We'll see."

The next day, his only son was struggling to ride one of the wild mares and broke his leg. His neighbors came around again to commiserate with him over his bad luck. Again, he responded only with, "We'll see."

A week later, the local warlord came to their village, conscripting every able-bodied young male. Naturally, he was unable to take the farmer's son. His neighbors came around again to congratulate him on his wonderful good fortune. Yet again, he responded only with, "We'll see..."

More on unanswered prayers in *Personal Spirituality*.

Personal benefits of spiritual awareness and practice

In addition to the evidence reviewed in *Personal Spirituality* on the vast body of evidence demonstrating that religious affiliation and practices (sometimes including spirituality) are correlated with health benefits, there are immediate, personal benefits in terms of spiritual enrichment. Exploring the world through this inner awareness, we can come to appreciate that each of us is a part of a vaster reality. This is the essence of spirituality as experienced in traditional societies, such as the Native Americans.

[American] Indians have a very different concept of where you worship. The whole Earth is the temple. Any place you stand is a church. The tipi is a nesting enclosure on the Earth Mother's breast, a place of sharing

among a small group. Here each can worship at his or her own time, as the heart directs, in his or her own language.

– Carl Hammerschlag

We don't have to believe in God or in any religion in order to experience personal spirituality. We have only to trust our inner knowing of our connection to the All, and to satisfy our left-brain, linear beliefs and trust in that inner *knowing*. This may be more challenging than it may seem at first glance.

My own experience is that it is possible to bring discrete examples from observations of our inner spiritual experiences (dreams, intuitions, synchronistic occurrences in our lives) for analysis in the light of reason – both in personal explorations of spiritual awareness and in developing energy medicine and spiritual healing awarenesses. This helps us to feel reassured in our little *self* – our thinking, analyzing, knowing, left brain – that we are not simply indulging in hopeful fantasies about the existences of a vaster *Self* that we sense through an immediate, intuitive awareness, which I call a *knowing* of its absolute validity. The teachings, support and examples of more experienced and gifted intuitives and healers can be enormously helpful in these explorations, as can the reflections of trusted friends and colleagues who are also exploring personal spirituality. Moving deeper in these realms, we may even connect with the collective consciousness, as described in Tess Castleman, *Threads, Knots, Tapestries*, and find that we are dreaming each others' dreams.

Suggestions

If we become addicted to the external, our interiority will haunt us. We will become hungry with a hunger no image, person, or deed can still. To be wholesome, we must remain truthful to our vulnerable complexity. In order to keep our balance, we need to hold the interior and the exterior, visible and invisible, known and unknown, temporal and eternal, ancient and new, together. No one else can undertake this task for you. You are the one and only threshold of an inner world. This wholesomeness is holiness. To be holy is to be natural, to befriend the worlds that come to balance in you. Behind the façade of images and distraction, each person is an artist in this primal inescapable sense. Each of us is doomed and privileged to be an inner artist who carries shapes and a unique world.

John O'Donohue

Experiential explorations of spiritual awareness

Seat yourself comfortably in a quiet environment where you will not be disturbed for about 45-60 minutes. If you have a familiar practice of meditation or prayer then use that as a starting point for quieting and centering yourself. (The term *centering* comes from potters. If their clay is centered on the potter's wheel, it will stay there. If it is even a little off center, it will fly in all directions. It is the same with our minds.)

Step 1. Once you are centered, think of someone who could use spiritual healing and would not object to your sending her or him your healing wishes. Spend as long as feels intuitively right as you sensing you are projecting healing to that person. Write down how you felt during this exercise. The following paragraphs will give you further instructions for steps 2-4, but don't read these before you have completed Step 1.

Step 2. Start to picture to yourself that your feet are connecting with Mother Earth. You might feel that roots are extending from your feet, going deep into the earth. Sense the earth energies rising through your feet, into your legs, into your body. Feel how these healing energies reach every particle of your being. Feel them concentrate particularly in your heart. Now sense that you are projecting the loving, healing energies from your heart to the same person. Do not 'push the river' by picturing that these energies are changing the person to whom they are sent. (Their needs and wishes for changing or staying as they are should be respected.) Picture that you are projecting love, support, healing, unconditional acceptance, or any other qualities that might be helpful to that person, allowing that they may accept just as much of these qualities as they need at this time. Spend as long as feels intuitively right to you in feeling that you are projecting healing to that person. Do not read further until you have done Step 2.

Step 3. Now invite the Infinite Source (you might address God, Christ, Buddha, Allah, your higher self, or just a cosmic source of very strong energies) to connect with you through the top of your head. Sense the energies from the infinite source coming through your head, into your body. Feel how these healing energies reach every aspect of your being. Feel them concentrate particularly in your heart. Now sense that you are projecting the loving, healing, unconditionally accepting energies from your heart to the same person. Spend as long as feels intuitively right to you in feeling that you are projecting healing to that person.

We may similarly have different experiences of healing when we call upon our spirit guides or angelic helpers to assist in healings. Though it

may be difficult to do so, putting down a few words in writing can be helpful in anchoring these experiences in our memories and in our lives.

Step 4. As we meditate, we hold one of our hands over our heart chakra, the energy center at the lower half of the breast bone (sternum). In turn, we sense our heart opening to connect with the heart of someone we love; with the heart of someone in pain or in need, who might benefit from our sending them love; with the source of healing lessons through the collective consciousness; with the Infinite Source.

When we have finished this exercise, it is helpful to take some time to reflect upon the differences we perceived between each of the steps. I believe that through stepwise exercises of this sort we can begin to appreciate some of the qualities of spiritual awareness. Many will note distinctly different qualities of experience as we connect with particular levels of spiritual awareness in our meditation and healing explorations

Going deeper through meditations

Meditation is the most common route for connecting with and deepening our personal spirituality, practiced through endless variations that are limited only by habit of limited practices or laziness. To a great extent, this is simply a way to quiet the chattering of the mind that distracts us from our awareness of our connections with the All.

See the suggestions for meditation in Chapter 2.

Sharing thanks and acknowledging a oneness with the Infinite Source

Sharing our moments of thanks with family and friends we are close with and trust can enhance the sense of connectedness with the All for everyone.

- We can say a simple "Thank you for the blessings, lessons and healings of this day" upon awakening in the morning, at meal times, on being blessed with a pleasuring of the heart or sense, before closing our eyes to sleep, and at whatever other points we are reminded of our connection with the All during the day. This is not because the Infinite Source requires our thanks, but as a way of increasing and deepening our awareness of our connections with the All.

- Saying "Thank you" invites synchronicities of blessings into our lives, for which we can offer further thanks.

- Saying "Thank you" in the presence of others sensitizes us and them to notice more of the blessings that are present in our lives, individually and collectively.

Again, some cautions about spiritual awakenings

Mystical traditions caution against rushing into spiritual awakenings without proper support from spiritual teachers and without appropriate preparations.

Hassidic Jewish mystics warn that not everyone who enters the garden of mystical awareness is able to return. Some may become lost in inner worlds of fears, delusions or psychoses.

There is a good measure of wisdom in this advice. In exploring new territory it is possible to wander into realms that are unfamiliar. Some of these are beautiful and peaceful but others may be alien and frightening. The greatest danger may be from our own fears. If we panic while in an alternative state of consciousness, we may become so stressed that we are traumatized.

One can also become entranced with the allure of visiting other worlds, avoiding dealing with the challenges of the everyday world. For some people it is easier to drop out of real life, immersing themselves in spiritual quests and related preoccupations, rather than facing situations they find difficult. This is a *spiritual bypass*. Among these are many who become *workshop junkies*, attending endless series of weekend spiritual experiences but devoting themselves to no one practice that could take them to deeper explorations of their inner self and their higher Self. We must finish our business of dealing with earthly existence before we go off to dwell in other dimensions.

CHAPTER 12. Participatory intelligent design

...the uttering of the world reveals how each of us relentlessly creates. Everyone is an artist . Each person brings sound out of silence and coaxes the invisible to become visible.

– John O’Donohue

The concept of intelligent design for living organisms has been discussed for several centuries, preceding Darwin by many years. In recent years, the theory of intelligent design has seen a resurgence, primarily led by Christian fundamentalists who are seeking to promote teaching of Biblical creationism in US schools. This is not the topic of my discussion here.

A second approach to intelligent design argues that scientific evidence demonstrates that Darwin’s theory is too simple and actually is inadequate to explain the complexity of the world as we know it. There are numerous factors in the physical world that are required – separately and in combination with each other – for the existence of life on our planet. Arguments for intelligent design based on interpretation of scientific evidence can be reasoned without relying on religious faith and will be considered here.

Scientific discussions of intelligent design in evolution begin with the observation that the multitude and combinations of absolute requirements for life to exist is utterly mind-boggling. These can be seen at many different levels of organization in nature. The enormous complexity of conditions required for life to exist suggest the work of a Creator.

The scientific evidence for Darwinian evolution and the questions raised about its adequacy are rather technical. If you are keen to delve into the finer details of these arguments, you will find the basic facts outlined, with extensive corroborating references, in *Personal Spirituality*. A single example is presented here.

John O’M Bockris nicely summarizes the steps required for the evolutionary development of the eye. In its most primitive form, the eye is found as a light-sensitive spot in single-celled organisms that has pigment beneath it. This allows the organism to sense the direction of a source of light, without perceiving any images. In multicellular organisms, collections of light-sensitive cells are located in a cup-like depression. If this is deep enough, and the opening into the depression is narrowed, it forms the equivalent of a pinhole camera. The next improvement is to have a transparent film over the opening, which is a primitive lens. The fullest development includes a

lens combined with a muscular iris that widens or contracts to control the amount of light admitted to the eye.

It is difficult to imagine how each of the components of an eye could develop – prior to the existence of the entire, complete eye. For instance, in the retina, the chemicals, 11-cis-retinal and rhodopsin are sensitive to light and transform light entering the eye into nerve impulses that go to the brain, where they are interpreted for whatever meaningful information they convey. How could these chemicals have been synthesized at precisely the right spot in order to initiate primitive vision? The same is true of the development of the indentation that forms a primitive eye, and of the lens that then appears as an enhancement of the eye. It is difficult to explain how all of these pieces could have assembled themselves by chance, since each component alone would convey no advantage to the organism.

Bockris notes that natural selection occurs from living organisms that already exist, in their irreducible complexity. Jumping from one irreducibly complex system into another one appears to be a process unlikely to occur by chance. This is a strong challenge to Darwinian theory, which cannot explain how selection would produce the original irreducibly complex system.

Stephen Meyer, in a cogent, detailed analysis of Darwinian theory, points out a further logical inadequacy in this explanation of evolution. New types of cells require entire systems of proteins to work together in order to produce these evolutionary advantageous new features. Darwinian selection can act on the organism as a whole. However, natural selection cannot play a part in the generation of information that builds the desirable features – until the information required to build the required aggregate protein system has already been created. In other words, one can't select the functional features that offer advantages until the advantages are demonstrated. There would be no obvious way that selection would act on a given protein – prior to that protein altering a gene and prior to that gene producing an advantageous effect. Only at the point of demonstrating the functional advantage can Darwinian survival of the fittest can come into play, but not before this.

I believe that the above argument is the most telling one – Meyers' cogent criticism of the illogic of Darwinian selection at levels of genes, proteins, and cells. For Darwinian selection to prevail at these levels would require that the selection must precede the demonstrated advantages of the features that will later confer greater survival on the members of a given species. Logically, within the materialistic and mechanistic frameworks of Darwinian theory, there appears to be no theory that would explain how the original complex elements of an eye could have been selected for any purpose, prior to their having demonstrated some advantage in survival.

What does any of this have to do with personal spirituality? The amazing

varieties of creations that are the plants and animals on our planet speak to my sense of the wonderment of creation. I feel a deeper connection with the universe through having an inner sense of a designer that is behind the apparent coherent design of the universe.

However, all of these arguments are not necessary in order to feel a wonderment when we see a butterfly, breathe in a lungful of fresh mountain air and scan awesome natural vistas, or bite into a ripe mango – and sense the miracle of being alive and participating as part of a vastness beyond ourselves. There is still wonderment to be felt at a universe that could have organized itself into you and me and everything else on a random, chance basis.

Suggestion

The effects of intention on genes can be studied through simple experiments on the cross-breeding of plants, fruit flies or viruses. The numbers of offspring that will be produced with crossbreeding of dominant and recessive traits, such as colors of beans, are well known. Studies of mental intent to alter the numbers of progeny with particular traits can provide a simple basis for exploring human influence on genetics.

If such effects are demonstrated, then one can readily hypothesize that the collective consciousness could influence the evolution of species. Much more on this in *Personal Spirituality*.

CHAPTER 13. Contributions of religions to healing and spirituality

*Religion asks you to learn from the experience of others.
Spirituality urges you to seek your own.*

– Neale Donald Walsch

This chapter is focused on the relationships of religions to healing. Regardless of our individual religious beliefs, I believe the highest contribution that most religions can make is in helping us to heal ourselves. Healing, in its broader sense, is the process of bringing love, acceptance and forgiveness into our lives – in relationships with ourselves and with each other. In addition to healing our own lives, this can encompass healing our community, our environment, our nation and the entire planet.

To the extent that religions teach healing and lead us in these directions, they are contributing to healing on all of these levels. To the extent that they divide us and pit us one against another, they are un-healing in their direct actions, but offer invitations for healing at other levels. As discussed in *Personal Spirituality*, under *good and evil*, were there no evil in the world, we would have fewer challenges to give us the opportunities to activate our healing awareness and energies. So in a backwards sort of way, those religions which promote divisiveness, self-centered prejudice and even hatred may actually present challenges for others (and hopefully themselves as well) to bring more healing into the world.

You can't have the joy of repentance unless you sin first.

– Ashleigh Brilliant

Speaking out for healing awareness and actions in our religious community

It is surprising how many times there are others who feel like we do about various issues but we all hold our tongues rather than take a chance on speaking out for change. When people of like minds, hearts and spirits come together, there is a collective synergy of energies that can be more potent and effective in bringing more healing into the world than when we act alone. But even if we stand alone in our differing or dissenting views,

speaking our truth is important to our integrity. I have often found that planting a seed and being patient will lead to a flowering of resonations in others, given a little time and patience and trust in my inner knowing of the rightness of my feelings and intuitions.

In religious groups where personal spirituality is acknowledged and valued, questions raised by members are welcomed as a stimulus to discussions that invite everyone to evaluate their personal understandings of and commitments to religious teachings.

Promoting personal spirituality may be a challenge if our religion or our particular church (or both) have a low tolerance for questioning of interpretations of scripture or of the relevance of ancient teachings to today's world. We live in a world that is vastly different from the world at the time of the original religious teachings, so I see this discussion as relevant to many religious traditions. Sadly, there are religious groups in which dissent is poorly tolerated or not tolerated at all. This leaves members of those groups the choices of conforming despite their personal opinions, values, feelings and intuitions; speaking out and facing censure and other pressures to conform; or leaving. When we open into personal spirituality, these are sometimes alternative we have to face. This can be a serious challenge, even within one's own family. (See extensive discussions of stages of faith in *Personal Spirituality*.)

My understanding of religions is that they have evolved through many generations from the original inspired teachings of one or more highly spiritual people. Many basic principles, such as the golden rule, are still absolutely valid today. However, other teachings – particularly those that proclaim a particular religion to be the only true faith, with condemnations of all other religious paths – appear to me to be completely contrary to true spirituality.

I hasten to add that I am not asserting this as a doctrine that condemns all other religious beliefs and teachings other than my own! I am advocating for healing attitudes and practices within religious settings.

Below are principles that I suggest can help us to decide whether religious teachings are healing or un-healing:

Religions teach values that enhance social order and quality of life.

The Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," and the ten commandments are well known examples. Those who are inspired by these teachings live lives that are blessings to their families, friends, and communities.

For many, however, the good of others is forgotten when temptations of

immediate pleasures and personal gains are difficult to resist. For others of us, navigating the paths of life through our head – with goals of achievements and satisfactions based on acquisitions of material goods or power – may distance us from our immediate knowing of the rightness and wrongness of our actions, which in many instances are better recognized by our heart and our intuitive awareness. For both of these groups, the promoters of religious institutions have developed restraints that are reinforced by social pressures to conform, backed up by promises of rewards in the hereafter on the one hand, and threats of Divine retribution on the other. To some extent, these religious constraints support the social order.

Those who feel the personal presence of the Infinite Source – through experiences such as mystical or religious awakenings, NDEs, spiritual healing, and the like – and who know they are one with the All, need no religious teachings to guide or restrain them. Being one with the All makes it impossible to hurt anyone or anything – because one would be hurting oneself in doing so.

This is the hope and prayer of healers who work to bring more spiritual awareness into the world. If everyone were to open to these awarenesses, then love and light would rule and negativity and darkness would no longer prevail.

Suggestions

Ways to assess the personal value of religious teachings

On the positive side, encouraging acceptance and practice of a religious teaching:

- Does a given religious teaching promote the greatest good of all in the world?

By this, I mean the good of every living person, every other living thing, and the environment – not only in this moment, but for all time to come. Sometimes, this question may be answered by current-day teachings and practices. In other cases, there may be a long historical tradition that provides a deeper perspective on whether the religion truly promotes personal spirituality vs. promoting its own power base

- Does a given religious teaching promote personal spiritual awareness and growth?

A related question is whether the religion is respectful of other religions and their teachings.

- Does the teacher model and demonstrate that which is being taught?

On the negative side, suggesting that a teaching may not advance our personal spirituality:

- Does a religious teaching discourage us from promoting the greatest good of all?

- Does a religious teaching instill fear?

Beware particularly of fears that are taught as ways to discourage members from questioning religious teachings, doctrines and the authority of the clergy.

- Does a religious teaching suggest that 'others' (people outside that religion) are less worthy of acceptance and respect by people or by the Infinite Source?

Religion can help people deal with pain and suffering.

... Pearls are created from the oyster's pain. They are the valuable tears of the sea. Suffering is meaningful if man learns to answer this not with the question 'why' uttered in despair, but with the word 'wherefore,' uttered with faith... The word 'why' looks back, the word 'wherefore' leads to the future and can even give meaning to the most severe suffering.

– H. C. Moolenburgh

A belief in a higher self, an afterlife, a collective consciousness, an Infinite Source, God, or however else we may conceptualize a guiding intelligence in the universe brings hope that there is meaning to our lives. The explanations for life's mysteries may not be comprehensible within human frameworks of understanding, but many presume that the Infinite Source has a plan behind it all. Of course, the plan may be to give us free choice, in which case there may be nested hierarchies of plans – from yours and mine; to the life plan of our families of incarnation and of choice; to the social collective plan; to the plans of the collective consciousness of our planet; to the vaster plans of cosmic intelligences across the universe; to the plan of the Infinite Source.

We can worship God by studying the beauty of his handiwork.

– Petrarch

A belief in reincarnation opens suggestions that pain and suffering are challenges the soul chooses to experience, or is challenged by some higher intelligence to face, in order to learn deep lessons that serve the soul in its spiritual advancement. Within this belief system, the challenges we are given are graded to our level of development. Such beliefs can help us face difficult situations that might otherwise seem overwhelming.

Nothing happens to anybody which he is not fitted by nature to bear.
– Marcus Aurelius

Within the limits of materialistic existence, anything that threatens or ends life is bad. In a world in which reincarnation promotes lessons over a series of lifetimes, physical death is merely a transition to the between-physical-worlds existence, where further lessons are learned and where one prepares for the next round of incarnation. Conversely, coming into physical existence is a between-spiritual-worlds experience that allows us to practice the lessons we have learned in previous physical and spiritual world experiences. Within such a framework, a struggle in which we do not succeed or even fail to survive may be a worthwhile and valuable lesson. Maintaining a spiritual awareness and healing attitude as we deal with our challenges seems to be the most important lesson.

What is to give light must endure burning.
– Viktor Frankl

Cautions on sharing spiritual and healing knowledge indiscriminately

Eastern teachings suggest that personal spiritual development is a goal in and of itself. They suggest that all of the intuitive and psychic phenomena we manifest along the way are distractions from our true personal development that are to be discouraged.

It is apparent from studies of religious writings of East and West that religious leaders through the ages felt that methodologies for opening personal spiritual awareness must be earned through rigorous practices and guidance under expert tutelage, rather than acquired through reading, casual questioning, or psychedelic drugs that are taken without proper ritual and expert spiritual guidance.

Considering the corruptions that power brings with it, it is understandable that religious teachers should wish to maintain as secrets the potent methods that can open up within people enormous psi powers. Safeguards

against the misuse of psi powers have included requirements that students have close supervision from mentors, or apprentice themselves to religious orders if they wish to be initiated into mystical, transpersonal teachings. Shamans in traditional cultures may teach apprentices in similar manners, conveying esoteric knowledge as the students mature into their healing powers.

In ethical religious systems, this allows the teachers to determine when a particular student may be stable enough and ready to acquire the deeper knowledge. In power-centered religious systems, this esoteric knowledge is a source of control for the religious leaders.

Today, the secrecy around intuitive and psychic development has been promoted as well by governments that have invested considerable sums and efforts in studying psychic methodologies that could be applied towards espionage and military aims. Even here, however, cautions are acknowledged and the psychic person is usually accompanied by a guide when engaged in remote psychic viewing.

I believe that there is still a definite place to caution those who might be unwise, rash or impetuous and to not make it easy to develop psi abilities for those motivated by wishes for power more than desires for enlightenment and healing. Sadly, commercialism in our materialistic society puts development of psi powers on sale through numerous self-development courses, where little or no screening of applicants is practiced. Worse yet, teachers of these subjects usually work in isolation, with no peer or mentor supervision and many workshops and courses are offered without teaching cautions and ethics of transpersonal explorations and interventions. Teachers are in some cases themselves prone to ego inflation and open to the potentials of becoming psychologically destabilized or of abusing these powers.

Western relationships with death and its healing

Death is normal, is good, is not defeat and is not the end. Every person Jesus healed later died...

Death is the best solution in many situations and, "if it is of God, it were better not to contend against it."

– Charles C. Wise, Jr.

Death is another topic traditionally addressed by religion. In recent decades, segments of the Western medical and psychological community have developed an understanding of its psychological and emotional aspects.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a psychiatrist, probably did more than any other person to return this topic to the awareness of the public in general and of the caregiving professions in particular. She delineated the processes and stages involved in mourning various losses. Losses may include the deaths of others; deterioration in health; terminations of relationships; or loss of positions or possessions of personal significance – up to and including one's own anticipated loss of physical life itself. Kübler-Ross offers suggestions for healing through understanding and acceptance.

Western society is strongly death-avoiding and death-denying. Caregivers are often untrained in dealing with issues surrounding death. For the conventional doctor, treatment stops with death – or perhaps with the mourning of relatives if the doctor feels competent and takes the time to intervene with the family. Religious clerics are often left to deal with this portion of life's unraveling. Western medical world views tend to relegate beliefs about the afterlife to a realm they label *mystical*, meaning that they cannot substantiate it within linear systems of reasoning, do not understand it, are therefore uncomfortable with it, and consequently do not want to delve into it too deeply – leading them to avoid the subject of death for the most part. Personally, I was given very little instruction in my medical and psychiatric training about helping people prepare for death, helping families with their bereavement, or dealing with my own grief and feelings of impotence in the face of terminal illness and bereavements (my own as well as those of the family and of other caregivers) with the deaths of people who were in my care.

Denial of the pain of bereavement is frequently encouraged in our society. Too often the bereaved 'put on a brave face,' while denying and holding in their feelings in order to not feel the hurt of grief themselves, and not to upset others. Feelings that are repressed tend to fester inside – rather like a carbuncle. The unconscious mind, seeking to protect a person from hurt, then builds various avoidance fences around the emotional pus to keep it from erupting into painful awareness. These protective inner fences tend to keep people away from a full enjoyment of life.

[T]he *fear of death* recoils as a *fear of life*...

– Abraham Maslow

A frequent problem I see as a consequence of unresolved grief is the unconscious avoidance of close relationships, out of fears of further losses. Maslow called this *the Jonah Syndrome*, a "fear of being torn apart, of losing control, of being shattered and disintegrated, even of being killed by the experience."

Sonya came for psychotherapy because she was unable to find a man with whom she could hold a relationship beyond a few weeks. She was a bright, attractive, independently successful real estate agent who never lacked for suitors. She could not understand why other women were able to find men who were gentle and considerate, but she always kept finding men who angered or even infuriated her through major and minor irritations that she found unacceptable.

She gave some examples from her most recent failed relationships: Paul, a handsome, warm businessman, would put her in a rage by being constantly late for dates and even for telephone calls that they scheduled. This set a negative tone to all of their interactions that she was not able to overcome. Trevor, an easygoing, humorous salesman, and the person she had dated longest (about 10 weeks) would irritate her when he absent-mindedly forgot things she had told him.

In therapy, Sonja came to see that she really did not trust men to be there for her consistently and reliably. It was not difficult for her to consider that this pattern might have begun with her father's unexpected death in an auto accident when she was her late teens. Coming into this awareness, she connected with angers at her father, who had essentially abandoned her (from her teenage perspective) – feelings she had not been aware of and might never have connected with, outside of a therapy session.

Having released her angers from this grief reaction, along with deep feelings of hurt, Sonya came to understand that her difficulties with men had been triggered by behaviors that set off unconscious alarms of possible abandonment. She was very pleased to find that here relationships with men were no longer marred by her anger, and was pleased to let me know about a year later that she had found her 'Mr. Perfect' and was engaged to be married.

Western society is caught in the vicious circle of being death-fearing because it is death-avoiding. Fears of death are self-reinforcing. For example, in fearing death, we encourage the dying to spend their last moments in hospitals and hospices. We avoid speaking of death with the dying, and they with us, lest we upset each other. We turn over to specialists the tasks of preparing the body for burial and of interring the remains. We may even elect over the phone to have the body transferred from the hospital to a mortuary and hold the funeral with a closed casket or urn so that we never even cast eyes on the body or even the ashes of the deceased. By dealing as little as possible with the dying person or body of the deceased, we remain distanced and unfamiliar with the process of dying. The unfamiliar is alien,

discomforting, and even frightening. We therefore distance ourselves from it emotionally. So the fears become deeper and deeper. Such fears can bring about great suffering, not only from the buried hurts gnawing away inside, but also from restraints they impose on our lives. As we saw with Sonya, having lost someone close and not having grieved properly for them, people will often avoid close relationships out of unconscious fears that they will again be abandoned.

Some people are so afraid to die that they never begin to live.

– Henry Van Dyke

Bernie Siegel, a surgeon who works closely with cancer patients, points out (in *Love, Medicine and Miracles*) “[I]f we can react to loss with personal growth, we can prevent growth gone wrong within us.” When we don’t avoid the grieving process, we can deepen our appreciation of life. As we work through the pain, anger, and guilt of grieving, we grow more confident in our abilities to deal with painful feelings. We don’t distance ourselves from our own mortality. We can then face the big question of how we are going to deal with the end of our own life.

We may find it difficult to deal with our fears of death and dying, as I did when I went into my practice of psychotherapy and was soon faced with these sorts of issues. Over the years I have found a number of further ways of understanding and helping those who are approaching death and those who are bereaved – to understand and deal better with death.

Reports of spirits in pre-death and deathbed visions challenge conventional scientific beliefs about life and death. Rather than re-examine our fears – of the unknown; of having to abandon familiar beliefs; and of approaching the end of our own lives – it is easier to distance ourselves from, or even to reject the evidence of, survival of the spirit – sweeping it under the carpet of repression that covers our unconscious anxieties and fears. This is a child’s way (programmed into our biocomputers when we were young) of avoiding what is uncomfortable. It succeeds admirably in immediately reducing anxiety.

Sadly, this is nearly always counter-productive in the long run. People with terminal illness are desperately eager to discuss their fears. By tacitly making a pact of silence with them, family members and health care professionals often condemn them to carry their fears, unspoken and unshared, to their graves. Worse yet, collusion in avoiding their fears distances and isolates the dying emotionally from those who ought to be closest to them in their last days, as the silence leads to tippy-toeing around issues that most people would feel better airing and clearing.

Similarly, it leaves the bereaved holding unspoken and unresolved feelings. These unresolved feelings about a death in the family may fester for years, leading to generations of maladaptive feelings and behaviors. When such fears are not cleared, they become family patterns of avoiding situations that might trigger anxieties about abandonment or other unresolved, grief-related issues.

My personal clinical experience and that of others who work more directly in the ministry of helping people transition to spirit existence, is that most people are enormously relieved to be able to air their feelings about dying with those they love. Once the barriers of mutual anxieties and fears are removed, emotions come pouring out on both sides. A much greater closeness develops. Passing on becomes a sharing that is treasured by all.

Death – the last sleep? No, it is the final awakening.
– Walter Scott

Death may also be an incredibly rich and valuable lesson to those remaining alive – in relating to the awareness of worlds beyond the physical. This may include deathbed visions of spirits or angels, or may simply be the sobering self-confrontation one has with one's own mortality, upon interacting with others who are dealing with their anxieties surrounding the last curtain on the stage of a given lifetime. Rather than death being a grim reaper, it can be a reminder of the transiency of every living thing on this planet – reminding us to savor and cherish that which we are granted to experience and enjoy while we can.

*So many parts of ourselves we have pushed away come up in grief.
That is why grief has this enormity of potential for healing.*
– Stephen Levine

Many healers view death as a stage of growth. Growth often occurs in the process of facing death. This is a healing unto death.

*Michelangelo found that whereas death inevitably killed every person,
thoughts of death also made them.*
– Irving Stone

Healing also may help a person to pass on peacefully, which is another stage of healing unto death. It is often those left behind who have greater difficulties with separation and death than the dying persons themselves. It is not infrequent to find dying people lingering well beyond the time

expected for their transition, hanging on because they do not want to disappoint or distress their family and close friends. When those who were clutching at the dying person are able to let go, then death comes swiftly and easily. Alternatively, the dying person may wait till someone who is clutching at them and restraining them from crossing over will leave the room or the hospital, making their transition when they are not feeling that they are being held back.

Often, death of a person is also disturbing to us because it stirs a dim awareness deep in our beings of the countless little deaths we experience daily – through releasing possession or control over material possessions; relinquishing habitual patterns of behavior; family, friends and colleagues who move away after having been close; children growing up and no longer giving us the satisfactions of being their caregivers; and the like.

Religion is a wizard, a sibyl... She faces the wreck of worlds, and prophesies restoration. She faces a sky blood-red with sunset colors that deepen into darkness, and prophesies dawn. She faces death, and prophesies life.

– Felix Alder

[D]eath is not what happens when you leave your body. Death is what happens when we live our lives in confusion and closed-heartedness, in anger and fear. In a sense, we are all partly dead, and there is nothing like the loss to make that evident, to make us see how unalive we have been, because it attracts our attention to the moment. Paradoxically, dying may be one of the few moments in life when we feel fully alive.

– Steven Levine

[D]eath is not something that happens at the end of our life... It is imprisonment in one moment of time, confinement in one sharp uncompromising deed or aspect of ourselves. Death is exclusion from renewal of our present-day selves. Neither heaven nor hell are hereafter. Hell is time arrested within and refusing to join in the movement of wind and stars. Heaven is the boulder rock unrolled to let new life out: it is man restored to all four of his seasons rounding for eternity

– Laurens van der Post

Views on suffering and death differ in Eastern religions compared to Western ones. Where reincarnation is an accepted fact, death is but another in a long series of rebirths – from physical life into spiritual life and then back again.

In traditional societies, death is not an unfamiliar or distant experience. There may be elaborate rituals for helping people make the transition from physical existence; family members may consider it an honor to minister personally to the dead body; funeral rituals may graphically acknowledge the transmutation of body into spirit - as in burning the body on a pyre; and mourning rituals may encourage fervent prayers for the spirit's ongoing journey in the realms beyond.

When there is life there is death, and when there is death there is life. When there is possibility there is impossibility, and when there is impossibility, there is possibility. Because of the right, there is wrong, and because of the wrong, there is right... The 'this' is also the 'that.' The 'that' is also the 'this.' Is there really a distinction between 'that' and 'this?'... When 'this.' and 'that' have no opposites, there is the very axis of the Tao.

– Chang Tzu

Similar views were expressed by Abraham a Sancta Clara, a German Augustinian monk in the 17th century:

The man who dies before he dies, does not die when he dies.

Eastern religions and mediumistic reports indicate that one's mental, emotional and spiritual focus at the time of death may shape one's course in the afterlife, and that spiritual development continues after death.

Personal transpersonal and spiritual awareness are growing in the Western world. It is particularly satisfying to see increased awareness and sensitivity among caregivers in dealing with death and bereavement.

*Don't stand by my grave and weep,
For I am not there.
I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond's glint on snow,
I am the sunlight on ripened grain,
I am the gentle autumn's rain.
In the soft hush of the morning light
I am the swift bird in flight.
Don't stand by my grave and cry,
I am not there,
I did not die.*

Author unknown

Suggestions

Preparing for the end of our physical life

When we face our fears and deal with them, they no longer block our engagement with life.

Here are varieties of ways to do this.

- Knowing that we may pass over the divide at any time, each moment of physical life, each sensation, each interaction becomes a precious gift to be savored to the fullest...
- Learning about near-death experiences, reincarnation memories, and mediumistic experiences can help us get a sense of what to expect when we transition.
- Preparing a living will (aka *advance health directive*) is a help to family and friends – leaving instructions for how we wish to have our physical body addressed if our consciousness should no longer be sufficiently functional to make decisions on antibiotics, tube feedings and other life support systems.
- Appointing a proxy with power of attorney to make decisions that we may not have prepared for is helpful in several ways. In addition to providing for unexpected contingencies, this opens up discussions with family members and/or friends about end of life issues.
- Volunteering to sit with people who are making the transition can be a help to us as well as to them. Look for a *No One Dies Alone* program that you might join. Once people get over their discomforts and anxieties about this program, they report it is one of the most deeply satisfying experiences they have ever had. Many liken this to being present at a birth.
- When we live each day as though it may be our last, our last day in this lifetime will be as familiar to us as any other.

Bereavement as an opportunity for growth and renewal

Letting go of a person or of anything else important to us in our lives is a painful process. There is a truncation of relationships that have been a part of our lives, leaving a gap in our feelings, habits, energy fields and support systems. The usual process of grieving involves the following steps:

Shock – Feeling that we have been hit by an unexpected jolt of misfortune; feeling dazed, numb, confused, distractible, forgetful; having difficulty absorbing information, needing to be told things repeatedly; feeling as though we were in a dream.

Usual duration: intensely for minutes to hours fading over several days

Bargaining – Hoping against hope and reason that perhaps the loss is reversible, we may say, “Please, God, let this not be true” or “I pray that this didn’t really happen.”

Usual duration: several hours

Denial – Having difficulty absorbing that the loss occurred; wanting it to not have happened; saying to ourselves, “This didn’t really happen” or “This couldn’t have happened;” hoping and feeling, against all rational hope, that perhaps the loss has not really happened.

Usual duration: several hours to several days.

Pain/ sadness/ tears/ grief/ depression –There is an initial period of major hurt and sadness, with tears, distress over the loss and over many things that remind us of the loss, both large and small. This usually lasts for weeks, often for months. It may be difficult for us to get up in the morning. Our appetite may be seriously off and our sleep patterns disturbed. It may be difficult to concentrate and we may be distractible and forgetful at first. We may lack energy and motivation to do things, with a tendency to retreat inside our rooms and ourselves, feeling lethargic, numb, empty and lost. It may be difficult to socialize, and we may be impatient with others who are in a very different space from ourselves. We may feel that life is not worth living and have morbid thoughts of dying ourselves.

Gradually, the depression lifts and we begin to return to our normal selves. However, processing our grief is a roller coaster ride. There are deep dips into sadness, with increasing periods of normalcy or near-normalcy. The contrasts between the ups and downs may be very trying, if we begin to believe that we are well past the worst, but then are overcome with another dip into a dark hole. Knowing that this is the normal process of grief can be helpful, as we can anticipate that the roller coaster will take us back up, out of the sadness. Holidays and anniversaries, which remind us of the person who is no longer there,

Children under eight years old respond differently from adults. Prior to that age, most children cannot understand the finality of death. It may take about a month before they comprehend that the loss by death is

an irreparable and final one. This may put them 'out of phase' with the grieving of the rest of the family.

I recall a painfully poignant two year-old soldier's daughter whose father was killed in battle. She had known him more in his absence than in his presence in her life, speaking with him on the phone frequently from afar. After he died, she would play a pretend game of speaking with him on the phone – tearing the hearts of the rest of the family.

Usual duration: Several months of serious depression, resolving with ups and downs over a period of two or more years, but with occasional further dips after that, particularly on anniversary dates and holidays when we would have been together with the departed.

Anger– Angers of rational and irrational nature are expected: towards God for allowing our loss to happen; anger at someone who essentially abandoned us through their departure; and anger at ourselves for things said/ done or unsaid/ never done;

Usual duration: Several months

Guilt – Guilt over things said/ done or unsaid/ never done to or for the person who departed; guilt over our anger at that person or at God; and guilt and shame over not being able to function at our full capacities.

Usual duration: Several months

Reorganization/ Resolution – As we work through all of the stages of grief, we gradually come into a space of adapting to a world that is missing the person or other part of our life that we have lost. The more we are able to work through all of our feelings of grief, the easier and faster it seems we reach a place of resolution.

Depression, anger and guilt may alternate in any pattern and sequence. These, plus denial, may be worsened or prolonged when one has not viewed the body of the deceased, particularly if the loss was by disappearance and one cannot be certain of its finality - despite great odds against there having been an error in the report of loss or the reality of the death.

I helped a widow named Leah in psychotherapy who had lost within a period of only three weeks both her husband to a brain tumor and her only son who disappeared in a battle. Only a boot belonging to her son had been found after his position had taken a direct hit by a bomb. Over

the next two years Leah kept hoping she would hear news of her son's capture rather than his death. She was constantly angry at bus driver, postal clerks and other innocent people, even though she knew they hadn't done anything to deserve her anger. She had difficulty sleeping and had withdrawn into isolation, which was contrary to her prior sociability.

Leah was stuck in denial, depression and anger. Her grief was gradually relieved when she was helped to release the deep hurts and angers over her double loss, rather than displacing them towards anyone who crossed her path.

Suggestions

It helps to know the stages of grief and accept our normal grieving process

There are no two ways about it - grief is no fun. What helps to make it more tolerable, however, is to understand that we are going through a known process with recognized stages. We don't need to beat up on ourselves or feel guilty for having these feelings, and for having them erupt at odd times, unexpectedly, beyond our control. Knowing grief comes in waves is a help in dealing with the frustration of feeling we were doing better, only to slide back down into a black hole of hurt, anger, or guilt. Allowing our feelings to run their course, we also know we will come out the other side into resolution.

It helps to let out our feelings of grief

The greatest danger is that we may shut off and bury our feelings. Because grief is so painful and unpleasant, many people hold them in. 'Being strong' or 'being brave' and 'not being a crybaby' are common ways to avoid feeling the pain of the grief, and to protect others from feeling their pain at the loss. When we do this, the grief festers inside and often restricts us from getting anywhere near it. Our unconscious mind stashes the grief feelings in a dark closet and puts up a big sign on the door, "KEEP AWAY" - to remind itself not to stir up the unpleasant, painful emotions so we don't have to feel them. In addition, the unconscious mind also needs to remember what to stay away from in our lives - so that we don't stir up the buried memories and feelings. So, in small print, it adds at the bottom of the sign whatever it is we are to avoid. The unconscious mind commonly inserts - in the small print - "Don't get close to anyone, because they'll just die or leave you and

you'll end up grieving and feeling sad again." This is how people who buried their grief are more likely to end up being lonely or depressed or angry. The buried feelings keep wanting to be released and a lot of energy is wasted in keeping them buried, while their lives become distorted and impoverished through unconscious defenses.

Here are some healing ways to deal with our grief:

- If we stay with our feelings, letting them wash over us, they will dissipate much more quickly than if we fight them and push them away.
- Talking with others who are experiencing grief currently or have done so in the past, who can truly understand what we are experiencing, can be helpful to us and to them.

A problem shared is half a consolation.

Jewish saying

- Conversely, being patient with people who are uncomfortable with our grief can be a practice in acceptance and forgiveness. Those who have not traveled this path of tears often find that others who haven't known grief have little understanding or patience for our grief process. They are likely to make apparently callous statements and suggestions that may feel hurtful. For the most part, my experience has been that this is their own fear of death speaking, asking us to not upset their feelings.
- If we feel that our grief is reaching overwhelming proportions, counseling/ psychotherapy support can help us through to resolution. There are trauma-specific techniques that are easily learned, easily applied and highly effective, such as WHEE (Whole Health – Easily and Effectively, AKA the Wholistic Hybrid derived from EMDR and EFT) which I developed, as well as other, related approaches for treatment of stress. These can often relieve distress rapidly and deeply
- When we are having a particularly difficult time in dealing with grief, we may often discover that there is an earlier grief that was buried in the past that is preventing us from processing and releasing the feelings of the current grief. WHEE and related techniques can help equally well with buried feelings from many years earlier.
- Bereavement apparitions of the deceased, or communications through mediums may enable us to process unfinished business and to confirm

that life in spirit continues past the end of a physical life. As we saw in Chapter 6, two out of three people who have lost someone close to them report bereavement apparitions. Grief may thus become a doorway into direct, personal spiritual awareness.

- Allan Botkin and R. Craig Hogan report on a method for clearing traumas, which can include grief reactions, called the Induced After Death Communication (IADC). This method enables people to communicate directly with people who passed over, with whom we have had close relationships. (See details in Chapter 9.)

Forgiveness

We carry fears, angers and resentments from hurts we have experienced throughout our lives. Our little child self programmed us to beware of anyone or anything that hurt us, lest it might hurt us again. Even after we release the angers and resentments, the *beware* programs remain. Unconsciously, we may be programmed to stay away from anyone like a person who hurt us when we were one or five or twenty-five years old. This is how a little child writes protective programs on our inner, personal guidance system for managing our lives. This is how we end up having difficulties relating to other people, based on our past experiences.

So, after releasing fears, angers, resentments and hurts, we must also work through to a place where we can forgive others, and ourselves as well, and release the *beware* programs that can cripple our lives. This not only frees us from these shackles to old issues, it gives us a big energy boost because we are no longer investing so much of our unconscious awareness in scanning our environment for perceived dangers, in avoiding anything similar to whatever traumatized us in the past, and in putting up our interpersonal porcupine quills to prevent anyone or anything from getting anywhere near us, lest we be hurt yet again.

When we start to do put our guard down, our child programs will protest, "But we've protected you for so long! We've kept you safe by keeping you out of harm's way! It would be dangerous to stop being vigilant, when we were hurt so badly in the past!" Our inner child believes that if we forgive whoever hurt us, we will forget to watch out for anything similar in the future, and will be in danger of being hurt all over again.

Forgiving is not forgetting. Forgiving is letting go of our burden of stored resentments. By releasing these shackles to the past, we are freed to move forward, leaving our pains and suffering behind. Forgiving others doesn't mean we will then let them take advantage of us or hurt us again. Forgiving

enables us to stand firmly in a centered place in the present, relating to what *is* rather than responding to the present through the colored and distorted lenses that were ground in the past. Forgiveness allows us to choose our course with clarity. Forgiveness shifts us into a place of healing, from which we can respond appropriately to what is facing us now. Forgiveness allows us to be fully alive and present, able to interact with the world as it *is*, NOW.

When we have cleared the residues of anxieties, angers, fears, sadness and hurts that linger from our traumas, it is often surprisingly easy to find it within ourselves to forgive whoever wronged us. In many cases, we can see that we were not wronged intentionally. Even when malicious intent seems to have been clearly present, we may realize that any resentments we carry within us are poisoning our own lives, and therefore we are much better off releasing them. Such releases have been profoundly healing, even in cases of the most severe abuses and atrocities, even in war zones and the aftermaths of the horrors of genocide.

A word of caution, however, in developing *generic* forgiveness. I have seen many people who practice forgiveness as a principle of living, often through religious and meditative traditions. In many cases, this is a wonderfully cleansing and liberating practice. It may also be an aspect of a broader detachment, or non-attachment to all negativity, or even to all distractions from being ever-present in this moment, the only moment that is real. However, in some cases this is a form of spiritual bypass, in which we avoid confronting and releasing the hurts we have carried from traumas. Thus, being in a state of general forgiveness could leave us less fretful and vengeful, but still carrying hurts that lead us to avoid potentially rewarding portions of our lives – out of anticipation that we cannot trust others not to hurt us, as we had been hurt in the past.

Suggestions

Where traumas we experienced were not caused intentionally, releasing our negative feelings with WHEE, psychotherapy or any other form of healing may be sufficient to bring us to a point of forgiveness. This may require an investment of time and effort over many months, perhaps even years. Those who have traveled this path attest to the enormous value and benefits of the efforts.

When we still have difficulties reaching forgiveness, it may be that we are wishing at least to have an acknowledgment of the wrongs that were done against us by those who hurt us, and of our suffering, if not a full apology.

Communicating with those who have wronged us to express the suffering we have experienced can be helpful, even if they do not respond as we might hope they would, or do not respond at all. In doing this, it may be helpful to have the support of a therapist to assist us in dealing with our feelings, or of a reconciliation expert to mediate a session with the parties who have wronged us.

Where direct communications are impossible, then writing a letter can help us release some of these feelings. Even if we cannot deliver such a letter (as when those who wronged us are no longer alive), the writing or journaling of our experiences can be cathartic.

Another approach is with gestalt therapy, in which we voice our feelings out loud to the imagined person(s) who wronged us. We can alternate speaking in their place, while continuing to alternate to the responses we give on their behalf, expressing our feelings, in turn. This process often brings out much deeper understandings on our part of our hurts and how we handle them. This may work better with the help of a gestalt therapist.

Where our traumas were the result of deliberate harm, forgiveness may be much more challenging. In such situations, it is extremely helpful to share the stories of our experiences, our feelings and our suffering with others who have been through similar traumas. The help of a group therapist or a reconciliation expert can contribute enormously to our success in such groups. Forgiveness is possible, even with the worst imaginable traumas. The broadest healings occur when oppressors and oppressed can sit together, hear each others' stories, ask for forgiveness on the one side, and grant forgiveness on the other. Raymond Helmick and Rodney Petersen have an excellent collection of reports of ways in which this process can work.

Acceptance

*God, grant me the Serenity to accept the people I cannot change, the
Courage to change the one I can, and the Wisdom to know it's me.*

– Rev. Tessie Mandeville

Acceptance is broadly acknowledged in many religious teachings as a major path to healing. For absolute clarity, let me state that I am not suggesting here we should be totally and uncritically accepting of the religious teachings as interpreted by religious authorities. As with other topics in *Personal Spirituality*, I am speaking of our personal acceptance of our place in the

world – in all of our multifaceted interdigitations with our inner self; our relationships with other people and the environment; and the Infinite Source.

With acceptance of oneself and others, there develops a compassion for all beings and a sense of connectedness to the All. Many people are surprised to find that accepting themselves is actually harder than accepting others. This is a lesson in owning one's own issues and not pointing a finger before we have cleared the vessel through which we want our healing to flow.

CHAPTER 14. Taking our spirituality out into the world

Before Enlightenment chop wood carry water, after Enlightenment, chop wood carry water. What's the difference?

– Zen saying

Developing our personal spirituality brings more light into the world. Each of us is a pixel on the screen of a vast reality. So ginormous are the inner and outer universes of our existence that we mortals cannot perceive, much less comprehend, the total picture – from our vantage of being a little pixel on an infinitely large screen. The best we can do is to be the clearest and brightest pixel we can possibly muster ourselves to be, and to encourage all who are around us to be the clearest and brightest pixels that they can be. Gradually, the screen will get brighter and brighter.

The healing light of personal spirituality we bring into this world is not just for ourselves and those people who are close to us. We are truly living in a global village, where all of us are interrelated to all other living beings, and to Gaia, our planet, with ever increasing clarity of our interdependences. The clothing we purchase is often produced from fibers grown, processed into cloth, and manufactured into clothing on the other side of the world. The pesticides and fertilizers we spray on our lawns and gardens, and the medications and other pollutants we flush down our toilets wash into the rivers and oceans, poisoning living organisms and plants world-wide. This may occur directly, through the chemicals we, ourselves use, or indirectly, through the encouragements and inducements we offer other countries to aspire to our lifestyles and follow in our ways. The pollutants we emit into the air in our community and our country contribute to global warming that will influence every living organism on this planet.

Our planet is in crisis. If we do not change our ways of dealing with each other and with the environment, life as we know it will not survive on our planet. Personal spiritual awareness is also an awareness of our interconnectedness with the earth, the waters, the air, and with every living organism that contributes to the marvelous chorus of life that sings our planetary spiritual halleluya.

Once you have adopted such an attitude of infinite interconnectedness, you naturally want to liberate not just yourself but all beings from suf

fering. The Buddha calls this 'the conception of the spirit of enlightenment.' It is the soul of the Bodhisattva, the person who dedicates him- or herself to helping all beings achieve total happiness. When you open to the inevitability of your infinite interconnectedness with other sensitive beings, you develop compassion. You learn to feel empathy for them, to love them, to want their happiness. You want to keep them from suffering, and you do so just as if they were a part of you. You don't think your behavior makes you special. You don't congratulate yourself for helping others, just as you won't congratulate yourself for healing your own leg when you hurt it. It is natural for you to love your leg because it is one with you, and so it is natural for you to love others. You would certainly never harm another being. As the great Buddhist adapt Shantideva (8th century Indian sage) wrote, "How wonderful it would be when all beings experience each other as limbs on the one body of life!"

– Robert Thurman

It may appear daunting to consider undertaking the healing transformation of our planet. We actually have the resources to do so. If we allocated for healing of our planet all of the monies that the people of the nations of the world (the US being the leader among them) appropriate for war, we could utterly change the course of destruction we are pursuing.

It is not because things are difficult that we do not dare; it is because we do not dare that they are difficult.

– Seneca

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's 2006 Year Book on Armaments, Disarmament and International Security for 2005:

- World military expenditure in 2005 is estimated to have reached \$1,001 billion at constant (2003) prices and exchange rates, or \$1,118 billion in current dollars;

- World military expenditure in 2005 presents a real terms increase of 3.4 per cent since 2004, and of 34 per cent over the 10-year period 1996–2005;

- The USA, responsible for about 80 per cent of the increase in 2005, is the principal determinant of the current world trend, and its military expenditure now accounts for almost half of the world total...

CHAPTER 15. My personal spiritual awareness

The greater danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it. But that it is too low... and we reach it.

– Michelangelo

I have been disaffected with much of what I experience in conventional religious practices. I find many who are similarly disappointed with what they experience as unmeaningful, rote rituals and traditions devoid of spirituality in their churches and synagogues. Others are satisfied with their religious teachings and practices and draw deep and satisfying nurturance for their spiritual selves within these institutions.

Any religion... is forever in danger of petrification into mere ritual and habit, though ritual and habit be essential to religion.

– T.S. Eliot

[E]very form of authoritarian or highly-organized society is inimical to individual spiritual evolution, because it prevents the individual person from expressing and therefore facing his true self from which experience alone comes the desire for his own spiritual growth.

– Joan Cooper

In contrast with this, my personal spiritual experiences have been wonderfully enriching. I was raised in a non-observant Jewish home, with religion experienced more as a cultural and historical tradition than a spiritual influence. This was reinforced by living in the secular sector of Israel for four years as a child and for six years as a parent. For most Israelis the Bible is just their local history book. It is marvelously grounding, however, to live in a land in which one's people put down historical roots over many centuries. My parents preferred to observe the 'Thou shalt's' of Judaism and to ignore most of the religious (not the social) 'Thou shalt not's.' During my university and medical school years I became a Freudian agnostic, believing that God was the creation of man's reluctance to give up parental figures and to deny the finality of death.

A long series of life lessons gradually shifted my perceptions and beliefs, including: receiving psychotherapy, healing and psychic readings; being in several long-term, committed relationships, particularly my current one, with Mary Ann Wallace; being a parent and grandparent; reading omnivorously; being a psychotherapist, healer, lecturer and workshop

leader; and studying and participating in healing research. Many others, like myself, quench our thirst for spirituality at the deep wells of our inner being through meditative practices and may imbibe from the springs of experience of several cultures. I find that participation in a group is helpful but that no one group seems to be just right for me all of the time. It is difficult for me to stay in touch with that edge of beingness that connects me with the All. At times repetitive rituals help; at other times these seem too lullingly familiar and a change of routine brings me back to that connection with my higher self. Giving and receiving healing definitely help me to connect with that higher level of being which I find deeply nurturing and satisfying.

I resonate with the views expressed by many spiritual teachers in Native American traditions. For instance, Carl Hammerschlag, a psychiatrist who has worked for many years with Native Americans, writes:

Indians have a very different concept of where you worship. The whole Earth is the temple. Any place you stand is a church. The tipi is a nestling enclosure on the Earth Mother's breast, a place of sharing among a small group. Here each can worship at his or her own time, as the heart directs, in his or her own language.

I sing my Jewish songs in the tipi, and I wear my father's prayer shawl, the one he wore at his bar mitzvah in Germany. My Indian friends say that it does not matter in what language you sing; there are always at least two people who understand – you and the Creator.

I do not recommend such a path for everyone. It may be that it is actually good only for a minority of people, perhaps those who are more inner-directed. I do recommend that people seek to make spirituality a part of their lives. I believe, along with many other healers, that the development of spirituality is the most important contribution of healing and that the physical effects of healing are of secondary importance.

I bring my spirituality into the therapy room as it feels appropriate. At first I did so with great hesitation. I was anxious that clients would find this odd and uncomfortable. The opposite has almost always been the case. People welcome discussions of their spiritual lives and draw great inspiration and strength from their inner wisdom, markedly facilitating their psychotherapy. This does not mean I abandon the many and varied more conventional approaches in my practice. As detailed in *Healing Research*, vols. I and II, wholistic practice addresses body, mind, emotions, relationships and spirit.

The physical body is the biofeedback mechanism of the soul.

– Len Wisneski

My personal belief is that there is in each of us the ability to perceive directly a connection, through our 'higher selves,' with something vast, eternal and awesome that is beyond words. The *process* of searching for this may be as helpful as the *content* of anything we may 'discover' or be able to translate into linear terminology.

I am your life. You are my expression. I am the vine, you are the branches. I am the consciousness, you are my focus. There is no separation, except in time, perhaps, and in my presence, time does not exist. I have the clarity now, while you sleep yet in darkness. But I am calling you earnestly to awaken. I would share with you the totality of my perceptions.

– Ken Carey

My personal belief is that we come into this physical world for spiritual lessons. These lessons challenge us through all levels of our existence: the physical, emotional, mental, social, ecological and the more directly spiritual.

*There is a phantom
in this painful dream
of who we wish we were -
the imagined self.
Don't be fooled
by a thought
into believing (another thought)
you are less
than God.*

– Stephen Levine

In summary

I hope that as more people connect with their personal spirituality, we will bring more healing to ourselves, our communities and our planet.

I am pleased that you, dear reader, are taking on this challenge personally. I wish you good healings.

We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.
– Winston Churchill

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Daniel J. Benor, MD, is engaged in an ongoing search for ever more ways to peel the onion of life's resistances, to reach the knowing (with the inner knowing of truth which has the feel of rightness) that we are all cells in the body of the Infinite Source.

While his unique area of expertise is spiritual awareness and healing, his principal work is through wholistic healing – addressing spirit, relationships, mind, emotions and body. He is using WHEE, a potent self-healing method, with children and parents (many foster parents) who are dealing with PTSD and other forms of stress, psychological and physical pain, low self-esteem, cravings and other issues.

Daniel J. Benor, MD, ABHM is a wholistic psychiatric psychotherapist. His psychotherapy blends elements from intuitive and spiritual awareness, spiritual healing (as in Reiki and Therapeutic Touch), WHEE - Wholistic Hybrid derived from Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) and Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), transactional analysis, gestalt therapy, hypnotherapy, meditation, imagery and relaxation (psychoneuroimmunology), dream analysis, and other approaches. Dr. Benor has taught this spectrum of methods internationally for 25 years to people involved in wholistic, intuitive, and spiritual approaches to caring, health and personal development.

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