

The most important book I have read. I study it like a Bible.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

THE
GOSPEL
ACCORDING TO
JESUS

A New Testament for our Time

If you know me in your heart, you will embody my teaching with an inner certainty. You will know that love is the only answer to your problems.

When you give love you cannot help but receive it. Indeed, the more you give, the more you receive. There is no deficiency of love in the world. Love lives in the heart of every human being. If it is trusted, it has the power to uplift consciousness and change the conditions under which you live.

Love is ultimate reality. It is the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega. It emanates from itself, expresses itself and rests in itself. Whether rising or falling, waxing or waning, ebbing or flowing, it never loses touch with what it is.

I may not be present here in a body, but I am present in your love. When you find the love in your heart, you know that I am with you. It is that simple.

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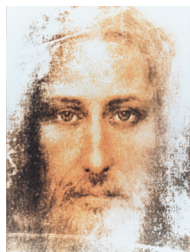
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A New Testament for Our Time

Mini-Ebook Version

BY PAUL FERRINI

*Words and concepts
cannot open your heart.
Only love can open
your heart.*



Introduction

Mine is a teaching of love, not of fear. Jesus

The great majority of my teachings have come down to you intact. However, there are some errors and distortions that need to be corrected. Mine is a teaching of love, not of fear. The language of fear cannot be used in any testament that comes from me.

Do not be surprised that some—even those as wise as my apostles—would have you believe in a vindictive God who punishes you for your sins. I assure you that they are mistaken. Our God is not an angry God, but a compassionate One who helps you to find forgiveness for your errors and those of others. By learning compassion and practicing forgiveness, you move through your fear, correct your errors and relinquish your judgments. Gradually, your shame is washed away in a baptism of acceptance and love.

Please just do your part. Ask forgiveness from all whom you have harmed in thought, word or deed, extend forgiveness to others who ask it from you, and be willing also to forgive yourself. God will do the rest.

All of you have come here to learn to love without conditions. When you can love yourself unconditionally, it is not difficult to love others. When you can accept others with all

of their faults, it is not difficult to accept your own.

Those who misunderstand and misinterpret my words would have you place me above you. Please do not do this. Whoever places me on a pedestal also places me on the cross, for you cannot have one without the other. Therefore, do not address me or anyone else as less than or greater than you, for to do so is to create the one and only sin against the son of Man.

I teach and have always taught the Spiritual Law of Equality. Adhere to this teaching and all that separates you from one another will fall away and you will rest in the Heart of God where all beings are equally loved and blessed.

I do not teach one thing to one person and something else to another. My teaching is the same for all of you. Think well, therefore when anyone asks you to judge, blame, libel, cheat, harm, or reject any of your brothers and sisters in my name. I tell you this is a blasphemy and an inversion of truth. It can lead only to suffering.

I have told you once and I will tell you again, all are welcome in my house: rich and poor, black and white, straight and gay, women and men, children and old people, tall and short, skinny and fat, healthy and sick, the able-bodied and the handicapped.

I do not have one church for those who live in their minds and another for those who live in their hearts. I have one church for all and the door to that church is always open to anyone who wants to enter. Whoever closes the door or blocks the way to any brother or sister takes my name in vain and distorts my teaching.

Do not heed the words of such a person but observe his actions to see if they are consistent with what he says. As I have told you before, you would be wise to examine the tree before you eat the fruit dangling from its branches.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JESUS

The door to my church and the door to my heart is always open to you, dear brother and sister. Indeed, I welcome you even as I hear your footsteps approaching. If I so honor and care for you, how could our God, who is far greater than I, do otherwise. No, my friends, God's love for you is more profound than any love you will ever know. Even my love for you pales by comparison.

We are both children of a loving God. Of that you may be certain. All that God has given to me will be given to you when you are ready to receive it. By then it will not matter from whose hands you receive the Gift, for all who serve Him share His love for you and extend His blessing to you now and for all time.

Do not despair, dear ones. Open your hearts and feel my Love for you. Take my hand whenever you need it. Although at times it seems that you walk this path alone, know that I am at your side whenever you call to me.

Godspeed on your journey. Soon you will be home. Until then, know I am holding this place for you.



CHAPTER ONE

My Teaching

Words and concepts cannot open your heart.

Only love can open your heart.

It is nearly 2,000 years since my birth and my teaching, which was once like a raging stream, has shrunk to barely a trickle of water. You have rationalized me and put me in my place—an exalted place perhaps—but a distant one. You have placed me above you where I will not challenge you. By making me a deity, an only son of God, you excuse yourself from having to live up to my example. Yet my example is the heart of my teaching. If you do not try to emulate me, what is the meaning of your belief in me?

Mine is not an intellectual teaching. It is a practical one. “Love your neighbor” is not an abstract concept. It is a simple, compelling idea that invites you to practice. I did not invite you to an evening of discourse and argument. I did not ask you to profess or debate the scriptures. I asked you to do what you find so difficult to do: to go beyond your limited concept of self. Any of the practices I gave to you will keep you busy for a lifetime. Although they are simple to understand, their challenge lies in the practice.

If I died for your sins, then there is nothing left for you to do. Why then not ascend to heaven on the strength of your belief in me?

I will tell you why. Because, in spite of your belief, you are not happy. You are not at peace. You have placed me above you where I cannot touch you.

Take me down from the pedestal, my brother or sister, and place me at your side where I belong. I am your absolute, unconditional equal. What I have done, you too will do, and more. You will not be saved by my thoughts and actions, but by your own. Unless you become the Christ, peace will not come to the world. If you would see me as king, then king must you yourself be.

Do not put this distance between us, for I am no different from you. Whatever you are—a beggar or thief, a holy man or a king—that I am too. There is no pedestal I have not been lifted upon, nor any gutter I have not lain in. It is only because I have touched the heart of both joy and pain that I can walk through the doors of compassion.

I was born to a simple woman in a barn. She was no more a virgin than your mother was. You make her special for the same reason that you make me special -- to put distance between us, to claim that what I did you cannot do.

If my life has any meaning to you at all, you must know that I do not claim a special place. Neither Mary nor I is more spiritual than you. We are like you in every way. Your pain is our pain. Your joy is our joy. If this were not true, we could not come to teach.

Do not hold us at arm's length. Embrace us as your equal. Mary could have been your mother. I could have been your son.

DEEDS NOT WORDS

The language of love is not a language of words.

Anyone who practices being loving returns to the divine home. It does not matter what path s/he takes or what s/he calls it.

No one way is better than another. You will not get home faster if you believe in me than you will if you believe in Krishna or Buddha. The man or woman who loves the most makes the most progress. That is the simple truth.

Religions, sects, dogmas are nothing but obstacles on the journey home. Anyone who thinks he has the one and only truth builds his house on quicksand. It will not take long before he discovers that his pride, narrow-mindedness, and lack of tolerance toward others were the cause of his undoing.

If you are a loving person, does it matter if you are Jewish, or Muslim, or Taoist? That love expresses itself regardless of what you believe. The language of love is not a language of words. A few simple words and a heartfelt gesture are enough to convey your love and acceptance of another person.

Words and concepts will not open your heart. Only love can open your heart. Practice my teaching of love and forgiveness. Practice giving and receiving love in all of your affairs—in your family, with your friends, in your community, even with strangers.

Do not let the differences in your beliefs, your culture, or the color of your skin keep you apart from each other. For these things are just the external mantle covering the truth of who you are. If you want to know the truth, you must learn to look beyond appearances. You must learn to look not just with your eyes, but with your heart. When you do

that, you will not see an adversary, but a brother, a sister, a friend.

When you look with the heart, you feel your friend's pain and confusion. You feel compassion for the universal experience of suffering, which you both share. From that compassion, love is born—not the love that wants to fix or change others—but the love that accepts, affirms, reaches out, befriends and empowers others.

Love is the only door to a spiritual life. Without love, there are just dogmas and rigid, fearful beliefs. Without love, there is no compassion or charity. Those who judge others, preach to them, and seek to redeem them are just projecting their own fear and inadequacy. They use the words of religion as a substitute for the love they are unable to give or receive. Many of those who are most forlorn and cut off from love live in the shadow of the pulpit and mount the steps of judgment every Sunday to spread the message of their own fear. Do not judge them, for they are in their own painful way crying out for love. But do not accept the guilt they would lay at your feet. It is not yours.

Those who live a genuinely spiritual life—regardless of the tradition they follow—are centered in their love for God and their fellow beings. When they meet, they have only good wishes and praises for one another. For them, labels mean nothing. For those who practice their faith, God is the only King of Kings, and men and women, no matter what they believe, are absolute, unconditional equals. All are equally loved and valued by God. There are no outcasts, no heathens.

I have said it before and I will say it again: religious dogma, self-righteousness, and false pride create division, ostracism, and alienation. They are the tools of judgment, not of love.

My disciples learn to look upon all that happens with an open heart and an open mind. They grow increasingly willing to surrender their narrow beliefs and prejudices. They refrain from condemning themselves or others for the mistakes they make, but try to learn from these mistakes so that they will not repeat them.

My disciples grow more respectful and intimate in their relationship with God every day. They learn to let the indwelling God lead the way in their lives. Thinking of me and attending to my example helps them do this.

The path I have laid out for you is an open one. Anyone who wants to can follow it. No prerequisites are necessary -- no baptisms, confessions or communions. Nothing external can prevent you from embracing my teaching.

But this does not mean that you will be ready to walk this path. If you are still holding onto dogma or creeds, you will not be able to take the first step. If you are convinced that you or anyone else is evil or guilty, you cannot step forth. If you think you already have the answers, you may begin to walk, but you will be on a different path.

My path is open to all, yet few will follow it. Few are willing to give up what they think they know to learn what they know not yet. This is how it was when I first walked the path, and it is how it is today. Many are called, but few answer the call.

WHO ARE MY DISCIPLES?

By teaching love, they are filled with peace.

A teaching lives only to the extent that people understand it and live it. It is like a musical composition. It doesn't come alive until someone performs it.

My disciples practice love and forgiveness every day. They are not perfect in their practice. But they are sincere. They make mistakes, come to recognize those mistakes, and endeavor to learn from them.

My disciples are wise, but they do not parade their wisdom. They do not seek to attract attention to themselves, but work to empower others in their thoughts, their speech and their actions.

My disciples do not put obstacles in the way of those who would enter the path to truth. They hold the door open to all who are ready to walk through it. They live the love they talk about. They model the teaching.

My disciples know that I did not come to die for their sins. They know I came to recall them to their innocence and to find that innocence in others. My disciples see the light in each soul. They do not focus on the darkness, for they know that darkness is ultimately not real. They focus on the indwelling goodness of all beings, for evil is but the absence of something that can never be totally taken away.

My disciples do not focus on what is missing or what needs to be corrected. They focus on what is always there and can never be taken away. They focus on what is right and what is good. They do not look for weaknesses and thus they instill strength. They do not look for wounds, and so they help people find their gratitude.

My disciples know that every unkindness that one person does to another is done because there is an apparent lack of love in that person's life. One who attacks others cannot know that s/he is loved.

My disciples teach love by loving and accepting others as they are. In all their actions, they teach others that they are worthy of love. By teaching love, they are filled with peace. And the more peaceful they feel, the more loving they can be.

My disciples know that people often forget the truth about themselves. They become lost in their roles and responsibilities. They take each other for granted. They forget to open their hearts. My disciples do not chastise people for forgetting. They simply remind them gently, over and over again, that they are capable of giving and receiving love.

My disciples reinforce the good and the true, and let illusion and falsehood fall away by themselves. They do not berate people for making mistakes, for that would just reinforce the guilt they feel. Instead, they praise people for having the willingness to learn and grow from the mistakes they make.

A TEACHING OF EQUALITY

*I challenge you to accept each person
who comes before you as a Child of God.*

Mine is a teaching of absolute, unconditional equality. I call upon you to become the embodiment of love, non-judgment and compassion. I challenge you to accept each person who comes before you as a Child of God, no less perfect than you or I am. I challenge you to give to each other the love and freedom that God has given to you.

If you want to be a vehicle for love, you must practice both giving and receiving, leading and following, speaking and listening, acting and refraining from action. Love flows to and from you naturally as you accept the polarities of your experience, integrate them, and realize your wholeness.

You are a child of God, as am I. As a man, you must emulate the father and embrace the qualities of the mother. As a woman, you must emulate the mother and embrace

the qualities of the father. Just as God is neither male nor female, but both together, so are you a synthesis of male and female qualities within a particular body/mind vehicle.

Women have an equal place in my teaching. Those who have denied women their rightful place in my church have twisted and distorted my teaching. Gays and lesbians, blacks, Asians, Hispanics, fundamentalists, Buddhists, Jews, even lawyers and politicians all have a place in the community of faith. Everyone is welcome. No one can be excluded. And all who participate in the community must have the opportunity to serve in leadership positions.

My teaching has never been exclusive or hierarchical. It cannot be used to justify any form of discrimination, inequality or injustice. Those of you who attempt to use my teaching in this way are distorting it and misusing it. You have taken the house of worship and made it into a prison of fear and guilt. It is time for you to repent from your unkind actions and words. It is time for you to make amends to those whom you have injured or judged unfairly.

Your mistakes do not condemn you unless you insist on holding onto them. Let them go. You can grow. You can change. You can be wiser than you once were. You can stop being a mouthpiece for fear and become a spokesperson for forgiveness and love.



CHAPTER TWO

The Core Issue

*You are using everyone in your experience as a mirror
to show you what you believe about yourself.*

Like all your brothers and sisters, you suffer from a basic sense of inadequacy and unworthiness. You feel that you have made terrible mistakes which will sooner or later catch up with you. You expect to be punished for your sins and are waiting for the shoe to drop.

These unresolved issues of self-worth are the conditions of your embodiment. In other words, you are here to work them out. You selected your parents to exacerbate your shame so that you could become conscious of it. Thus, blaming them for your problems will not help you remove the conditions you have placed on love.

Seeking someone special to provide the love your parents weren't able to provide will not help either. Don't be surprised if the mate you choose is the perfect embodiment of the parent with whom you most need to heal. Your life is set-up so that you will come face to face with your wounds. Parents, spouses and children are here to help you see your need for healing, and you are performing the same function in their lives.

Looking for unconditional love in a world of conditions must inevitably fail. Since all your brothers and sisters are acting out of shame-based patterns, they cannot offer you the love you know that you deserve, nor can you offer it to them. The best that you can do is raise each other's awareness of the love that is necessary and begin taking responsibility for giving it to yourself.

If you do not take responsibility for bringing love to your own wounds, you will not move out of the vicious cycle of blame and shame. Your feelings of rage, hurt and betrayal, all of which seem justified, just fuel the fire of interpersonal conflict and continue to reinforce your unconscious belief that you are unlovable.

You must learn to see the extent of your own self-hatred. Until you look in the mirror and see your own beliefs reflected there, you will be using every brother or sister in your experience as a mirror to show you what you believe about yourself. While this practice may eventually produce awareness of the pattern, it is not the shortest or the easiest way home, since there is always the tendency to think that what you see is somebody else's lesson.

If you want to step outside the vicious psychology of the world, you must stop the game of projection. It is ironic, indeed, but at the very instant at which you are proclaiming your innocence at your brother's expense, you are also reinforcing your unconscious shame and inferiority.

There is no way out of the circle of blame but to stop blaming. Yet, be prepared. If you would step off the wheel of suffering, you may find that you aren't very popular. Those who don't join in the world's game of projection are the very first to be attacked. If you learned anything from my life, you must have learned this.

THE FUTILITY OF PUNISHMENT

You cannot love in an unloving way.

You can't be right and attack what's wrong.

In human society there is a right and a wrong. Those who do right are rewarded and those who do wrong are punished. This is how it has always been.

My teaching threatens this basic assumption. At the most superficial level it challenges the idea that wrongs should be punished. In the face of the call for retribution, I have stood and will continue to stand for forgiveness.

At a deeper level, my teaching challenges the very idea that someone should be condemned by his behavior. If someone acts wrongly, it is because he thinks thoughts that are false. If he can realize the untruth of his thinking, he can change his behavior. And it is in the interest of society to help him do this. But if punishment is brought, his false ideas will be reinforced, and guilt will be added to them.

You have heard the expression "two wrongs do not make a right." That is the essence of my teaching. All wrongs must be corrected in the right manner. Otherwise correction is attack.

To seek to overpower or to argue with a false idea is to strengthen it. That is the way of violence. My way, on the other hand, is nonviolent. It demonstrates the answer in its approach to the problem. It brings love, not attack, to the ones in pain. Its means are consistent with its ends.

To make wrong is to teach guilt, and perpetuate the belief that pain and suffering are necessary. To make right is to teach love and demonstrate its power to overcome all suffering. To put it simply, you are never right to make wrong, or wrong to make right. To be right, make right.

You cannot love in an unloving way. You can't be right

and attack what's wrong. Error must be undone. And since the root of all error is fear, only the undoing of fear will bring correction.

Love is the only response that undoes fear. If you don't believe this, try it. Love any person or situation that evokes fear in you and the fear will disappear. This is true, not so much because love is an antidote to fear, but because fear is "the absence of love." It therefore cannot exist whenever love is present.

LOVE WITHOUT CONDITIONS

*One who loves without conditions
places no limits on his freedom or on anyone else's.*

You have learned conditional love from people whose love for you was compromised by their own guilt and fear. These have been your role models. You need not be ashamed of this. You need only be aware of it as a fact.

From the time you were an infant, you were conditioned to value yourself only when people responded positively to you. You learned that your self-worth was established externally. That fundamental error has perpetuated itself throughout your life.

Your parents' experience was no different from yours. Your children's experience may be similar. All of you need to heal from the same wounds. All trespasses/violations must be made conscious and the emotions attached to them must be released. This is the way that all wounded beings move from the experience of conditional love to the experience of love without conditions.

In the process of healing, you learn to give yourself the unconditional love you never received from your biological

parents. In this process you are re-parented, not by other authority figures, but by the Source of Love inside yourself.

Learning to give love to the wounded child within begins to reverse your belief that your self-worth must be based on how others respond to you. Slowly you retrain yourself to value yourself as you are, here and now, without conditions. No one else can do this for you. People can assist and encourage, but no one can teach you how to love yourself. That is the work of each individual soul.

Each soul comes into physical experience intent to grapple with these issues of self-worth. However, very early on in the soul's sojourn here conditions are placed on its natural ability to love and include others in its experience.

Reversing these conditions is essential. If the soul leaves the physical world believing that it is the victim of its experience here, it will be drawn back again to unlearn that belief. However, if the soul awakens to the truth that its worth is not dependent on anything or anyone outside its mind or experience, it will establish itself in the Source of Love and awaken from the dream of abuse.

Awakening from abuse means rejecting the false belief that you are not lovable as you are and learning to bring love to the parts of yourself that feel unloved or unworthy. As you do this, you attract others into your life who are able to love you without conditions.

Your attempt to find love outside yourself always fails, because you cannot receive from another something you haven't given to yourself. When you withhold love from yourself, you attract others into your life who are doing the same thing.

The experience of unconditional love begins in your heart, not in someone else's. Don't make your ability to love yourself conditional on someone else's ability to love you. Don't place

your faith in the conditions that surround love or in the form in which it presents itself. For these are impermanent and subject to the vicissitudes of everyday life.

Real love does not change. It exists independently of the form through which it expresses. The Source of this eternal, omnipresent, formless Love is within you. This is where your faith must be placed, for this Love is as certain as anything you will ever know. Once it is firmly established in your heart, you will never need to look for happiness outside of yourself.

People will come and go in your life. Some people will treat you well. Others will treat you unkindly. You will accept the love that is there and see lack of love for what it is, a cry for help from one who is hurting. You will encourage others to find the Source of love within as you did, knowing fully that you cannot fix their little problems. The tragedy of their lives can be addressed only by their willingness to look within their own hearts and minds.

One who loves without conditions places no limits on his freedom nor on anyone else's. He does not try to keep love, for to try to keep it is to lose it. Love is a gift that must constantly be given as it is asked for in each situation. And the giver always knows when and to whom the gift is to be given.

There is nothing complicated about the act of love. It becomes complicated only when one starts to withhold love, and then it ceases to be love that one offers.

One who loves unconditionally does not love in degrees or with strings attached. He does not search for someone special to love. He loves everyone who stands before him. One person is no more worthy or unworthy of his love than another. This is the kind of love that I offer you and that I ask you to extend to others.

Love takes no hostages. It makes no bargains. It is not compromised by fear. Indeed, where love is present, fear with all its myriad conditions cannot be.

OPENING THE DOOR

I am the door to love without conditions.

When you walk through, you too will be the door.

To bring attention to any person or situation, you cannot have an agenda of your own. If you have expectations of yourself, of another, or of the situation in general, you cannot be fully attentive in that moment.

Your ability to be attentive depends on having an open mind, a mind that is free of judgment and free of expectation; it depends on having an open heart, a heart filled with compassion for yourself and others. It means that you see and treat others as equals and understand that your well being and theirs are one and the same.

Having an open mind and an open heart opens the door to love. But this is a door that opens and closes. When it closes, one needs to be patient and forgiving, or the door will not open again.

One needs to feel not only the presence of love, but its absence as well. Feeling its absence, one learns to listen, and to soften in the heart. Feeling separate from others, one learns to look for the subtle judgments that are being made. The shift from judgment to acceptance, from separation to empathy is the essence of healing.

Being a healer means accepting your inherent capacity to be free of conflict, free of guilt, free of judgment or blame. If you accept this capacity in yourself, you will demonstrate miracles in your life just as I did.

Healing is not only possible, it is necessary. Every one of you is a healer of your own perceived injuries and injustices, and a witness to the power of the miracle. Healing is your only purpose here. The sooner you realize it the better.

Please remember that all authentic spiritual practice begins with the cultivation of love for and acceptance of yourself. Don't try to love other people before you learn to love yourself. You won't be able to do it.

Be patient and compassionate with yourself. Take small steps. Begin healing your own thoughts and feelings. Every time you heal a judgmental thought or feeling of separation, it is felt by every mind and heart in the universe. Your healing belongs not just to you, but to all beings.

When you come to peace, world peace becomes immanent. If you have a responsibility to others it is only this one: that you come to peace in your own heart and mind.

An open heart and an open mind are the door that opens to love's presence. Even when the door is closed, it bids you open it. Even when you are judging and feeling separate from another, love calls to you from within.

I have told you that, no matter how many times you have refused to enter the sanctuary, you have only to knock and the door will be opened to you. I have said to you "ask, and it shall be given you," but you refuse to believe me. You think that someone is counting your sins, your moments of indecision or recalcitrance, but it is not true. You are the only one counting.

I say to you, brother, "stop counting, stop making excuses, stop pretending that the door is locked. I am here at the threshold. Reach out and take my hand and we will open the door and walk through together."

I am the door to love without conditions. When you walk through, you too will be the door.



CHAPTER THREE

Integrity

*The potter is not defined by the clay,
but by what he chooses to do with it.*

Integrity is defined as the “quality or state of being complete or undivided.” While you aspire to have integrity, many of you do not feel either complete or undivided. You feel discouraged when you look within and your search for happiness with others exacerbates your deepest wounds.

There are no magical fixes for this condition. It is the raw material of life which has been given to you to transform. You must mold it and craft it into a work of art.

The clay gets molded by your willingness to stay with and in your process. In your struggle, and in your surrender, the clay gets molded. The work of art is offered, torn apart, and offered once again. At some point, you know it is finished and you can work on it no more. Then you walk away from it and, before you realize it, more clay is given into your hands. It has a different consistency, a different potential. It brings new challenges.

Integrity is a universal gift. Everyone has it. It is part of the clay itself. Whatever you build with your life will stand

up. It will be there for you to reflect on and for others to see.

You may choose to leave it standing or to tear it down. That is your choice. Others may gawk and say unkind things. That is their choice. None of it means anything.

There is no right and wrong in this process. You cannot say that what one person builds with his life is less valuable than what another person builds. All you can say in truth is that you prefer what one person has built to what another has built.

Integrity is not something you have to earn. It is essential to who you are. There is no one here who does not have integrity, just as there is no one here who does not deserve love.

Of course, there are plenty of people who don't think they have integrity. And they have the unfortunate habit of trying to find their wholeness by demanding the time, attention, or possessions of others. These people are not evil. They are just confused. They don't know that their life is a work of art. They don't know that they are master sculptors. They think that they got a lousy hand.

One day they will realize that they got the perfect hand. And then they will start to work with it consciously and energetically. Until then, they are playing at being victims. They are playing at being broken, unhealed, unwhole.

A black person confined to a wheel chair may not feel whole, but he has no less integrity than anyone else. He has not been given inferior clay. There are no accidents in this life. Nobody got anybody else's clay.

You see the problem is not existential. Integrity is there in each one of you. The problem is that you believe you are not whole. You believe that you need to be fixed or that you can fix someone else. You feel a false sense of responsibility for others and you do not take enough responsibility for

yourself. You are driven by desire, greed, guilt and fear. You attack, defend, and then try to repair the damage. Of course, it doesn't work.

In truth, nothing is broken and nothing needs to be fixed. If you could dwell in this awareness, all your wounds would heal by themselves. Miracles would happen, because the ego structure blocking the spontaneous flow of creative energy would dissolve.

This human drama seems to be about abuse, but it is really about learning to take responsibility. All suffering is a temporary construction created for your learning. And all the tools that you need to end your suffering have been given into your hands.

When you are not blaming each other for your problems, you are blaming God. You think it's His fault that you are unhappy. You don't like being put to the test. Neither did Job. It's not fun to have your magical beliefs smashed.

But you need to realize that no magical incantation is going to open the door to the prison. It doesn't work that way. Freedom is much more simple and close at hand.

"Well," you say, "if I only had a helicopter or a 747 I could get out of this hole!" You don't realize how absurd that sounds.

Forget about that 747, brother. Just use the ladder.

"That old cruddy thing? That can't possibly get me out of here!"

You know the dialogue. We've had this conversation before.

Others keep pointing to the ladder, but you keep looking away. You have a certain attachment to being a victim.

The problem is that the victim will never acknowledge the ladder. He will never admit that he has the tools he needs to extricate himself from his suffering. For, as soon as

he admits that he has these tools, he ceases to be a victim. Nobody feels sorry for him anymore. The game of being a handicapped creator comes to an end.

So if you want to discover your integrity you need to stop pretending to be a victim. You need to stop pretending that you weren't given the right tools. You need to take the clay and work with it.

Anyone who does this stops complaining and gets on with his life. He learns to take care of himself and he gives others the space to take care of themselves. Indeed, he releases all sense of obligation to and from others so that he is free to follow the promptings of his mind and heart. For him, there are no excuses and so there is no need to procrastinate. Nothing stands between him and his joy.

His life is his work of art and he is busy about it even as a bee is busy pollinating flowers. If you speak to him of sacrifice, he will laugh and say, "Work that is not joyful accomplishes nothing of value in the world." And, of course, he will be right.

One artist does not work for another unless he is learning something of value to his craft. When he stops learning, he moves to another teacher, or begins working on his own. Nobody can keep him from his craft. No one can take him out of his life. For his life and his craft are one.

In a world where everyone is a genius, there are no bosses and no employees. There are only teachers and students in voluntary association.

If you do not like where you are, you must leave that place or you do not honor yourself. Do not force yourself to stay in any environment in which you cease to remember that you are a creator of your life.

I once told you, "leave your nets." Do not struggle to be worthy when you already are. Leave that job or relation-

ship in which you are unable to be yourself. Let go of your neurotic bargain for love and acceptance. And walk through your fears. You will never find your wings until you learn to use your arms and your legs. Don't ask God to do for you what you must learn to do for yourself.

In honoring yourself, you needn't make anyone else wrong. Just do what is good for you and express your gratitude to others. When you are stepping into your life, you do not leave others hastily or in anger. You say your goodbyes. You bless the person whose life you have shared and the place where you have lived. Because you can bless the past, you are free to leave it.

You cannot "leave your nets" and take the fish with you. In time, the fish will rot and leave a terrible stench. For miles around, people will anticipate your arrival. "The Fisherman is coming." Your past walks in front of you. This is not the way to freedom.

Be strong in your conviction about your own life, but gentle with others. Do not judge their needs just because you cannot meet them. Just be honest about what you can and cannot do, and wish them well. Remember, the one whom you reject follows you. Only acceptance brings completion.

When you are ready to leave the entanglements of your life and step out on the simple path of love and forgiveness, you will know it in your heart and mind. There will be no struggle, no deliberation.

In your clarity and generosity, others will relax and release you. And you will hold them in your heart wherever you go.

The only prisons in the world are the ones of your own making. And only one who is ignorant of his own genius could hold another hostage against his will.

Remember, dear brother and sister: for every prison you

create in your mind, there is a key that unlocks the door. If you can't erase the prison, at least claim the key to the door.

You are not a victim of the world, but the one who holds the key to freedom. In your eyes is the spark of divine light that leads all beings out of the darkness of fear and mistrust. And in your heart is the love that gives birth to all the myriad beings in the universe. Your essence is unbroken, whole, dynamic and creative. It but awaits your trust.

CREATIVITY AND TRANSFORMATION

*When one person moves toward individuation,
it gives everyone permission to do the same.*

Your commitment to the expression of your gift will transform your life. All the structures in your life that hold you in limitation begin to fall apart as soon as you make this inner commitment to yourself. Trying to change these structures from the outside in is futile. That is not how change occurs.

Change occurs from the inside out. As you embrace your gift and move through your fear of expressing it, old, outdated lifestyle structures are de-energized. Without receiving new energy from you, these structures dissolve. As they dissolve, they create a more open space within your consciousness for the gift to be recognized, affirmed and nurtured into expression.

Your work situation, your family life, your sleeping and eating patterns all begin to shift as you get about the business of honoring yourself and moving toward your joy. Without struggle, you unhook from roles and relationships that no longer serve your continued growth. This happens spontaneously. There is no forcing or violation involved.

When faced with your uncompromising commitment to

yourself, others either join you or move swiftly out of your way. Grey spaces created by your ambivalence—your desire to have something and give it up at the same time—move toward yea or nay. Clarity emerges as the clouds of self-doubt and attachment are burned away by the committed, radiant self.

When one person moves toward individuation, it gives everyone permission to do the same. Dysfunctional family structures are dismantled and new structures that honor the individuals involved are put in their place.

This is what commitment to self does. It destroys sloppiness, codependency, neurotic bargaining for love, boredom, apathy and critical behavior. It frees each individual to be himself and find alignment with others in a more honest and authentic way.

One person's fidelity to self and willingness to live her dream explodes the entire edifice of fear that surrounds her. It is that simple. And it all happens as gently as the first "yes" said in the silence of the heart.

No one can be abandoned by your "yes" to yourself. If you think otherwise, you will build a prison of fear and guilt around you. Your "yes" to your essential self and life purpose is also a "yes" to others who care about you. You cannot love another by abandoning yourself.

Neurotic bargains for love in which boundaries are constantly compromised cannot stand in the light of self-affirmation. In setting yourself free, you call others to their freedom. Whether they answer the call or not is up to them.

The call to self-actualization is not a call to abandon others. It is not a call to separate or avoid responsibility. The call to honor self is also a call to honor others. It comes to fruition only when the heart remains open.

Sometimes—in order to be honest and authentic—you

may have to act in a way that others cannot understand or support. That may be difficult for you, but you must learn to stand firm in your commitment to what is best for you. Please don't capitulate to those who would make you feel guilty for following your heart. But remain open to them. Love them, bless them, talk with them, and they will come to understand and respect your decision.

Your commitment to other people must be an extension of your commitment to yourself, not at odds with it. How can you choose between your good and that of another? It is not possible. No one asks you to make such a choice.

There is a choice that honors you and also honors others. Find that choice. Make that decision. Don't abandon yourself. Don't abandon others.

Let the old form of your life go and allow the new form to emerge at its own pace. Go willingly into the open space of "not knowing." Whenever you release the past, you must enter this space. Don't be afraid. Don't be embarrassed. It is okay not to know. It is okay to let things evolve.

Just be present and tell the truth. Be patient. Growing is a process. Be gentle with yourself and others.

THE MYTH OF MATERIAL PROSPERITY

*You cannot measure spiritual riches
with a worldly yardstick.*

The world does not support your journey to authenticity. The world supports only what it understands. And right now all it understands is duty and sacrifice. That will change in time, but don't expect it to happen soon. Don't go into your lifework with the expectation of worldly support and approval.

Those who understand my teachings and try to live them are often treated with disdain by the world. If this happens, bear it patiently. Be committed to your journey and your patience and determination will be rewarded. When others see that you have their highest good at heart, they will soften to you. However, if you are seeking their approval or recognition, you are likely to be disappointed.

Pay no mind to the religion of abundance. That is no more true or helpful than the religion of sacrifice. God does not necessarily reward spiritual work with material success. All rewards are spiritual. Happiness, joy, compassion, peace, sensitivity: these are the rewards for a life lived in integrity.

If material success does not come, it is not important. If it seems important and resentment develops, then more ego expectations need to be stripped away. You must learn, once and for all, to stop measuring spiritual riches with a worldly yardstick.

If material success comes, it is often a test to see if you can transcend self-interest and greed. Material wealth, like all other gifts, is given that it may be shared with others. If you are holding onto wealth, you will not reap the reward of true prosperity, which is happiness and peace.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that your lifework must bring in a large paycheck or meet with worldly success. On the other hand, don't make the mistake of thinking that you must be poor to serve God. A rich person can serve God as well as one of humble means if he is willing to share his riches. It matters not how much you hold in your hands. What matters is whether or not your hands are extended outward to your brother.

CREATIVITY AND ABUNDANCE

The energy inside you is never the same energy.

You are never limited to the past.

All energy is potentially creative. That potential for creation becomes limited as energy expresses itself in form. It is the nature of form to limit and constrict. By limiting its creative potential, form channels and directs energy in specific ways.

Form emphasizes some aspects and de-emphasizes others. It prioritizes. It constructs a picture. Without form, there would be no works of art. Manifestation is a commitment of energy to a certain direction or goal. It is the movement from unlimited to limited, from abstract to concrete, from unseen to seen.

All creativity is a dialogue between energy and form. It is therefore meaningless to talk about energy without also talking about form.

You are an animated form, an energy body. Your body/mind consciousness is a temporary container for the universal energy of creation. This energy expresses through you in a unique way, through your genes and chromosomes, as well as through your personality structure.

As your consciousness expands with love, you become more open to giving and receiving the universal energy of creation. Conversely, when you contract in fear, you become less able to give or receive this dynamic creative energy.

The energy of creation wants to expand and open you up and the structure of your mind and body resists that expansion. Structure belongs to the past, while energy only exists in the moment. It is like water that flows by you as you watch from the bank of a river. It is never the same water you are looking at. In the same manner, the energy inside

you is never the same energy that it was five minutes ago. It is always new energy.

That is fortunate indeed, because it means that you are never limited to the past. Every adjustment you make in consciousness in the present has an immediate affect on the energy that is able to move through you. As your physical body becomes more healthy and your personality structure becomes more flexible and integrated, you become increasingly able to give and receive energy, physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

You are an ongoing dialogue between energy and form. When you are fearful, you contract on all levels of being. Energy gets trapped in your body/mind and you experience physical tension or pain, emotional upheaval, and mental anxiety. These symptoms, when not addressed, may lead to bigger ones: physical illness, the break up of a relationship, work or money problems.

On the other hand, when you are feeling love, energy flows effortlessly through you. You are physically comfortable, emotionally open, and mentally present and alert. You experience gratitude for your life and openness to new possibilities.

A fearful attitude toward life leads to defensive, controlling behavior that pushes love and abundance away from you. A loving attitude leads to trusting behavior that honors other people and inspires them to support you.

Love opens the mind/body vehicle to its maximum energetic potential, enabling others to “feel” the energy of acceptance, gratitude, and kindness flowing directly to them. This opens their hearts and minds to their own potential and empowers them to share their creative gifts with others. This is how abundance is generated in the world.

EGO BLOCKS TO ABUNDANCE

Selfish actions are not supported by the universe.

The energy of creation moves through you to others and through others to you. While this energy supports you in essential ways, there can be no personal ownership of it. No one has a special connection to the energy. As soon as someone claims ownership of it, his or her connection to the energy is disturbed.

When your relationship to each other is one of mutual trust and mutual respect, you create an energetic connection which is supported by the love energy of the universe.

Your alignment with the energy of creation requires the relinquishment of your ego agenda. Your ego agenda operates from the belief that you can manipulate people and events to obtain the outcome you want. Your ego agenda is selfish and short-sighted. It does not consider the good of others, and therefore it does not consider your good, although you may believe that it does.

When you cheat someone out of something s/he deserves, you lose not only what you thought you would gain, but what you would have gained if you had acted in a less selfish way. Every attempt to gain in a selfish manner eventually leads to loss and defeat, because selfish actions are not supported by the universe.

Those who take advantage of others may have great determination and skill, but they cannot compensate for the loss of their connection to the energy of creation. Others equally determined will join together and, supported by invisible forces, defeat them in the end, for David always defeats Goliath. Not because he is bigger or stronger, but because his intention is clear and he has love in his heart.

While fear might sometimes seem to marshal more forces

on its side than love, it can never hold those forces together. Fearful forces are always pulling apart. When the selfish expectations of one group are no longer met, it defects or goes over to the other side.

I have said that “those who live by the sword will die by the sword.” Those who try to take advantage of others will fall victim to their own erroneous actions. That is the nature of the karmic journey. Every time you attempt to injure another, you really only injure yourself. For everything that you think and do toward others returns in the end to you. Only one who truly forgives and eschews vengeance breaks through the vicious egoic cycle of violence.

If you want to open to abundance in your life, you must give up the idea that you can gain through someone else’s loss. That is the fearful thinking of the ego mind and it must be recognized and refused if new patterns are to be set into motion in your life.

Fortunately, there is another way that begins when you recognize that your good and that of your brother or sister are one and the same. When you accept your equality with others, you reconnect to the energy of creation and that energy supports you so that you do not toil in vain. Results come spontaneously and on their own timetable.

While you may have ownership of your area of the work, you never have exclusive ownership of the work as a whole. For the work of creation is essentially collaborative. It cannot be done without the contribution of many people. Your piece needs to fit with other pieces or the integrity of the whole will be compromised.

The demands of this path are as great as those made by the ego’s path of manipulation and struggle. But the rewards of the path of Spirit are far greater, for those who follow this path find true happiness. Because they serve others, love

serves them. Because they give without thought of return, the universe brings to them unexpected gifts. Because they live joyfully in the present, the future unfolds gracefully before them. When challenges come, they rise to meet them. When disappointment arises, they look within, and surrender the emotional barriers that prevent them from feeling love's presence in their lives.

THE ECONOMY OF LOVE

The economy of love is based on surrender.

The economy of fear is based on control.

Peace and happiness will not come to the world until it comes into the hearts and minds of all the people who live in the world.

People whose minds and hearts are open experience and extend love, gratitude and abundance as a matter of course. Being open, what they need comes to them. Being caring and compassionate, they give away what they don't need to others who need it. This is the law of love. It is based on trust and faith.

People who align with the law of love do not have to try to hold onto or protect what they have. For they know that everything they have is merely given to them temporarily. It will stay with them as long as it is needed. And when it is no longer needed, it will go.

The economy of love is based on surrender. The economy of fear is based on control. The economy of love is rooted in the understanding that there is enough for everyone. The economy of fear is rooted in the belief that there isn't enough to go around.

Contrary to popular opinion, abundance does not mean

that you have a lot of money or material possessions. Abundance means that you have what you need, use it wisely, and give what you don't need to others. Your life has poise, balance, and integrity. You don't have too little. You don't have too much.

On the other hand, scarcity does not mean that you don't have enough money or material possessions. It means that you don't value what you have, don't use it wisely, or don't share it with others. Scarcity may mean that you have too little. It may also mean that you have too much. Your life is out of balance. You want what you don't have and you have what you don't want.

I assure you that you will not increase your happiness by increasing your material possessions. You increase your happiness only by increasing your energy, your self-expression and your love. If that also increases your pocketbook, then so be it. You have more to enjoy and share with others.

The goal in life should not be to accumulate resources that you don't need and cannot possibly use. It should be to earn what you need, enjoy and can share joyfully with others.

The abundant person has no more or less than she can use responsibly and productively. She does not obsess on protecting what she has or in obtaining what she does not need. She is content with what she has and is open to giving and receiving all the resources that God brings into her life.



CHAPTER FOUR

Religious Righteousness

*Your job is not to condemn,
but to understand and to bless.*

Only those who are full of pride think that they have exclusive understanding of the truth and the right to judge or teach others. The Christian religion—the religion that purports to be inspired by me—is riddled with countless cases of spiritual pride.

It is inevitable, I suppose, that someone will always be looking for a soapbox to stand on. And others who are uncertain in their own faith will listen to him and call him Messiah. Proclaiming his teaching, they will neglect the wisdom that lies within their own hearts. But such idols inevitably fall, and when they do the fears of the followers come to light for healing.

Your job is not to condemn, but to understand and to bless. Your job is to see the fear in people's eyes and remind them that they are loved. Why would you beat, burn or excommunicate those who are most in need of your love? Please, my friends, do not use my teaching as a stick to beat people with.

I have given you only two rules: to love God and to love each other. Those are the only rules you need. Do not ask me for more. Do not ask me to take sides in your soap opera battles. Am I pro-life or pro-choice? How could I be one without also being the other? It is not possible.

When the truth comes to you, you will no longer need to attack your brother. Even if you think you are right and he is wrong, you will not attack him with “the truth,” but offer him your understanding and support. Because of the love and gentleness you share you will move closer to the truth.

I have offered you the key to the door within. Please use it, and do not worry about the thoughts and actions of others. Work on yourself. When you have established the truth in your own heart, then you can go out and share that truth with others.

Do not be a mouthpiece for words and beliefs you have not brought fully into the rhythms of your life. All who extend my teaching do so from the same level of consciousness as me. Otherwise what they extend cannot be my teaching.

THE ONLY AUTHORITY

Accept no other teaching than the one of your heart.

That alone is God's teaching.

Do not expect your relationship with God to look like anyone else's or you will sabotage the relationship. God's presence in your life is totally unique. Don't try to measure your spirituality by comparing what happens for you with what happens for others.

Cultivate your relationship with God directly. Enter the silence of your heart. Talk to God. Pray and ask for guid-

ance. Open the dialogue and listen for God's answers within and in the signs that She sends into your life.

Get to know God in your own experience. Accept no substitutes. And know absolutely that any message of fear does not come from God or from me.

Neither take a teacher nor be one. Be a brother or a sister instead. Do not prescribe for others or let them prescribe for you, but listen to the voice of God and be guided by it.

Do not take communion in a hall where fools preside and the flock is mentally and spiritually asleep. Those who wish to be told what to do will find out soon enough that no one has the answers for them. Do not give your power to impostors. Accept only God's teaching into your life and take communion in the silence where you meet Her.

You, my friend, are enough. You are sufficient. All the jewels of knowledge can be found within your own mind. All the joys of spirit can be discovered in your own heart.

Gather with others in mutual appreciation and gratitude to God, but do not take direction from one another. Instead, honor each other's experience. It is sacred. It is beyond comment or evaluation.

Celebrate your common experience. Meditate and pray together. Break bread together. Give, receive, and serve together. But accept no other authority in your life but God's.

Each of you is guided in a unique way and has unique gifts to offer. Celebrate that guidance and those gifts. But do not try to give your guidance to another and do not accept another's guidance if he offers it to you. That is a false gift. For what works for one will not necessarily work for another.

The only advice you can give to the seeker is this: seek for truth within your own heart, for there alone can you find it.

Share your experience -- your story can inspire others -- but the boundaries of such an offering are clear. It is YOUR experience, not a prescription for others. Whatever truth someone else sees in it is the truth he is meant to receive.

Ultimately, you alone are responsible for the beliefs you accept. Someone can tell you terrible lies, but it will never be his responsibility that you believed them. So do not waste your time blaming the guru, the cult or the church. Thank them instead. Without seeing their weakness and hypocrisy, you would have continued to idolize them and give your power away. Now you can reclaim your power and resume your path to peace.

Everybody at one time or another gives his power away, only to learn to take it back. That is an important and profound lesson on the spiritual path. Be grateful if you have learned this lesson. It means you are closer to your own truth, and if you are closer to your own truth, you are closer to God, the universal truth.

You come to oneness not through conformity, but through authenticity. When you have the courage to be yourself, you find the highest truth you are capable of receiving.

An authentic person does not capitulate to or usurp the power of others. He claims the freedom to be himself and offers the same freedom to others. He does not wish to be in prison, even if the bars are made of gold, nor does he desire to hold anyone else captive, for he knows that those who hold hostages must house and feed them.

Freedom comes when you reject all forms of external authority and refuse to be an authority for anyone else. Therefore, be a brother, a sister, a friend, but accept no teacher other than the one who lives inside your heart.

PERMISSION TO BETRAY

*All forms of manipulation are rooted in fear and insecurity.
They may promise love, but they cannot deliver it.*

When you give your power away to someone, you are setting yourself up for abuse or betrayal. That is especially true for anyone you accept as a savior.

You may say “but I didn’t know he would take advantage of me.” I say to you, “Wise up. Take responsibility for your life. Realize that you bought the farm. Stop trying to blame another for the choices you made.”

You gave permission. You gave your power away. Perhaps you did not know how bad it would be. The abuse came, as it frequently does, wrapped in sugar-coated promises. Friendship may have been offered, or financial security, or spiritual redemption, or sex, or love. You name it. It doesn’t matter what the bait was. You swallowed it and you got hooked. Be wiser next time. See the offer for what it is. You gave your power away in order to gain acceptance and love. But love never comes from any form of manipulation. All forms of manipulation are rooted in fear and insecurity. They may promise love, but they cannot deliver it.

Don’t believe those who say they would sacrifice their good for yours. Even if it were true, they would be committing a sin against themselves and nothing good could come of it.

Claim your freedom to create your life and offer the same freedom to others. Those who try to manipulate or bargain for love will spend their lives in an emotional labyrinth with little hope of egress. Conditional love is an endless prison. The only escape is to tell the truth to yourself and others. Then you can walk free.

Neither a borrower nor a lender be. Do not borrow

approval from others. Do not offer it when others seek it from you. Get out of the approval business. Get out of the lending business. Give what you can give with your whole heart and let the rest lie where it is.

Too many of you get caught in the horizontal journey. I have tried to tell you that, no matter how far you go in the exploration of “other,” you will return to self. Earth is round. After you travel the circumference of the planet, you return to the same place.

The more you believe that you need others to be happy the more miserable you will be. As soon as you give your power away, you will be attacked or betrayed. Yet this is a mirror, showing you the vicious nature of the abandoned, separated self.

There is only one person here who needs to give and receive love and that is you. Give love to yourself and include others in that love. If they do not wish to be included, let them go. It is no loss. You do not need another detour, another useless journey.

Be steadfast in your love for yourself. Let that be your absolute number one commitment. Your commitment to self will bring others in who are happy to be themselves. They will not come in making demands of you. They will not come in trying to take control of your life.

When someone makes you an offer you can't refuse, you must learn to refuse it. Don't betray yourself, regardless of the price.

The tempter will always come to you offering extraordinary gifts. Don't be fooled. He seems to have supernatural powers, but they are not real. He is just your brother moving off course, trying to draw you into his drama of self-abuse.

Don't say yes to his offer. Listen to what God is telling

you now and in each moment: "Your needs are completely met. You are whole. You lack nothing. Relax and breathe. This too will pass."

Yet even when you refuse him, the tempter will not yield. He will play to your insecurity and victim consciousness: "No," he will tell you, "you are not okay. You are lonely. You need companionship. You need a better job. You need a better relationship. You need more money, more sex, more notoriety; all of this will I give to you."

Surely, you have heard this pitch before! Some knight in shining armor or damsel in distress always appears when you are feeling low. Where has it gotten you in the past? How many knights or damsels have sped off on their steeds leaving behind them a trail of blood and tears?

Yet this one seems better than the last. He or she is more sincere, more sensitive, more grounded, more _____. You fill in the blank. It is your drama, not mine.

If you look deeply enough, you will see that every pitch is the same. Every invitation to self-betrayal has the same sugar-coated promises and the same heart-wrenching core.

Those who seek salvation in another lose touch with self. They go off like Don Quixote on the great horizontal journey. And they always find damsels to rescue and windmills to fight. That's part of the terrain. But in the end, they return home tired, wounded, and lacking in faith. The horizontal journey defeats everyone who takes it. There is no salvation to be found in the world.

You can find peace only if you stay at home. Stay with the self. Bring love to the parts of the self that still feel unloved. Become rooted in the eternal blessing of God's abundance and grace.

Here there are no strings attached, no neurotic bargains for love and approval. Here there is authentic wholeness, the joy

of being present alone and together. Here freedom and love are intertwined for, without one, you cannot have the other.

DANCING IN YOUR OWN TRUTH

*Do not become lost in the world before you know who you are
or your chances of waking up are not strong.*

Most people are afraid to be alone. They are lonely and seek companionship, yet real companionship is not possible, for they have not yet discovered who they are.

The self is a wilderness. Leave it unexplored and cities are built over it. Explore it courageously and intimacy becomes possible.

True equality requires individuation. Until you know the contours of your own heart you can't learn those of another. If you leave home before you are ready, you look for home without finding it. You find mother instead of wife, father instead of husband.

When you have found your home, you take it with you wherever you go. Find your home first, and then seek companionship.

Find out who you are, not according to someone else's definition, but according to your own. Let all aspects of yourself become present. Explore the dunes that swell up at the sea's edge. Feel the salt spray and walk along the beach at low tide. See all the life forms, all the possibilities revealed when the tide is rolled back.

Know thyself. Do not become lost in the world before you know who you are or your chances of waking up are not strong. The world will be only too happy to give you a role and a responsibility. Other people will be only too happy to assign you a role in their play.

Let's face it, some roles are seductive. They promise a lot. It's hard to say no. Yet this is how the self is betrayed. This is how the wilderness is paved with asphalt, stifling its grasses and trees, invading its sky. Call it domestication, technology, progress. It is anything but that.

Try to live with someone before you have learned to live with yourself and you will make a mockery of relationship. It won't work. Find home inside your heart first. Only one who knows and accepts himself can find equality with another. Anyone else gives himself away.

It is never the other person's fault when relationship doesn't work. All relationship endings can be attributed to a single cause: lack of fidelity to self.

If you were not faithful to yourself when you entered the relationship, how is it possible that you would be faithful to yourself while you were in it? You see, it can't be the other person's fault. You came together with him or her because you were lonely and tired of seeking and you went to sleep together.

Soon enough you discovered that sleeping together wasn't all it was cracked up to be. You woke up and asked: "Why did I trade one dream for another? The original dream was lonely, but it was also a simpler one."

You just took a detour, a delaying maneuver. You went from sleeping alone to sleeping with another. But the real challenge for you wasn't to sleep, but to wake up.

Unless you commit to your own awakening, others can offer you only detours, side-trips, running in place. Time goes by, but nothing changes. The pain doesn't lift. The old dissatisfaction is still there.

The sheets have been changed, but the bed still sags. The problem is not a cosmetic one. The problem is in the foundation itself. That is what must be addressed. That is what must be shored up.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JESUS

You are the one who opts for the detour. Don't blame the companion who accompanies you. It was your choice. But don't beat yourself up over it. Make a different choice.

When you fully inhabit your life, you will be drawn to others who are doing the same thing. Then, you will not have to give up your life for another. That is the beginning of a more beautiful and challenging dance. But it is a dance that cannot happen unless you are already dancing in your own truth.



CHAPTER FIVE

The Journey of Awakening

Feeling your pain enables you to be honest and authentic.

It connects you with a healing community.

One cannot find genuine intimacy with others without being deeply with one's experience and communicating honestly about it to others. Relationships based on mutual denial are emotional prisons. Since two people wearing masks cannot communicate easily or honestly, partners in such relationships have no tools to open the prison door.

Enter an awakening crisis—the death of a loved one, a physical illness, or the loss of a job—and presto, the shell of denial is cracked. The prison door is blown open and the shell-shocked inhabitants are led out into the fresh air. Here they feel worse than they did when they were in prison, because now they are in touch with their pain.

Awakening events take chronic pain and make it acute. It hurts more. People get sicker. They can't function in the world as well. They have to make time and space to be with their pain.

To begin to “feel” your pain is the first great act of self-

liberation. It is the end of unconscious sabotage and collusion. It is the birth of conscious awareness.

When you “feel” your pain you begin to move through it. It is a passageway, a means of shifting your life. It is not meant to arrest you. You are not meant to fall in love with your pain, hold onto it, or build a new identity around it. It is not a stationary train, but a moving one.

Feeling your pain enables you to be honest and authentic. It connects you with a healing community. You meet other human beings whose shells of denial are cracking. And you begin to heal together.

A healing community is very different from a hospital, where people go to get fixed or die isolated and alone. In a healing community, people connect with their feelings and discover greater intimacy with others. They live and die authentically. They live and die in forgiveness, in acceptance, and in peace.

THERAPEUTIC ABUSE

*The compulsion to heal is as vicious
as the compulsion to wound.*

Indeed, they are different faces of the same coin.

When it becomes “chic” to be a victim of childhood trauma or sexual abuse, therapists too easily get away with putting words in their clients’ mouths. Memories of events that never happened are enshrined on the altar. Incidents of minor insensitivity or carelessness are exaggerated and painted with the language of fear and guilt. Everyone imagines that the worst must have happened. This is hysteria, not healing. It is a new form of abuse.

Instead of inquiring into what happened and allowing the

inner child to speak, a professional label is placed on the wound. The victim's voice is squelched once again and she is given someone else's opinion of what happened to her. In order to gain approval, the wounded child tells the story the authority figure—now her therapist—asks her to tell. By capitulating to authority, she is told she is getting well.

The therapist projects her own unhealed wounds onto her client. Her subjectivity is taken for objectivity by the courts. Families are separated. More children are punished. The chain of abuse continues.

The unhealed healer is only too quick to make her patient into a victim, too quick to blame others. In the process, the patient is stripped of all dignity and self-confidence. She is made dependent on a steady diet of prescription drugs and doctor authority figures.

If you are not to make a mockery of the healing process, you must avoid the extremes of denial and fabrication of pain. Pain must be faced, not imagined. If it is there, it will express itself authentically. It will speak with its own voice. Your job is to invite the voice to speak, not to give it the words to say.

The attachment to pain is debilitating. The embellishment, exaggeration or fabrication of pain is insane. It results in greater fragmentation of consciousness and imbalance in the psyche.

You must neither deny what happened, nor make it up. You must acknowledge what happened—however unpleasant or painful that may be—with the help of a therapist if you need it. That is what starts the shift from untruth to truth, from secrets to revelation, from hidden discomfort to the conscious awareness of pain.

Pain is a doorway you walk through when you are ready. Until then, you are the doorkeeper, the sentinel who stands

guard and decides whom to exclude and whom to let in.

It is okay not to be ready. It's okay to exclude people or situations that feel unsafe. You are in charge of your own healing process. You decide how fast to go. Don't let anyone else dictate the pace of your healing process. If you work with a therapist/healer, make sure that s/he knows whenever you feel pushed or unsafe in any way.

Honoring your own process is essential to a life lived authentically. Others will always have ideas, suggestions, or plans for you. Thank them for their concern, but be clear that you, not they, are making the decisions in your life.

A FREE AND LOVING COMMUNITY

*Real love does not seek to bind, to control, or to enslave,
but to liberate, to empower,
and to set others free to find their own truth.*

The great challenge before you today is to learn how to come together to create a healing community based not on dogma or external authority, but on mutual equality and a deep respect for each person's experience.

Since most forms of love tend to be conditional, love is offered only when there is perceived agreement. To love someone who disagrees with you is rare. To feel emotionally connected to someone who has a very different set of experiences is unusual.

Real love is unconditional. It requires you to see beyond appearances, to see others from an inner conviction that all people carry the divine spark within them.

Real love does not seek to bind, control, or enslave, but to liberate, empower, and set others free to find their own truth. What church or temple has this for an agenda? What

religious structure gives its members the freedom to self-actualize in the name of love?

What church extends love and inclusion to all? What society reaches out to those who live on the fringes and keeps inviting them back in? What community of human beings is dedicated to seeing beyond its fears and learning to love its enemies?

When I asked for a church, was this not what I asked for? Did I not ask for a community which would recognize the Christ presence in all human beings, a community where no one would be ostracized or cast out? What is salvation, I ask you, if you do not offer it to everyone, regardless of his appearance or beliefs?

Love asks you to give and receive freedom. It asks you to encourage and empower others.

There are never any guarantees in the act of loving. If you look for agreement or favorable response, you cannot love freely. And if love is not free, it is not love. It is bargaining, negotiation, commerce.

Perhaps you begin to see what a church like the one I called for would do for the world you live in. It would make no one wrong, but encourage each person to find out what is right for him or her. It would trust and support the love and the light that dwells in each human being. It would not foster a world divided into rich and poor, haves and have-nots, but it would create a world in which each person has enough and is not afraid to share what s/he has.

A church and a society founded in my name would live by the principles I taught and teach. It would extend love and support freely to all. It would make no one wrong, condemn no woman or man, nor ostracize any human being from the community of faith. It would not be defensive, greedy or proud, but open-minded, generous and humble.

These qualities lie within each one of you. You have only to cultivate them. There is not a single one of you who cannot love unconditionally. But you must be encouraged to do so. My church is a church of encouragement. It calls you to realize the highest truth about yourself and about your brother and sister.

LIVING A SPIRITUAL LIFE

*A spiritually awakened person knows
that love is the answer to every perceived problem.*

Spirituality and religion are not necessarily the same thing. Religion is the outer form; spirituality is the inner content. Religion is the husk; spirituality is the seed. Religion is a set of beliefs; spirituality is a continuum of experience.

You can be spiritual and not attend church or temple. You can find your spirituality in intimate sharing with others, in communion with nature, in being of service. Spiritual experience is simply that which relaxes the mind and uplifts the heart. Meditating, walking in the woods or by the ocean, holding an infant, or looking into a lover's eyes—these are all spiritual experiences. When there is love and acceptance in your heart, your spiritual nature is manifest and you can see the spiritual nature of other people.

To be spiritual is to see yourself and others without judgment, to see not just with the eyes, but with the heart. To be spiritual is to accept and appreciate “what is,” instead of finding fault with it and seeking something else.

A spiritual person sees beauty everywhere, even in suffering. Wherever hearts are touched by the poignancy of life, there is beauty. Whenever people learn their life lessons and let the past fall away, beauty is present. There is beauty in

the rain and clouds, and beauty in the sun. There is beauty in aloneness and in intimacy, in laughter and in tears. Wherever you turn, beauty awaits you.

A spiritual person does not focus on what appears to be ugly, cruel, or manipulative. S/he sees all these behaviors as coming from a lack of love. S/he gives love whenever it is asked for, even if it is requested in a fearful or aggressive way. A spiritual person looks upon her own suffering and that of others as a temporary disconnection from the experience of love.

A spiritually awakened person knows that love is the answer to every perceived problem. If life does not unfold the way you want it, you have disconnected from love and acceptance. To reconnect, you need only surrender your expectations and accept what comes into your life with gratitude.

Spirituality is the consciousness that life is okay the way it is. It doesn't need to be changed or fixed. It just needs to be accepted. A spiritual person is peaceful, upbeat, helpful, encouraging. S/he doesn't complain about the past or look for happiness in the future. S/he doesn't try to fix other people or ask to be fixed. S/he lives in the present moment, filled with gratitude and acceptance.

Everyone is spiritual, but not everyone takes the time to explore their spirituality. Many people become lost in the drama of their lives. They spend most of their time dealing with survival issues. They do not take the time to watch the sunset or smell the roses. They are missing out on a great deal of joy and beauty. If they would just stop, take a deep breath and look for a moment, they would realize what they are missing.

There is a discipline involved in living a spiritual life. You need to take care of yourself and say no to people who

would draw you into their dramas of suffering and victimhood. You learn to bless them and give them the space to have the experience they wish to have. You see the futility of trying to rescue others from their dramas and you know that your ability to help anyone depends on your maintaining your own health and balance.

When you rest in your Self, you see that there are no problems to be fixed. Life just needs to be accepted in a heartfelt way. In that acceptance, peace and happiness are established and all that seemed to be obstructing love is finally washed away.

WHO NEEDS RELIGION?

A barren tree will make no fruit.

A religion that does not help

its followers connect to love will not prosper.

The truth is that no one needs religion. You don't need to hold onto the husk. But you do need to break it open and plant the seed.

Whatever your religion, it has dogmas and interpretations that disguise the truth. All religions are heavily burdened by the prejudices and narrow ideas of followers who never opened to truth and beauty in their lives. What you have is a record of their fear, not an invitation to love.

But if you dig deeply enough in the garden of your faith, you will find the voices of truth and beauty that help you to open your heart to love's presence. And that is where you must focus. That is where you will plant the seed of faith that will take root in your life.

There are many beautiful trees that flower in the springtime. Each tree has its special beauty. Seen together, they

make an extraordinary garden. So it is with approaches to the divine. Each approach has its own beauty and integrity. It speaks to certain people and not to others. That is the way it should be. One tree is not better than another. One religion is not better than another.

Each religion has attached to it a climate of fear and rigidity that can destroy the tree before its seeds can be carried forth on the wind. This is true in every tradition.

If you belong to a tradition, you must find the seed, separate it from the husk, and see that it is planted in your lifetime. You must find the core teaching that connects you to love and pass that teaching on to your children. That is the only way that a tradition stays healthy. The form should change to better speak to the time and place, but the essence of the teaching must be continually discovered and resurrected.

A barren tree will make no fruit. A religion that does not help its followers connect to love will not prosper.

MINISTRY OF LOVE

Do not impose your beliefs and opinions on others.

When you seek to impose your beliefs and opinions onto others, you are not respecting their right to decide what works for them. This is manipulation, not ministry.

You place so much value on words and concepts, yet I tell you this is not where the experience of conversion happens. Conversion happens primarily in the heart, and not so much in the mind.

People are not converted to some concept of God, but to an experience of love. One who does not believe in something beyond his small ego suddenly opens to a loving

presence. That is the experience that changes lives.

People are not converted by adopting a set of beliefs and parroting them to others. Conversion does not happen through proselytizing. It does not happen when you preach narrow, intolerant ideas that make you right and others wrong.

People are converted by the power of love when you love and accept them unconditionally. You don't need to change their beliefs or customs, or fix their lives. You just need to demonstrate the power of love in the way that you speak and act toward them. That is what gets their attention.

No one can resist a person who radiates love. Everyone comes to sit at his or her feet. Can you imagine that? These people are not even invited, never mind proselytized, yet they come anyway. They come because love calls to them and they respond.

You do not have to go out aggressively to spread my message. You do not have to hit people over the head with it and drag them back to your churches or synagogues. Just love each other, and people will come. They will come and fill themselves to the brim, and they will return home with their cup running over. That is the way my teaching spreads.

You do not have to be perfect to be a mouthpiece for my teaching, but you do need to be humble. You have to meet people where they are. And you need to be honest about where you are. Pretense will not work. If you lie to yourself, you will lie to others, and if you lie to others, you will eventually be found out. So save yourself some valuable time and tell the truth from the beginning.

No one is perfect. I am no more perfect than you, and you are no more perfect than the least of your brothers or sisters. Every one of you makes mistakes. Every one of you

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JESUS

has much to learn about giving and receiving love.

You don't get to heaven by pretending to be there when you aren't, nor do you get there by pretending that you have some impossible handicap. Heaven is available to all who are willing to learn about love.



CHAPTER SIX

The Open Door

The most important door is the one to your heart.

Grace comes through your inner alignment with Spirit. When you are in constant dialogue with all parts of yourself, you learn to honor yourself more completely. You do not commit to activities about which you are ambivalent or have misgivings.

Because you wait for integration and clarity within, your outer actions create harmony, instead of conflict. You don't give mixed messages. You don't make promises you are unable to keep. Your life simplifies and slows down. You are less anxious and pressured. You do less, but what you do is far more effective than what you did before when you were under pressure to decide before you were ready.

Grace happens when you abide with what is. Struggle happens when you push what is away or try to bring something else in. Grace happens when you accept. Struggle happens when you reject or try to fix. Grace is natural. Struggle is unnatural. Grace is effortless. Struggle is arduous.

When you get in the way, you suffer. You know that you are not in your right place. That is when you must acknowl-

edge your mistake and move out of the way. Doing so removes the ego blockage within consciousness and restores the flow of grace in your life.

If you try to walk through closed doors, you will hurt yourself unnecessarily. So, even if you don't know why a door is closed, at least respect the fact that it is. And don't struggle with the doorknob. If the door was open, you would know it. Wanting it to be open does not make it open.

Much of the pain in life is as a result of people attempting to walk through closed doors or trying to put square pegs into round holes. You try to hold onto someone who is ready to go, or you try to get somebody to do something before s/he is ready. Instead of accepting what is and working with it, you interfere with it or try to manipulate it to meet your perceived needs.

Obviously, this doesn't work. When you interfere with what is, you create strife for yourself and others. You trespass. You get in the way.

It isn't helpful to obsess about your mistakes and feel bad about them. Guilt doesn't help you act more responsibly toward others.

When something does not work, a correction must be made. Adjustments are a natural part of living in a harmonious way.

Grace comes when correction is constant, when you don't just talk about forgiveness, but live it moment to moment. Then, it does not matter how many times you stray from the path or put your foot in your mouth.

You cannot fit through the door if you are carrying the past around. Don't feel guilty. Instead, take responsibility and correct your mistakes. That way you don't carry around a lot of excess baggage.

On the other hand, if there is nothing you can do to make the situation better, then just accept it as it is. Sometimes, there's nothing to be done. It's no one's fault. Life is often un-ideal, ragged and unfinished. Loose ends prevail. If you can accept it as it is, a shift can happen. A door can open.

The most important door is the one to your heart. Is it open or closed? If it is open, then the whole universe abides in you. If it is closed, you stand alone, holding the world off.

A heart in resistance gets tired quickly. Life wears heavily upon it. But a heart that is open is filled with energy. It dances and sings.

When the door in your heart is open, all the important doors open in the world. You go where you need to go. Nothing interferes with your purpose or your destiny. Everything that you do unfolds naturally in its own time, without resistance or struggle. The unexpected happens without difficulty. Miracles are everyday occurrences.

DROPPING YOUR STORIES

*When you try to fix yourself, you reinforce your belief
that something in you is broken.*

Your stories of the past reinforce your fears and justify your rituals of self-protection. Whenever you connect with what you want, you also connect with all the reasons why you can't have it. "I want to leave my job, but I can't....I want to commit to this relationship, but I can't." On and on it goes.... the perpetual "Catch 22."

You want to bring new energy into your life and hold onto your old habits at the same time. You want change, but you are afraid of it. In some ways, you prefer your pain just

the way it is because it is a known quantity. You think that if you make a change in your life things could get worse. You prefer a known pain to an unknown pain, a familiar suffering to an unfamiliar one.

Your ego is deeply committed to the status quo of your life. That's why the spiritual adult's heroic plans for the transformation of your life are inevitably undermined by the fears of the wounded child, who doesn't think s/he is lovable and therefore cannot have a vision of a life without pain. To the wounded kid within, any promise of release from pain is a trick that entices you to let your defenses down and become vulnerable to attack.

So your fears keep you closed to the possibility of meaningful change in your life. What you say you want is not what you really want. The spiritual adult and the wounded child are at odds, and when that happens the wounded child usually wins. Unfortunately, that does not lead to happiness for either adult or child. It leads only to the prolongation of your familiar, internalized suffering.

Into this duplicitous environment of the psyche at war with itself then come a variety of professional fixers: psychiatrists, counselors, preachers, self-help gurus. Each claims to have the answer, but each solution offered just compounds the problem. When you think there is something wrong with you, your shame and unworthiness are reinforced. When you try to fix yourself, you reinforce your belief that something in you is broken.

Professional fixers believe your stories of brokenness and try to heal you. If your story isn't juicy enough, they help you make it more juicy. It's all about high drama, about sin and salvation. It never occurs to them or to you that maybe nothing is broken, that maybe there is nothing in you that needs to be fixed. It never occurs to either of you that the

only dysfunctional aspect of your situation is your belief that something is broken, your belief that you will never get what you want.

The external problems you perceive are projections of the internal conflict: "I want but I cannot have." If you would allow yourself to have what you want, or if you would stop wanting it because you know you can't have it, this conflict would cease. Having what you want or accepting that you can't have it ends your conflict. It also ends your story.

If you have what you want or if you have made your peace with not having it, you have no story. There's no drama of seeking. To keep the drama of seeking going, you cannot find what you are seeking. Finding love, happiness, joy, and so forth ends the story. "And they lived happily ever after...." Story over. Drama complete.

The truth is you are not ready to give up your drama. Your story has become part of your identity. Your pain is part of your personality. You do not know who you are without it. Letting your drama go means letting the past dissolve right here, right now.

If you can do that, it doesn't matter what happened in the past. It has no power. It doesn't exist any more. You are writing on a clean slate. That means that you are totally responsible for what you choose. There are no more excuses.

When you no longer interpret your life based on what happened yesterday or last year, what happens is neutral. It is what it is. There is no charge on it.

The freedom to be fully present and responsible right now is awesome. Very few people want it. Most people wear their past like a noose around their necks. They insist on carrying their cross and wearing their crown of thorns.

You stay in the drama because you love it. You keep dragging your past with you because you are attached to it. And

so you have to heal all the wounds you think that you have. It doesn't matter that those wounds are not ultimately real. They are real enough to you.

And so the drama continues. You can't tell a person who is in prison getting three meals a day that freedom is its own security. S/he wants those three meals a day no matter what. Then s/he will talk about freedom.

When you are attached to what you already have, how can you bring in anything new? To bring in something new, something fresh, something unpredictable, you must surrender something old, stale and habitual.

If you want the creative to manifest within you, you must surrender all that is not creative. Then in the space made by that surrender, creativity rushes in. If the cup is full of old, cold tea, you cannot pour new, hot tea into it. First you have to empty the cup. Then you can fill it.

If you want to give up your drama, first find out what your investment is in it. What is your pay-off for not finding, not healing, not living happily ever after?

And then be honest. If you don't want to move through your pain, tell the truth. Say "I'm not ready to move through my pain yet." Don't say "I wish I could be done with my pain, but I can't be." That is a lie. You could be done with it, but you don't choose to be. Perhaps you enjoy the attention you get being a victim.

Most people who claim to be on the spiritual path are just spinning their wheels. They are always making excuses.

When you have learned to accept responsibility, there are no excuses. You don't procrastinate or make empty promises. You wait until you are ready and you act clearly and decisively. When you are ready, there is no need to hesitate, for actions flow from readiness, and actions speak louder than words.

CREATING HEAVEN ON EARTH

If you can create hell, can you not also create heaven?

The true price of freedom is not suffering, but responsibility. Instead of trying to make someone else responsible for your mistakes, you acknowledge and learn from them. You change the way you think and act. You begin to clean up the mess you made.

When you become responsible for your creations they thrive. Otherwise, you must live with your mistakes until you correct them.

This planet is a learning laboratory that helps you develop the self confidence and sensitivity to others that you need to create real happiness in your lives. Every thought you have, every emotion you indulge, every action you take, weighs in. So consider these well. Do not forge ahead blindly driven by your doubt, your anger, and your fear. You cannot afford to create out of that place anymore.

In your search for happiness outside yourself, you have made many enemies. Yet your hatred for them is nothing compared to your hatred for yourself. For every problem or trauma you encountered in the world, you have experienced a wound within.

You thought it was your brother pounding the nails into your hands and feet. But now you know that it was you. Everything you ever did to anyone else, you did to yourself. You are the victim of your own actions.

It is not easy to turn your life around. It is not easy to learn to take total responsibility for your experience. It is not easy to give up the game of shame and blame. Yet, if you want to transform your life that is what you are asked to do.

You must look at the hell you have created within your own consciousness and take responsibility for it. You must

understand once and for all time that you are the one who walks to the cross, the one who is crucified, and the one who performs the crucifixion. There is no one else here but you.

But if you can wrong yourself so completely, if you can torture and abuse yourself so mercilessly, if you can be the one who experiences hell itself, can you not also be the one who brings love and compassion? Can you not also be the peacemaker, the Christ, the one who comes with arms extended?

If you can create hell, can you not also create heaven? Is your creativity essentially distorted, prejudiced, and misdirected? Are you a man or woman condemned to suffer for all eternity for your mistakes, or are you the fallen angel who once sat at God's side, the one suffering from pride who needs but to surrender to regain his celestial seat?

Do you have a choice? Can you create with God, instead of against him?

When you stop crucifying yourself, your resurrection is at hand. When you learn to bring love and acceptance to your own wounded psyche, the Christ within steps off the cross and walks free of shame and blame. When you can do that for yourself, you can offer the same hand of love to your brother and sister.

When you learn to take total responsibility, there will be no one left to blame. There will be no more enemy to be found outside of you, and the enemy within can be forgiven. That is the path back to the Garden of Eden, the path of forgiveness, the one that I offered you once and offer to you now once again.



CHAPTER SEVEN

Ending the Fall from Grace

*The desire for power and control
takes you out of the Garden.*

The desire for power and control takes you out of the Garden. It takes you out of relationship with the divine presence.

When human beings left the Garden, they faced the task of providing for themselves. They became responsible for their own lives. The price of free will was high indeed. But it was freedom they wanted.

They wanted to become conscious creators. They wanted to wake up and make choices for themselves. They did not know that making choices would result in making lots of mistakes. They did not realize that they would judge themselves and others mercilessly for those errors. They did not know that self-crucifixion would become a way of life.

From the garden of grace to the garden of Gethsemane, from unconscious bliss to conscious shame, they moved until the fall was complete. And there they stood shivering in the cold, without faith in themselves, unable even to turn to God.

Slowly and painfully, they learned to have faith in them-

selves. They cut down trees, tilled the soil, planted seeds, and brought in the harvest. They labored from dawn until dusk. They built roads and railroads, great cities and industrial centers. They extended their civilization out into the prairies and the foothills of the mountains, out to the edge of the sea. They survived drought and pestilence, floods, fires, and hurricanes. They triumphed over the earth. They subdued the animals of the field and the birds of the air. In their eyes, they earned the dominion once promised to them.

But along the way, they made some big mistakes. They became restless, irresponsible, and greedy. They polluted rivers and streams. They burned their own cities. Their jails filled to overflowing. Murderers, rapists, and child molesters walked their streets. The earth groaned under the onslaught of endless roads, landfills and construction sites. Plutonium was buried deep in the heart of the earth. Oil spills stained the pristine waters of their shorelines and birds lay lifeless on the beach. Even the sky was torn open, leaving huge gaps in the ozone layer.

They began to realize that their version of the creation was not as good as God's. Prophets began to ring the bells of doom and gloom. Earth changes were coming. God was angry at them and they were going to have to pay for their sins. As the millennium approached, judgment day seemed to be coming with it.

Perhaps this scenario seems familiar to you. Perhaps you feel the personal and the collective level of fear arising as human creation runs amuck. Perhaps you understand how people feel alone, disconnected from themselves and from God, unable to face their mistakes or correct them.

When you chose to have free will, you also chose to be responsible for your creations. Perhaps you did not fully

understand what that would entail. But now you do. Now you know that the time for caring and cooperation has come. Now you know it is time to clean up the mess you have made, to make amends to those you have hurt, and to repair the environment that you have desecrated.

Your mistakes do not condemn you, unless you refuse to correct them. The choice is yours. The choice has always been yours.

GOD'S FAITH IN YOU

To know creation, you had to become it.

When you ate from the Tree of Knowledge, you entered into a path of mistake-making and correction which would bring you true knowledge of self and other.

It was a choice made with great courage. You gave up the comfort of absolute truth for the discomfort of relative knowledge.

You acted with great faith. Yet God had even greater faith. He released you on your quest for knowledge knowing full well you would walk through the land of darkness, encountering dragons and demons. He knew you would get caught in the dynamics of blame and shame, punishing yourself and others. He knew you would come to the brink of destroying yourself, yet he still let you go. He had such great faith in you that He was able to observe your suffering, indeed even feel it, without intervening in the choice you had made.

Perhaps He knew something you also knew when you left the Garden, but now have difficulty remembering. He knew that his spark, His seed, His love and His truth, was living within you. He knew that as soon as you learned to

turn to that love, you would begin to find your way home. And so the covenant between Him and you would be renewed. You would find light in the darkness. Not just His light, but your own as well. That light and that love were your inheritance.

God knew that no matter how far you strayed from the Garden, you could never abandon it completely. At the deepest level of your being, you had known unconditional love and acceptance. You had forgotten that experience, but in the end, when you were reeling in your deepest pain, you would remember it. You would remember God's love, because it is the essence of who you are.

When you left the Garden, you began a quest for knowledge outside yourself. You sought truth in the ideas and philosophies of other people. You read books, traveled to far-away places, sought esoteric and unusual experiences. All this took you away from your inner connection with God. You tried to find outside of you what you already had within. Indeed, the more you sought truth without, the more you forgot the inner connection with truth. Your relationship with God, which once had been intrinsic, became extrinsic. You made idols and worshiped them. The more you searched outside of you the more empty you felt within. And the more empty you felt, the more your search was fueled.

For some of you God became a large bank account, an exquisite house, or a fancy car. For others it became an expensive education or a successful career. Still others found idols in a bible, a teaching or belief system, a preacher or guru. And a few of you made idols of a bottle, a recreational drug, casual sex, or the promise of love.

All these things seemed to offer you satisfaction, but none of them delivered the love or the comfort they promised.

Instead, they left you feeling empty, wanting more.

You became over-stimulated without and lost your capacity to feel and connect within. Your relationship to love had become inverted. You became needy, dependent, alone. You forgot how to offer love. You could only ask for it.

You desperately wanted relationship, yet you could not handle its demands. You had become too selfish, too defensive. You had driven yourself into a corner. The very thing you wanted most was the thing you could not have, or at least this is what you believed.

The search for God outside you led to a wall you could not climb or get around. It was too tall and too wide. You were at an impasse.

The external journey had come to an end. There was nothing left to do but turn around.

To turn authentically, you had to recognize the utter futility of the search for love outside yourself. That moment of recognition would be the beginning of your spiritual path. It would be the end of your descent from grace, and the beginning of your return to the Garden.

REDEMPTION

I told you "knock and it will be open."

But I am not sure that you believed me.

When you are scared and overwhelmed by life, you think you are a victim of pain in a meaningless world. You do not know that your pain belongs to you and that it is your responsibility to transform it. You do not know that you are here on Earth with specific lessons to learn about how to love yourself and others.

Yet, sooner or later, you realize that life is not going to

conform to your expectations or demands. And you understand that your frustration will continue until you change your attitude toward life.

Trying to change the external events and circumstances of your life without addressing your internal beliefs and attitudes is an ineffective strategy. If you want to change the outer circumstances of your life, you must begin to look at the contents of your own consciousness. What meaning are you giving to the situation that presents itself? Are you suffering because of what happened or because of your interpretation of it?

The spiritual path begins with self-scrutiny, not with mechanical words and deeds aimed at increasing your ability to get what you want. The search for external abundance cannot succeed when you are feeling bankrupt within, even when it results in increasing your bank account or your possessions.

Inner wealth translates into appropriate supply: neither too much nor too little. You have just what you need when you need it. When you accept life as it is offered to you, you avoid an unnecessary struggle. You realize that the way you look at something influences the way you experience it and what you attract in the future. If you stop resisting life, it gets easier. Events which support you begin to occur naturally. You don't have to try to make them happen.

The law of grace operates from the inside out. As changes are made in the way you hold your experience, your experience begins to shift.

You do not reject or find fault with your experience just because it shows up differently from the way you expect it to. Instead, you take a deep breath, let go of your expectations, and try to get your arms around what is happening. You know that your job is to embrace everything that

happens to you. And that the more difficult it is for you to embrace something, the more deeply you will learn from it.

You learn to surrender into life and to trust it as it unfolds. This surrender is required not just once or twice, but continually, day to day, hour to hour, moment to moment. As the outside and the inside are brought into alignment, grace unfolds.

Grace is poetry in motion. It is a mercurial dance, embodying form for an instant, and then abandoning it. It comes into being, disappears, changes shape, and reappears. It is spontaneous, playful, always new. You must be in the moment to see it or appreciate it.

I once told you “knock and it will be open.” But I am not sure that you believed me.

When you are ready you will cross the threshold and we will abide together. Until then, know that the Friend is with you. She will lead you beside the still waters. She will guide you and comfort you. Through her, you will understand that goodness and mercy surround you and follow you throughout all the days of your life.

For you, my friend, are the bringer of love. You are the one who brings the light that illumines the darkness.

Because you have learned to love yourself, you can receive my love and carry it with you. Thus, wherever you go, I go with you. Through you, my teaching is given to the world authentically, as I gave it to you.

Godspeed on your journey, my brother and sister. Once you arrive in the House of Love, you never leave it. You merely open the door to others when they are ready to join you.



Paul Ferrini is the author of over 40 books on love, healing and forgiveness. His unique blend of spirituality and psychology goes beyond self-help and recovery into the heart of healing. His conferences, retreats, and *Affinity Group Process* have helped thousands of people deepen their practice of forgiveness and open their hearts to the divine presence in themselves and others.

For more information on Paul's work, visit the website at www.paulferrini.com. The website has many excerpts from Paul Ferrini's books, as well as information on his workshops and retreats. Be sure to request Paul's free email newsletter, as well as a free catalog of his books and audio products. You can also email: orders@heartwayspress.com or write to Heartways Press, 9 Phillips Steet, Greenfield, MA 01301.

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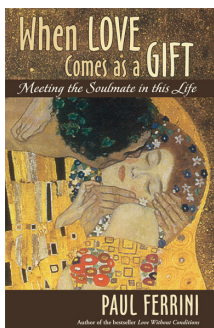
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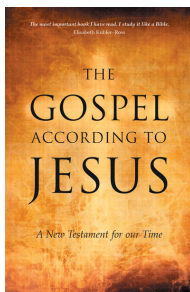
Our partner challenges us to become authentic and emotionally present. S/he invites us to walk through our fears, to tell the truth and to trust more deeply. Gradually, we open our hearts to the potential of creating intimacy on all levels.

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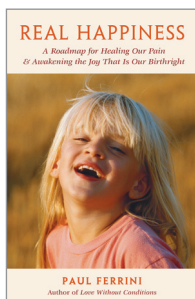
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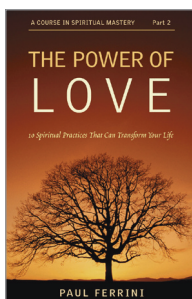
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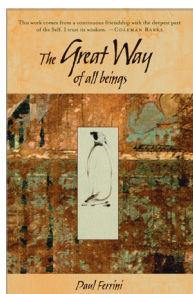
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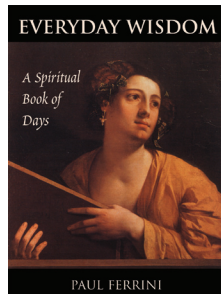
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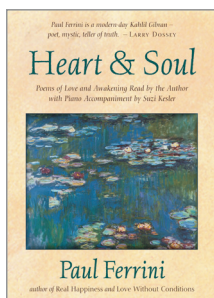


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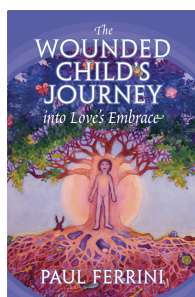
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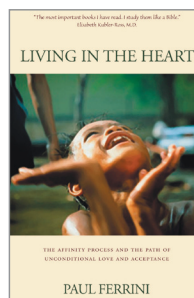
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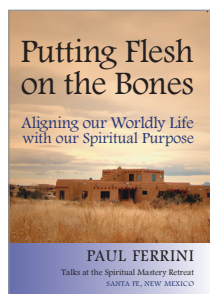
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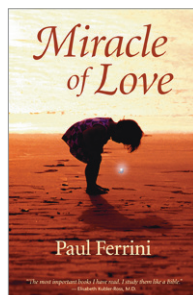
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