

The
Owl

A Sacred Stories Magazine
Autumn 2021

**WILL UNITING
HUMANITY HELP US
FIND THE MEANING
OF LIFE?**

**The Mystical Path
*of Kundalini Yoga***

***Leaving Big
Yellow Behind***

**SACRED ACTIVISM
*for Ending Violence***

THE HEART OF THE MATTER for
Spiritually Conscious Parents

Write for Good

**UP CLOSE
AND PERSONAL**
with Oscar Miro-Quesada

WELCOME

Welcome to The Owl!

A collaborative sharing of contemporary ideas, fresh perceptions, art, beauty, Universal wisdom, and modern inspiration across traditional and non-traditional spiritual and religious teachings. We invite everyone to the table to share in the rich feast of Life and Living.

Ariel Patricia



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Come On In & See What's Inside

The
Owl
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features

**Up Close and Personal
with Oscar Miro-Quesada** 6

Will Uniting Humanity 22

Leaving Big Yellow Behind 34

**Sacred Activism
for Ending Violence** 46

in every issue

A Sacred Story 4

WisdomKeepers 26

Artist in Residence 32

The Heart of the Matter 42

Write for Good 50

**Book Excerpt:
Jonas and the Mountain** 56

Sacred U Courses 70



26



34



42

A Sacred Story

by Seana Zelazo

The sea-salted air always stops us in our tracks as we climb the rocks at Sawyers Beach. Breathing in the scent of arrival, we lean into the cool Atlantic wind. With the weight of our surfboards under our arms, reassuring and close, we straddle the threshold between street and sea, and the magic hour before moonrise, assessing what awaits us. It's an incoming tide. From where we stand the wave looks only thigh-high. As the last of our quartet closes her trunk and zips up her wetsuit, we trek down to the water's edge. Four mothers, our children all temporarily occupied or nearly asleep, meeting for our monthly and year-long ritual of a full moon surf. As we paddle out, the wind switches, and a waist-high set comes in. Our bodies take over and we drop into the swell. It is 7:55 p.m., the moonrise begins in 13 minutes on the clear horizon just to the right of the storied Isles of Shoals on the New Hampshire seascape.

This is our women's circle, four mothers in our 40's committed to the sea. Our sport has realigned us with the moon and her tides. The lunar language sounds in our core. Enveloped in the darkness

of a nighttime surf session, the heavens feel more pronounced, somehow closer, and our sisterhood feels aligned with the *Queen of Heaven*, the Sumerian Goddess Inanna, her arms outstretched above a sacred space to play.

It is through surfing that I first connected with Inanna. As the *Queen of Heaven*, Inanna is both the *Evening* and *Morning Star*. She is also the dual Sumerian Goddess of Love and War. Her liminality is a powerful connector and the threshold she occupies is mirrored in the one we inhabit on the water, paddling the horizon between the sky and the sea. Inanna's father Nanna is a Moon God and her mother Ningal is a Moon Goddess, thus our lunar ritual is ripe with her echoes. Inanna's grandfather Enki is the *God of Wisdom* and the *Watery Deep*. As the daughter of the moon and the ocean through her ancestral line, we feel Inanna welcome us where the tidal waves roll in, beckoning our souls, and deliver us to ourselves.

Our hair dripping with salt and our bodies wrapped in the warmth of our wetsuits, we begin our full moon ritual

as soon as we finish our surf session. To watch the moon begin her ascent into the heavens while riding the Cosmic waves brings us each into a state of presence and reverence. It's a double baptism as we bathe in the moonlight and the ocean. To glide down the face of a wave, lit only by the low hung red moon opens us to the in-between, the sacred portal to the Higher Realms. While we come together regularly in awe of nature and the sea, our full moon surf sessions have helped us restore the practice of ritual and ceremony. Indeed, the art of ritual has been ignited within each of us and our commitment has yielded powerful shifts. The process has guided us through a challenging few years in which we have lost loved ones, launched young ones, realized our truths, and found our voices.

When I am the first person to paddle out under a still-dark sky of morning, I feel safe with Inanna nearby. She is the lighthouse to my highest Self. I have heard her call and now she speaks to me directly, imparting secrets of the underworld, the spaces of the unseen, the wisdom she is ready to share. In my own relationship with Inanna and the moon, I have remembered the potency of the sacred art of ritual, allowing me to engage in life through the eyes of the

Goddess; I can see the magic present in all things.

Tonight, we start a bonfire on the beach near the rocks and write up a list of what we have outgrown and what we are ready to release and transmute. Calling in the directions, the elements, Inanna, our guides, and loved ones, we summon their support to help us let go of all that is impeding us in order to alchemize it anew in the fire at our feet. In turn, we read aloud and hold to our hearts, the list of grace and support we wish to call forth and step into. Our voices command it into being and we witness for each other our generative power. We are a surfing sisterhood of moon-mothers ready to give birth to the lives we are here to live. As the *Queen of Heaven* and part of our sisterhood, Inanna reminds us how to create heavenly magic here on Earth, how to restore the sense of sacredness within and without, and how to always look for our connection to the Divine.

Seana Zelazo, LICSW is an intuitive channel offering spiritual guidance, coaching and teaching. A licensed clinical social worker, her background includes hospice, private practice psychotherapy and training in many healing modalities. As an athlete she uses sport to be in sacred relationship with the temple of the body. seanazelazo.com.



UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

with Oscar Miro-Quesada

Oscar Miro-Quesada is a respected kamasqa curandero and altomisayoq adept from Peru, founder of The Heart of the Healer (THOTH) Shamanic Mystery School, originator of Pachakuti Mesa Tradition cross-cultural shamanism. An internationally acclaimed shamanic teacher and healer, earth-honoring ceremonialist

and author, don Oscar is OAS Fellow in Ethnopsychology and member of the Evolutionary Leaders Circle.

A seasoned navigator of non-ordinary states of consciousness, don Oscar is well prepared to help people from all walks of life access realms of Being through which multidimensional powers and forces are available for healing self, others, and our planetary ecosystem as a whole.

Ariel Patricia: Welcome, Oscar. It's a pleasure to speak with you.

Oscar Miro-Quesada: Thank you so much, Ariel. Looking forward to seeing what emerges from this cosmic dialogue.

AP: Absolutely. Let's start with who is Oscar Miro-Quesada?

OMQ: Well, there's two ways of responding to that question. One is from a shamanic perspective of being pure consciousness, and the other is from the historical perspective of being a biological entity in human form. Oscar as consciousness is simply a friendly holographic projection of our world's need to have a teacher of cross-cultural shamanism.

From a historical perspective, I am a soul that incarnated in Peru, South America, from a Peruvian father, and an Italian-American mother. From early on, because of my father's work in national public health, I spent my formative years in very remote areas of the country immersed in indigenous reality and a soul-activated field of lived experience

that is characteristic of the Andes, the coast, and the Amazon regions of Peru.



As a child, I felt a deeper identification with the tribal views and sacred lifeways of Peru's native peoples than my European descendants, although on my father's side there is a trickle of mestizo bloodline connection with the 5th Inca, Capac Yupanqui. As a child, I recall having many conversations with ancestral peoples of Inca and pre-Inca origin, which later in life I found out were actual historical figures of great renown.

This early immersion in the mythic reality of indigenous Peru made

it extremely difficult to return to Lima's formal school system when my father was relocated back to the city. I felt like I was an alien in a world that wasn't mine, yet as it turned it out, this experience of feeling like a stranger in a strange land was crucial to my later seeking initiation into the native highland and coastal shamanic healing traditions.



AP: What an interesting childhood, to walk in both of those worlds. Can you share more about what you mean by a soul-animated field of experience?

OMQ: In Peru and throughout the world, all nature-venerating and spirit-befriending ancestral peoples recognize the primacy of

soul; in other words, the existence of consciousness in every living form—be it the sentience of a stone relative, plant relative, animal relative, or human relative. This living spirit is more important to communicate with than the actual physical body of the plant, the object, or the person. So therefore, prayer, ceremony, and ritual are integral to the lives of our first nations' people because without them, true communication and true guidance and true realization of one's inextricable interdependence with the great web of life are not possible.



Without that lived partnership with the spiritual reality behind the world of form and matter, our tribal wisdom traditions would vanish together with their ceremonial healing artistry, for they would not have an originating cosmology from which to continue their service presence on the planet. By recognizing that everything in existence—from what is the infinitesimal to the unimaginably large—is an expression of soul as consciousness, this allows an experience of reverence for life and All Our Relations.

AP: Share an experience growing up that was particularly impactful for you as a young person.

OMQ: The first that comes to mind is when my father was stationed in the Shipibo native community in the eastern Amazon department of Pucallpa. As there was no public health facility, my parents and several community members created a makeshift emergency treatment center. I was two years old at the time and one night, while I was sleeping in my crib in our little hut, as my father retold

the story, a vampire bat flew in the window and attached itself to my hair with its feet. Unsurprisingly, I started to violently bang my head against the bars on the crib, eventually smashing the poor little bat to smithereens.

When my parents woke up in the morning, they saw a bloodbath around me, the two claws of the bat still attached to my hair, and a big smile on my face, as though I had integrated the shamanic medicine power of the bat into my own soul through communing with its blood. In retrospect, this was my first classic shamanic initiation mediated by a traditional Shipibo power animal.

AP: Oh, my goodness.

OMQ: As I matured and began my formal apprenticeship in Northern Coastal shamanic healing arts, known as Kamasqa Curanderismo, it became evident that my experience was a genuine initiation, a direct medicine revelation and rite of passage equal in vocational destiny to most formalized apprenticeships.

AP: I'm sure you gave your parents great pause through your years as a young person.

OMQ: I certainly did. According to my parents, I didn't speak a word until I was three years old. My parents were a little concerned, of course. I would just sit there with my head tilted and gaze out into infinity. I spent most of my day that way. And then suddenly when I started to speak, nobody could shut me up.



AP: You were listening, which is always a good practice. Tell us more of your childhood.

OMQ: I had a very sickly and physically limiting childhood from the age of five to 10 years old caused

by severe asthma and allergies. I couldn't leave the house and I was bound to my room. I spent much of my free time in bed with my eyes closed and dreaming awake an infinitude of alternative worlds.

I developed a deeply rich inner world where my fantasies, dreams, and inventiveness became my lived reality—where the Within became my world Without. I populated my multidimensional inner realm with spiritual denizens that I later realized were part of the unseen universe spoken about in worldwide esoteric traditions. This inner journey experience helped enormously when I was being formally apprenticed in the arts of healing by my mentor, don Celso Rojas Palomino, who helped me understand that I had created a cartography of such, a map of the archetypal dimensions reflective of our pre-Columbian psyche and ancestral cosmology.

The internal world I used was so vivid and compelling in its reality that recovering from asthma and moving into the outside world with open eyes was akin to a rebirth. It was as if I had moved from one experience

of being a child into an unlimited paradise of opportunity. I couldn't get enough of the world of light and of external relationships.

This was a pivotal moment of Self-awakening and understanding that what is above is below, what is within is without, what is soul is world, to use a Hermetic wisdom adage.

AP: Oscar, the wisdom you're sharing is profound. At least in the West, we live so much of our lives and our children's lives in a busy and outward-facing way. It feels out of sync with the natural way, which is to allow that inner exploration that you speak of, which children are naturally drawn to.

OMQ: Some shamanic societies do that intentionally, such as the Kogi in Colombia. The Kogi have this realm called Aluna, which is like the dreaming of the aboriginal Australians. Their children are kept in a cave in darkness from birth until around seven or eight years old. And after they have spent time learning from Spirit in that isolated darkness, only then are they allowed to see the visible world of sunlight.

That is why they're so tuned into untapped psychic potentials and their ability to see into the future and have extra-sensory abilities to interpret things beyond the mind, word, and the senses. And because of this ability, much like other Heart Island or South American peoples, the Kogi are revered keepers of prophecies.

I also found that in both the ancient Greek tradition of Iatromantis and paleo-Christian great initiatory Mystery Schools, the practice of incubation—which is to go into dark caves and remain there for extended periods of time—was fundamental to receiving vision and guidance from the goddesses and gods.



I believe the experience of remaining within, free of the external vicissitudes of life, is very valuable. Hence, the importance of meditative practice and other forms of introspection and spiritual focus.

AP: That is fascinating. Tell us about your sickness and healing.

OMQ: In the early 1950s, everybody smoked cigarettes, including my parents, who were chain smokers. My congenital asthma was dramatically accentuated to the point where I needed to receive weekly intravenous treatments of dexamethasone, a steroid that allowed the alveoli in my lungs to open sufficiently to take in oxygen.

At 10 years old, I lost a year of schooling because they had to move me out of Lima to the central highlands, a place called Chosica, just so I could breathe. At that time, my mother and I were mostly living there by ourselves since my father had to commute from Lima. Even though the environment was free of Lima's pollution, intermittently I would still get severe asthma attacks to the point where I was

experiencing severe hypoxia leading to bouts of unconsciousness because of oxygen deprivation to the brain.

This went on for maybe three or four months, when one night, so tired of struggling to keep alive and on the verge of crossing over to the other side, I started to slide into this in-between realm. Suddenly, I heard my name being called like a faint echo.

I opened my eyes and in front of me were three very tall, angelic-like, transparent yet luminous beings, radiating an incredible love. One was directly in front of me and the others flanked me to the left and right of my bed. The one in front of me began to communicate telepathically, informing me that it wasn't my time yet and that they were there to assist me in remembering my soul origin, as well as present me some future scenarios of my life.

Then the being to my left arched over, like a willow tree with currents of light, and placed his lips over my heart center and torso, and began

a classic shamanic extraction by suction, drawing out the disease. As he did this, he gave the longest, most extensive syphoning breath you can imagine. And then he stood straight up and blew it out into the space above me. A huge portal opened in the ceiling of the room and this whirlwind of density flew out, was transmuted into light, and vaporized into space. I took a breath, and it was normal natural breathing.

At that point, the Shining One in front of me resumed to telepathically plant a few more seeds about what my future could be like, including relationships, children, education, career, and more. I saw a lot of the stupid choices I would make as a teenager and young adult. He then indicated that I should close my eyes, take a couple of deep breaths, and just release into a restful sleep. So, I did that. And the next day I woke up and didn't remember anything that had happened to me.

My mother walked in the room to wake me up in the morning for breakfast and noticed that

something had changed. She said, "What happened to you, son?" I said, "I don't know. I had a really good sleep and now I can breathe freely." She said, "Show me," and made me stand up and take a few deep breaths. She almost fainted because all the doctors that I had been to and all the medicine they had given me hadn't worked to date.

AP: How did that event impact your life?

OMQ: I could finally play outside and became a very adept soccer player, eventually resulting in a full scholarship to a university in the United States. Once free of asthma, I resumed my studies at a school in Lima, where half of the courses were taught in English and half in Spanish. There was a lot of influence of the American culture and psyche—the music, the blue jeans, and TV. Eventually in the Sixties, the flower-child movement of Haight-Ashbury brought with it the exploration of consciousness through meditation and the use of plant sacraments, as well as other mind-expanding

substances. I became fascinated with that path of self-discovery even though I didn't know at the time that it was integral to the ancestral shamanic traditions of most Amerindian peoples.



At age 14, I started to cook a psychedelic cactus. I hated anything to do with smoke because of my experience with asthma, so I refused to try marijuana. All my friends were smoking marijuana because it was just the thing to do in those days, yet I only focused on cooking and consuming this cactus. Commonly known as San Pedro or Wachuma,

its botanical name is *trichocereus pachanoi* or *trichocereus peruvianus*.

In time, I heard about a master healer, don Celso Rojas Palomino, renowned for cooking the best San Pedro in Peru. People from all over South America came to his place up in the Chongoyape River Valley. So I set my heart on learning his secrets.



Being a surfer in those days, I combined my visit to don Celso's place in Salas with a surfing expedition to the North Coast with three buddies. We surfed and then headed over to Salas. I went in there with my friends, and I said, "don Celso, I'm here because I heard that you are the leading expert in the

use of this plant sacrament, and I would love to learn your secrets."

We were four hippie-looking surfers, so he looked at me, glanced at the others, and said, pointing at me, "You stay, and you, you, you get out of here, I don't want to see you again." He sent my friends away and they left me there and took the car. This was 1969 and I was almost 18 years old. It was summer vacation and I stayed there a month, then took a bus back to Lima. In that month, so much happened, but in one of those Tuesday night healing sessions, called a *mesadas*, he engaged me as his assistant together with his son and son-in-law.

One evening at his ceremonial altar, in which there were placed ancient power objects laden with spirit consciousness and used to help the healing of the people of the community, emerged the same three Shining Ones that had visited me at age 10, upon which don Celso elbows me and asks, "Do you remember them?"

As you can well imagine, this turned my life upside down,

throwing me into an existential whirlwind. Here was another person witnessing the same visionary phenomenon that I was. It made me realize that I was dealing with somebody whom I could trust with my life when it came to being guided to follow the path of Peruvian folk healing known as *kamasqa curanderismo*, an ancestral shamanic lineage that, ultimately, I was sanctioned to bring to the United States.



AP: This is the point that you knew that this was your path?

OMQ: Oh, yes, certainly. How can I deny it? So, I combined academic study with my own inner study and apprenticeship in Peruvian healing. During college, over summer break, the first thing I would do is go to Peru. Instead of staying at my mother's, I would go straight to don Celso's place and study with him. That went on from 1970 all the way to his passing in 1982. Following don Celso's passing, I continued my apprenticeship with another renowned elder from the Cusco area known as don Benito Q'oriwaman Vargas in the Andean or Paco tradition, which is more focused on establishing sacred ceremonial relationships with the natural world; whereas, my apprenticeship with don Celso focused on individual and communal healing methods.

AP: Oscar, what is your work in the world today, while living in a soul-animated experience?

OMQ: My service path is best described as teaching Love by the way I live. I've understood over time that the most powerful medicine

is that of deep compassion and caring for one another and our entire planetary biosphere.

To accomplish this, based on my sanctioning by don Celso to share his ritual healing arts with those from the northern regions of the developed world, I originated the Pachakuti Mesa Tradition of cross-cultural shamanism. This is the foundation of the Heart of the Healer Shamanic Mystery School, which currently offers apprenticeships in this path by myself and 24 other lineage-sanctioned teachers. We also offer other types of initiatory experiences in hermetic, gnostic and star wisdom paths. My wife, Cindy, also offers some profound goddess initiations in awakening Divine Feminine Consciousness.



Carrying the medicine lineage of don Celso into the northern regions came with a caveat, because in those days the practice of *curanderismo* was illegal and considered superstitious bunk. A lot of the healers of the time were being persecuted and jailed by government officials. There was a great deal of extortion going on and many ancient ceremonial medicine artifacts confiscated. It was horrible and don Celso was extremely concerned about the future of these arts.

Yet he knew that if people from developed nations, particularly the United States, showed reverence and respect for our healing ways that the authorities in Peru would eventually start to honor and respect our ancient healing traditions in the same measure. He repeatedly emphasized that my mastery of the English language and connection through my mother in the United States, I was perfectly poised to start introducing

our native ways to those from developed nations of the world. And so, I'm dedicated to fulfilling his vision.

AP: Oscar, your work is vast and so important. Who do you admire?

OMQ: Mahatma Gandhi because of his conviction and steadfast adherence to a path of peace as a means of transforming the world. He was a true embodiment of both bhakti and karma yoga, of selfless love and compassionate service.

AP: Any final words you would like to leave us with?

OMQ: When we surrender the need to figure it all out and cultivate the ability to let it all in, then our earth walk becomes a sacred dance of healing service on the planet. More than the world needs saving, it needs loving.

AP: More than saving, the world needs loving. Thank you, Oscar, for your loving wisdom.

FUN FACTS

AP: Coffee or tea?

OMQ: I prefer coffee over tea, but I start my day with a green drink.

AP: Book or movie?

OMQ: A book for sure but there are some movies that are transformational.

AP: Favorite book?

OMQ: Memories, Dreams and Reflections by Carl Jung.

AP: Beach or mountains?

OMQ: Beach because I'm still a passionate surfer.

AP: Globetrotter or homebody?

OMQ: I'm going to say homebody right now. Although, in my work, I've globetrotted the world passionately and plan on doing

more of it, Right now, I'm really enjoying being at home.

AP: Early bird or night owl?

OMQ: God, this is hard . . . these either/or's are not the way the universe works for me. It's just it's so dependent on the level of teachings and work that I'm doing. If I become immersed in some creative adventure, I can go a couple of days without sleep.

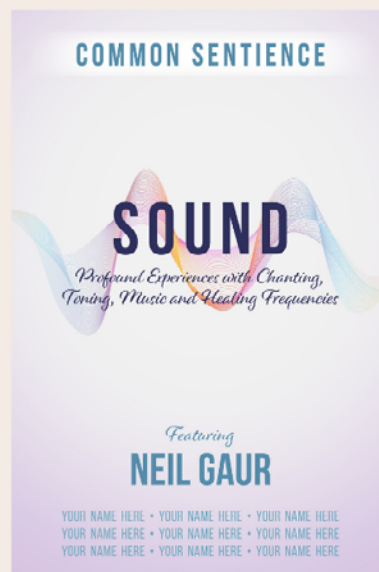
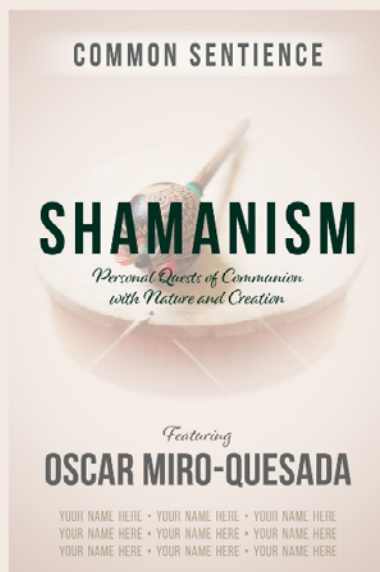
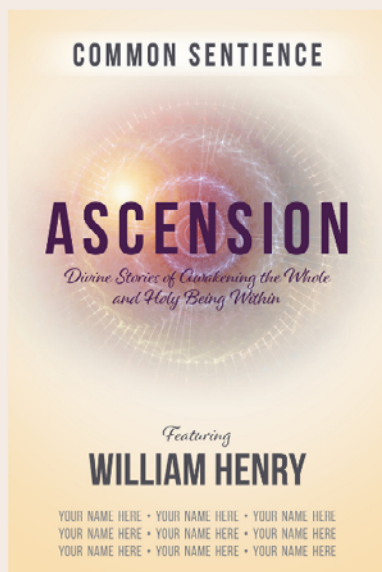
AP: Oscar, there are not many people who could be both ways but you're both in a lot of these. From a very young child, you've walked the inner and outer worlds, the mainstream and the indigenous practice. You are a walker between worlds.

OMQ: That's a perfect description of my incarnated life this time because I've always straddled the seen and the unseen. I'm comfortable with a very thin veil.

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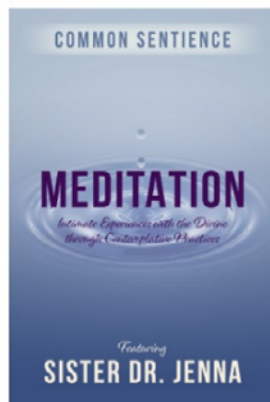
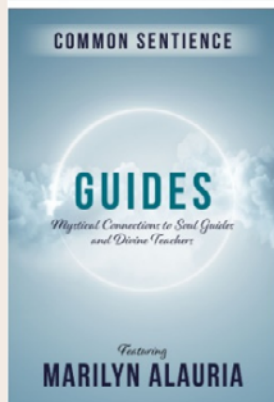
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**You can only lose
what you cling to.**
— Buddha



WILL UNITING HUMANITY HELP US FIND THE MEANING OF LIFE?

by Glen T. Martin

We know a few scientific facts about human existence within the Cosmos. We know the Cosmos is approximately 13.8 billion years old. We know from those physicists who formulated “the Anthropic Principle” that the emergence of intelligent beings was built into the universe from its very inception (see Harris, 1991). We know that life on planet Earth has been evolving for some 3.6 billion years and that it has followed a law of complexification leading to us—the most complex production of the life force on Earth. Within

us, some 37 trillion cells cooperate among innumerable organs, all coming together to create the beautiful and sublime unity of our human bodies and minds.

What is the meaning of this “immense journey,” as Biologist Loren Eiseley (1959) called it? Why has this creature appeared in the Cosmos? A creature who has immense problems precisely because we are self-aware. The other animals may suffer and die under various circumstances. The lion may kill and eat the antelope.

But the innocence of the animals limits their suffering. Only human beings suffer from the awareness that things could and should be different. Only humans remember the immense suffering recorded in the history of our species and agonize over why it should be this way.

The Cosmos has given birth to a unique self-aware creature concerned with freedom, compassion, justice, and redemption or “liberation.” The Maha Upanishad of India declares that we are all one family of brothers and sisters. Why has the Cosmos given birth to us, and what is our purpose?

Spiritual philosopher Raimon Panikkar (2013) speaks of “the destiny of Being” and our share within this destiny. Our share in this destiny has to do with freedom. The Cosmos has given birth to a creature who has the freedom to think, meditate, love, and act. To use Aristotle’s principle, we have the “potency,” the potentiality, to actualize ourselves in these ways. We can also fail to actualize these potencies by thoughtlessness, carelessness, hate, and destructive actions. Or we can ignore the question of our human destiny and

exploit the world as we find it for our egoistic purposes.

For several centuries our dominant activity as a species has been the conquest of the Earth—the development of technology, industry, production, transportation, and organization. Today, we find our entire human project in great danger from the threat of nuclear war and the realities of climate disruption. We find ourselves fragmented into rival, militarized nation-states, giant competing corporate entities, competing religions, races, and cultures.

Our technological success has not solved the problem of human suffering, chaos, and misery. We appear no closer to “redemption” or liberation. The disunity of our human project, along with our technological power and sophistication, is threatening to destroy this project entirely.

Our lack of concern and understanding of why the Cosmos has given birth to us is what has led us to this sorry impasse. Instead of actualizing our potential for

Will Uniting Humanity Help Us Find the Meaning of Life?

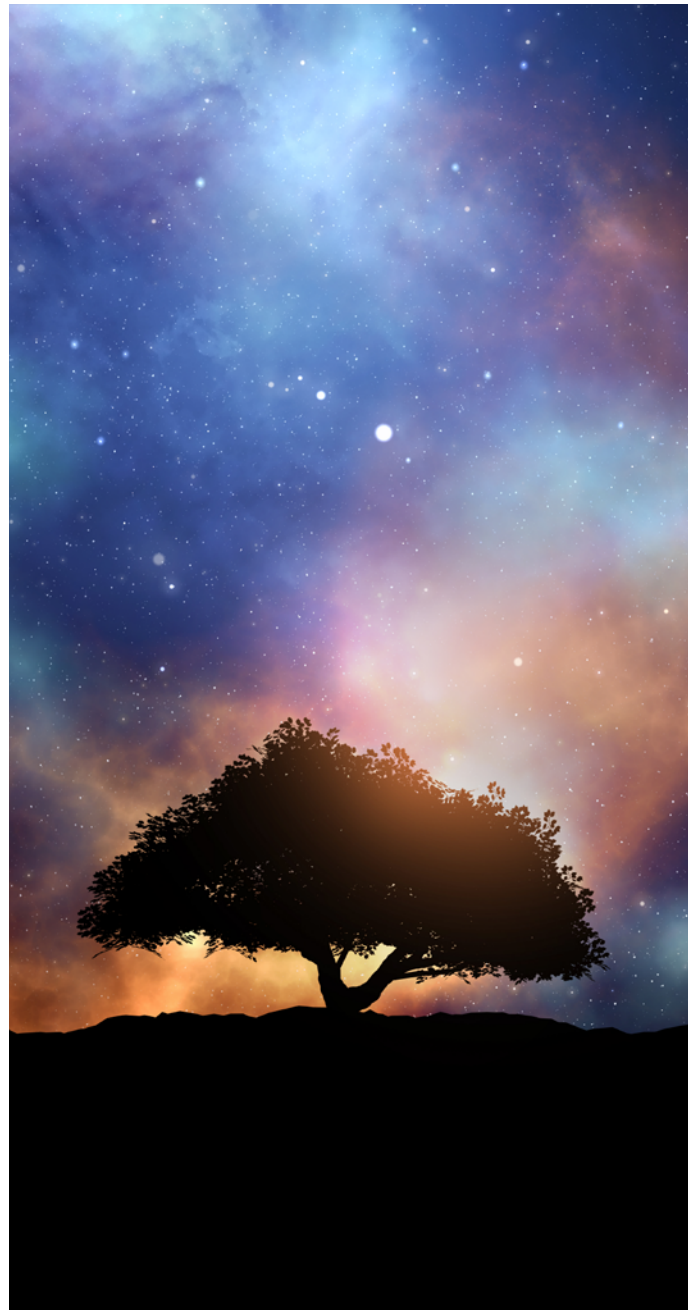
mutual respect, compassion, justice, and transformative action, we have substituted technological domination of nature and partisan fragmentation of the Earth. We spend vastly more money on war preparations than on health care.

What course of action is open to us?

The first step toward restoring our quest to actualize our destiny as gifted to us by the Cosmos must be to unite—to solve the problems of war and climate destruction through ratifying the Constitution for the Federation of Earth (Martin, ed., 2010). This Constitution addresses these global problems by creating a democratic world government explicitly designed to address our global problems, democratically and equitably. It ensures global justice, peace, and ecological protection. *My new book The Earth Constitution Solution: Design for a Living Planet, shows this in detail.*

Restoring the unity and integrity of our human project through ratifying the Earth Constitution is a means for humanity to get back on the track of discovering and actualizing our

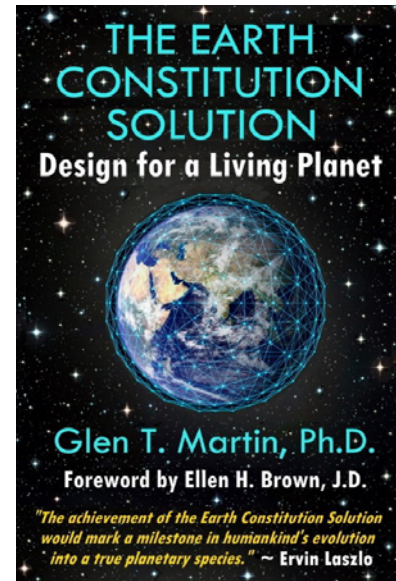
human destiny. It is also integral to that destiny. The Cosmos has produced a being with the gift of self-aware freedom, a being who can ask the great questions of the meaning of existence and this precious gift of freedom. Integral



to our gift is the recognition of its universality. We are all one as a divinely gifted species: our dignity and our integrity are universal.

The Earth Constitution restores sacred unity by creating institutions to protect and enhance our dignity through the principle of unity in diversity. It helps us avoid our present trajectory toward self-destruction and sets us on a course that allows us to ask the question of our humanity and destiny. What wisdom and what awakened spirituality do we want to bequeath to future generations?

Glen T. Martin, Ph.D. is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Radford University and the author of a dozen books. In 2013, he received the Gusi Peace Prize International for his work with the International Philosophers for Peace, the Earth Constitution Institute (ECI), and the World Constitution & Parliament Assoc. (WCPA). ECI and WCPA are global NGOs that sponsor Provisional World Parliaments. Learn more at www.EarthConstitution.world



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WisdomKeepers

The Mystical Path of Kundalini Yoga

by Karuna



*“Yoga is the journey of the self,
through the self, to the self.”*

-The Bhagavad Gita

Kundalini Yoga, because it emphasizes the deeply mystical aspects of Yogic spirituality, is often called Yoga’s “deeper dive” and a “Raj” (royal) or “Direct Path” Yoga. These deeper roots of the Yoga we have all become familiar with in modern times are sometimes overlooked, or even forgotten, by today’s practitioners. Today “Yoga” is often taken as referring only to actions, positionings, and postures of the human body—a form of exercise as in much of popular commercial Yoga. But the Yoga of the ancients, and the deeper Yoga still available to us today, is much more profoundly rooted. These deeper roots are seen in the origins and meaning of the word Yoga itself.

The root of the Sanskrit word for Yoga—“*yuj*”—has two, quite different meanings. These take on deeper significance because, in the original language of Yoga (Sanskrit) “*yuj*” is seldom used alone; it is always in relation with something—just like

we always are! It gives us our first clue that nothing is separate.

At its deepest level “*yuj*” points to the never-changing ground that embraces and unites all of reality: the “Oneness” or the “Unity” that is found in the most ancient understandings of our divinity as humans—the “I am *That* I Am” of the western Bible or “I am *That*” of our great Eastern traditions. I *am* Divine Being.

The second, simultaneous, meaning of the “*yuj*” root of Yoga points to the actions one can take to understand, to realize, this “I Am”. It points to the actions, the methods and techniques, to realize this Union, Oneness or Divine Identity. So, in short, the “doing” of Yoga is both the destination and the path, as the great western saint Teresa of Avila said: “All the way to heaven is heaven”. That’s quite a gift isn’t it? And it is true, no matter what kind of a person we are—and we humans are quite various—for sure! Accordingly, the great Yogi’s recognized what they called the “Tri-marga” or Three-fold Path(s) of Yoga—Yoga (Life actually) as Devotion (“*Bhakti yoga*”); Yoga (Life) as Actions (“*Karma*

The Mystical Path of Kundalini Yoga

yoga”), and Yoga (Life) as Knowing (“*Gyan or Jnana yoga*”). The great Indian Yogi Sri Aurobindo, and one of the founders of modern India, likened them as all gateways to the same room—who we are, our Divine Nature.

Of this “deeper dive” into our Divine Nature a number of assurances are given by our world’s greatest saints:

Your own self is your ultimate teacher. It is only your inner teacher that will walk with you to the goal.

Yoga is the work of the inner self.

You are the Self, here and now.

Awakening, Freedom, Happiness are your birthright.

KUNDALINI YOGA AS THE MYSTICAL YOGA

Of the over twenty kinds of Yoga generally recognized across the world, Kundalini Yoga distinguishes itself by its emphasis on the more deeply spiritual, meditational, and subtle-realm elements of Yogic

practice. Although, yes, it utilizes all the poses and postures (“*asanas*”, “*mudras*”, “*kriyas*” etc.) and other actions today familiar across our world’s commercialization of Yoga, in Kundalini Yoga all these are more deeply rooted in the ancient wisdom of the world’s great traditions.

This is the wisdom emerging from Yoga’s early history in the great documents *The Upanishads* and *the Bhagavad Gita* and into the “Classical Period” of Yoga (200-800 CE) with Patanjali’s classic “*Yoga Sutras: The 8 Limbs of Yoga*”. Then follows the “Puranic Period” (800-1470 CE), wherein the understanding of nondual (Oneness) consciousness solidified, and the “Bhakti Period” (1470-1710 CE) wherein so many practices of Yoga were perfected.

Thus, Kundalini Yoga is uniquely anchored in our understandings of “Nondual (Oneness) Consciousness”—authentic Awakening—and especially as it relates to the activity of our bodies in serving the awakening process. After all, it is the kundalini energy—and the classic understanding of its arising from the base of the spine

and then energizing all the energy centers (Chakras) of the body/soul—that characterizes and unites *all* the varieties and schools of Yoga. In the mystical Kundalini Yoga, it is the central theme.

EXPERIENCING KUNDALINI YOGA

Of course, Yoga must be experienced not just talked about. I want to acquaint you with one experience that is easily accessed through my programs at Sacred U. Please enjoy my free offering “Awakening the Ten Bodies” (courses.sacredstories.com/courses/tenbodies).

Yogic cosmology teaches that we have ten bodies—not just one. They are called the Ten Bodies—or the Ten Etheric Bodies—since they are actually “fields” that, together, form the wholeness of our being. Functionally, you could think of these Ten Bodies as the variety of “hats” that “You” actually wear across all the elements of your being, existence, and experience. You might visualize the ten “fields” as simultaneously surrounding the whole of you. As “fields” they don’t need to have precise boundaries or shapes. They

are dynamic—and always engaged in their own ongoing sustenance and further growth. The Ten Bodies that you will experience when you join me in this practice are, very briefly, our

(1) Soul Body, (2) Negative (or Protective) Mind, (3) Positive (or Expansive) Mind, (4) Neutral (or Meditative) Mind, (5) Physical Body, (6) “Arcline” (explained more in the practice), (7) Auric Body (or Aura), (8) *Pranic* Body (related to breathing), (9) Subtle (or Spirit-“Akashic”) Body, and (10) “Radiant Body”. They combine into and 11th Body—“the Whole of our Embodiment”.

About these, in the scriptures of the great Sikh tradition which anchor Kundalini Yoga, we find the words:

“When the God in you, and the human in you are in parallel unisonness, then you are an 11. You have no duality, you have divine vision, and the truth flows from you. You don’t have to find anything outside of you. The jewels are all in you – you are rich inside, you have satisfaction and contentment.”

The Mystical Path of Kundalini Yoga

Sensing your Ten Bodies is a bit like experiencing music. When you are, say, in your room listening to music, you are clearly aware the music is there, and its content is also clear. However, you wouldn't exactly be able to say “where” the music is in your room— or where the various attributes of the music are, say, the scherzos or the adagio's. Given this dynamism, Yoga cosmology speaks about each of the bodies by noting various of their attributes, elements, senses, or characteristics in making up the totality of who we are. These help us understand,

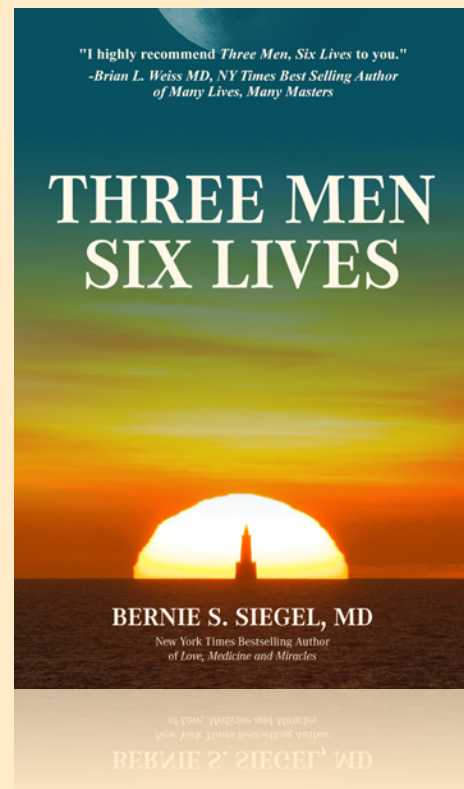
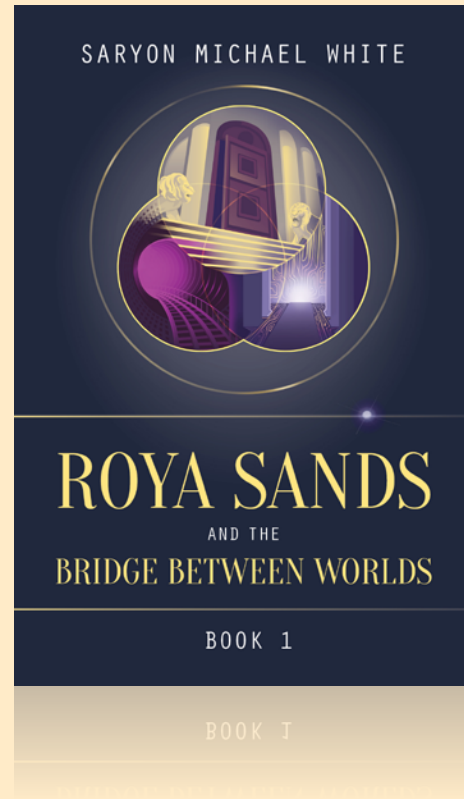
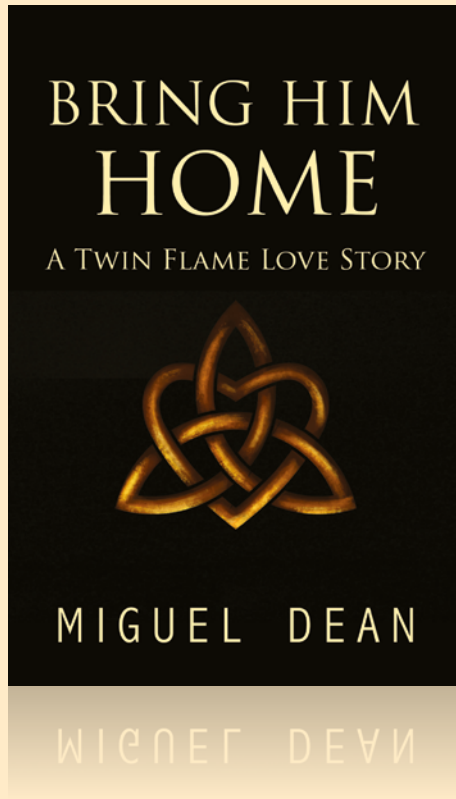
and sense, their reality. This is an amazing, and often life-transforming experience, so I invite you to share it with me (courses.sacredstories.com/courses/tenbodies).

***Karuna** is a renowned Yogini, founder of Light on Kundalini.com, a co-founder of Light on Light magazine and the Light on Light Press, and a co-host for The Convergence on VoiceAmerica. Annually, she joins the Committee for the International Day of Yoga at the United Nations for their celebrations all around the world.*



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ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

by Franne Demetrician

For many people, this time of year is about school supplies, school clothes and backpacks. For others, about packing up their older kids and getting them off to college. For me, the classes I'll teach or the classes I'll take. We all have our fall routines and rituals that are comforting in their predictability. This year my comfort went out the window because my grandson Logan went off to his first year of college in a faraway land called Louisiana.

I am the mother of a single child, and my single child is as well. My only grandchild has lived within a mile or two from me most of his life. I have relished every moment with him and was fortunate to have spent many years helping his parents care for him as he grew up. The suddenness of this moment in his life and mine is surreal. I keep asking myself, *Where did 18 years go? How could he be in college? Was I there all this time?* It came about in a blink.

The months and weeks leading up to his departure were exciting and active. Lots of celebrating and anticipation of

his high school graduation, helping to plan his party, shopping with him for some new clothing - all the fun stuff was a great distraction. But as the big day approached, I found myself a puddle of emotions. Memories of my own child's departure for college percolated up and caused me to relive the trauma of moving her into her dorm and leaving her behind to begin her college adventure. I was a hot mess that day, knowing that our lives were permanently changing. Letting go was difficult. Facing her empty room made me feel lost and sad. I had a lot of work to do to learn to be a mom from afar. And I had to let go.

Now the feelings are much the same; the same trauma of letting go and acknowledging that nothing will be the same. Somehow, I feel my age more poignantly and realize that I am in the process of yet another life lesson - "letting go 2.0". I cry when I drive by Logan's high school, and I gaze at pictures of him with tears welling and feelings overtaking.

What do I do with a life lesson circling back to knock me in the head once

again? I know I need a strategy to get through it. Self-talk is the first order of business. I know he will be home again soon, and I remind myself of that every day. I'm thrilled about what he will learn about himself and the world as he moves through his college career. I keep our connection strong by sending him cards, texting him goodnight, and reminding him how much I love him. Those things are easy. Well, maybe not easy, but logical and employable. It's letting go that requires an artists' touch.

Letting go in life is something we do without realizing it. In small ways, we do it every day. People come and go. Things come and go. Each day arrives brand new, is spent, and is gone with sundown. We receive it and let it go. And if we are lucky, there is a new day arriving right behind it, and the process begins again. I teach courses and connect with my students; the course comes to an end and I let them go. I create a piece of art, someone wants to purchase it, and I let it go. And with each, there is a piece of my heart that goes along with letting go. Maybe it's because I am an empath that the feelings are so intense and long-lasting, but I think many people experience

some version of this in their lives. Like everything else, letting go becomes an art form. For me, it is an opportunity to gracefully acknowledge my feelings and honor them with love and compassion. The feelings are a validation that I am alive, having a human experience.

A scene from the movie *Parenthood* has been coming to mind recently. The grandmother is speaking, "You know, when I was nineteen, Grandpa took me on a roller coaster. Up, down, up, down. Oh, what a ride! I always wanted to go again. You know, it was just so interesting to me that a ride could make me so frightened, so scared, so sick, so excited, and so thrilled all together! Some didn't like it. They went on the merry-go-round. That just goes around. Nothing. I like the roller coaster. You get more out of it."

Here's to the rollercoaster ride and the art of letting go.

Rev. Franne Demetrician is an interfaith minister. She has been a licensed holistic health practitioner since 1995 and wrote a spiritually oriented weekly blog from 2015 -2018. Franne is a working artist, photographer, writer, spiritual counselor, mentor, and teacher.

Leaving **Big** **Yellow** *Behind*

by Laura Gray



“The things you want are always possible; it is just that the way to get them is not always apparent. The only real obstacle in your path to a fulfilling life is you, and that can be a considerable obstacle because you carry the baggage of insecurities and experience”

- Les Brown

Have you ever stopped at a store for something and came out with that one item *and* much more?

Or perhaps you purchased something completely different from your initial intent? Twenty years ago, I stopped at a closeout store to find a black skirt. Instead, I discovered this ray of sunshine bag, sitting alone on a shelf, that I did not know I needed but somehow could not live without.

Over the years, I have traveled many places and have enjoyed numerous adventures with what I have come to affectionately call “Big Yellow”. Domestic or abroad, whether I roll or fold my clothes as a form of packing preference, I inevitably find a way to cram and jam more things into it, ultimately satisfying the “you never know what you might

need” philosophy. Either way, I am comforted by the thought of being well-packed and fully prepared.

Recently, it struck me that an overstuffed Big Yellow serves as a metaphor for the past baggage I have carried around each day. Like standing in the check-in line at the airport, shuffling our feet forward towards the airline professional as they repeat over the loudspeaker “never leave your bag unattended”, desperately hoping that it makes the weight limit. There has been more than one occasion where I have been asked to transfer some items from my luggage to my carry-on to successfully check Big Yellow through and proceed with my travel plans. Another metaphor, and life lesson: to reset and lighten our load. By that I mean, unpack.

According to the late Dr. Wayne Dyer, “To successfully open the door to heightened awareness, we must open it inward.” In doing so, we discover all that we have been holding on to, both good and bad, and that which is weighing down our journey. The term unpacking as it relates to our lives is very similar to cleaning out bedroom

closets. Why is it a dreaded chore? Is it because we must come face to face with our past and perhaps relive poor choices? Regardless, it is imperative if we are to create a future based on our now, not *what was* nor what *might have been*.



To unpack, we must first stop and smell the Cinnabon rolls! Unplug from all technology. Feel the warmth of our breath on the back of our hands and begin to practice gratefulness for another day. One tool I teach the youth I work with is called “five times grateful” or *5xgr8ful*. Each morning when you wake up before you even get out

of bed, say out loud five things that you are grateful for. Then at night, just as you get back into bed, say five things. They can be different each time or the same. It really does not matter. What does matter is that you are incorporating a practice of gratefulness in your life. Consequently, your life and the universe will respond by giving you things for which to be grateful in return.

Next, awareness is key.

How are you spending each precious moment? Do you feel like you are always running to catch your next flight and dragging along Big Yellow? Are you investing your time in love or in dread? Perhaps begin keeping a daily journal so that you may become more consciously aware of your innermost thoughts. Give yourself permission to write whatever comes to mind, whether it be one word or one full page. The bottom line, they are your thoughts. And if you do not like them, you are the one who can change them. The shift in momentum and magic all begins with awareness.



A simple way to do this is through positive affirmations. Start with five meaningful phrases to repeat (out loud) a few times each morning as you begin your day. For example, "I am healthy. I am independent. I am strong. I am loved. I am respected."

Once aware and focused on the good in your life, continue to go deep and explore all that is within and around you. What makes you feel most centered, in balance?

I hike almost every day and feel an instant connection with the energy the moment I enter the tree-lined pathway. Surrounded by nature, I graciously bow and acknowledge the plants, critters, and flowing streams who so lovingly share their home.

We create (successfully) from a place of wholeness. Put another way, it would be like building your home on a cracked foundation. Sure, the home may look good, however,

Leaving Big Yellow Behind

potential problems will inevitably find a way of creeping up and out due to the unstable base.

Throughout the years of delayed flights to missed connections and all the life experiences in between, I have slowly learned how to consciously unpack. Although not totally pain-free, it is through this pruning process that I have begun to fully embrace and create the life for which God has intended.

In doing so, sometimes we just might discover that it is ok if the airlines lost your luggage. Breathe, smile, and seize the unexpected opportunity to discover something new or better yet, learn to go without. Yes, your name may be tagged on your bag, but that does not mean you have to carry it around with you every day for the rest of your life.

The ancient Persian poet Rumi reminds us “The universe is not outside of you. Look inside yourself: everything that you want, you already are.”

Through the practice of positive affirmations, journaling, and finding

your passion to center yourself may ultimately lead to a place of wholeness and alignment with your authentic, inner self.

As part of my own journey, I personally have found this to be true. It all begins with the process of unpacking. And leaving Big Yellow behind.

***Laura Gray** is the Founder and Executive Director of IPride, a self-esteem, empowerment program for youth with an emphasis on mindfulness, social emotional learning, and creative expression. IPride offers individual life coaching, workshops, and outdoor experiences to improve and elevate the overall energy.*

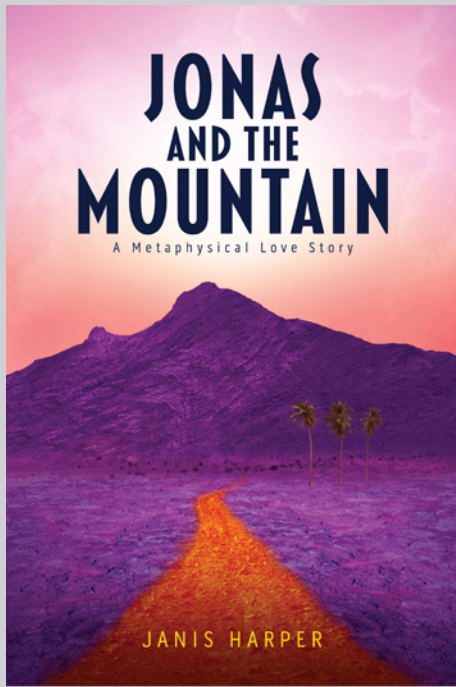
Breathe. Hope. Be.

Please visit our website at ipride.net or contact lgray@ipride.net.

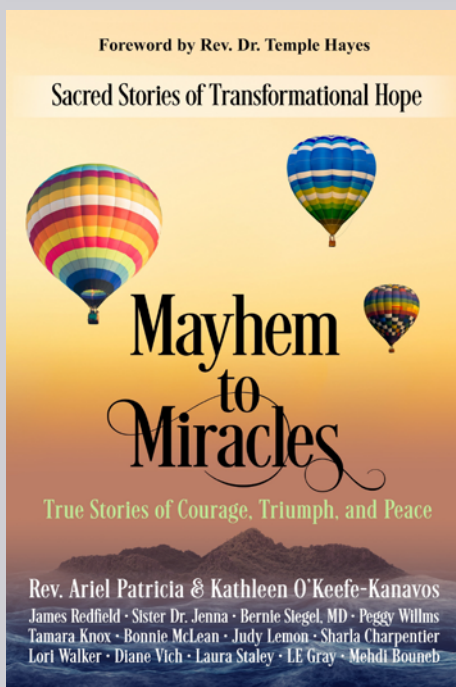


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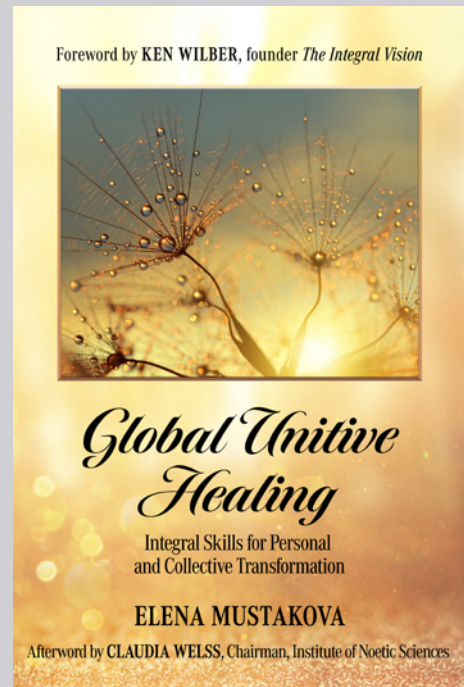
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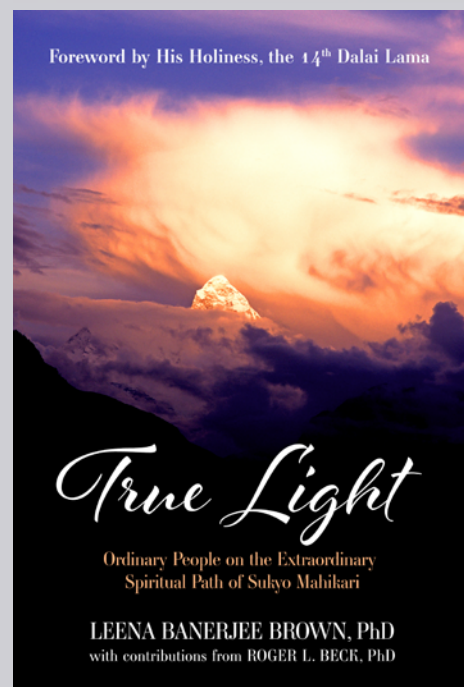
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**Those who cannot change their minds
cannot change anything.**

— George Bernard Shaw



The Heart of the Matter

for Spiritually Conscious Parents

by Mary Ellen Lucas



Death. Who likes to talk about death? Mortality is a hard topic for adults to talk about, let alone talking to a child about what it means to die. Parents instinctually desire to protect their children from the harsh realities

of life, to shield them for as long as possible from death.

We begin early in their lives to caution children about dangers and safety issues. Warning them about being

killed or overhearing about the threats Covid-19 brings could inadvertently teach a child only a fear of and aversion to death. We need to balance these protective admonitions with a realistic, general discussion of death. You can prevent a fear about death by preparing your children with your view of the natural evolution of living things as you see and believe it to be.

Clarifying in your own mind what you believe about death and dying before a conversation is needed with your child is a wise course of action. Then when the death of a family member or a family pet occurs, even though you can't take away your child's sadness, you will be prepared with what you want to convey to your child and can do so in a calm and reassuring manner.

My third children's book, *Goodbye to Grandpa Geezer Goose*, is about the death of a beloved character on Little Puddle Pond. The book intentionally has no religious overtones in order to be useful to the widest audience. However, throughout the book, my own beliefs about life's continuation after death is reflected. The story also includes themes about gratitude, disparate feelings occurring simultaneously, eternal love

and signs of communication from departed ones. Reading and discussing this book with your children may make it easier for you to explain this Mystery and help them perceive that challenges, heartbreak and grief are just as much a part of life as are love, beauty, and joyfulness. I offer here some suggestions which may give you some guidance in teaching about death and dying.

MODEL GRATITUDE

It is an enormous privilege to be alive. Gratitude for this gift is woven throughout my story. Grandpa Geezer Goose, affectionately called Grampy, developed a terrible tuckered-out tiredness, curtailing what he used to be able to do. He knew his days were coming to an end but he intended to remain grateful for whatever amount of time he had left.

A small child is enchanted by the simplest things. Awe and wonder are naturally inherent in children but these qualities often get lost along the way as they grow up. Being grateful is a quality that needs to be taught as part of child-rearing. Modeling gratitude to your child at an early age

will help them have a reverence and appreciation for life.

GRIEF'S CONTRADICTIONS

Grief is a paradox. If you ever witnessed a loved one suffering from illness, you felt the heartache of grief when they died but perhaps also had a feeling of relief that the suffering had ended, that they were no longer in pain. After the death, we feel immense love and gratitude for the time we were able to spend together while simultaneously feeling the hollowed-out ache of intense loss and engulfing sadness. Allow yourself and your children to experience whatever is felt while grieving the loss. Invite children to identify their feelings as this helps in the healing process. Reassure a child everyone grieves in their own way.

LOVE REMAINS

There is no choice when one dies. Perplexingly, a departed loved one is immediately gone from sight. Where did they go? Why did they go? A child may begin to wonder whether Mommy and Daddy are going to die. A good emphasis to focus on is what remains: the memories and love. Love can be the bridge that spans beyond the distance

of time and space to the deceased. A child's love for them or departed pet will be tucked away permanently into their heart and carried with them all their life. You may wish to model placing a hand on the heart whenever your child wishes to talk to the loved one and send them love.

SIGNS

Grampy made a promise to send a sign meant to lighten someone's heart. Whenever someone in the flock found a goose feather, they would chuckle and say, "Grampy sends his regards." Signs sent by loved ones after death communicate their presence in another realm. How? There may not be a rational explanation but there are plenty of stories that give testimony to the existence of ongoing communication between the living and dead.

A man once shared with me that whenever he found a penny on the ground, he believed his "Pops" had sent it and intended for him to find. He believed that is how they stayed connected.

A mother mourning her son's death went out for the first time in months for

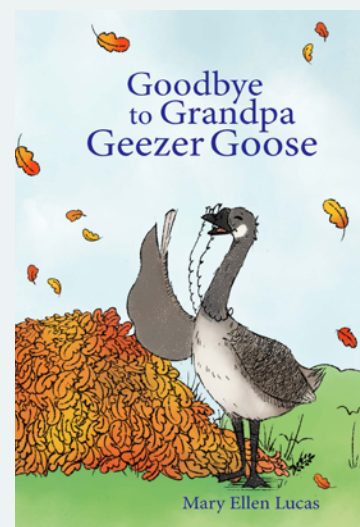
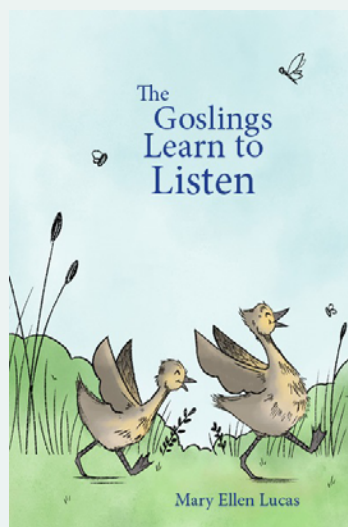
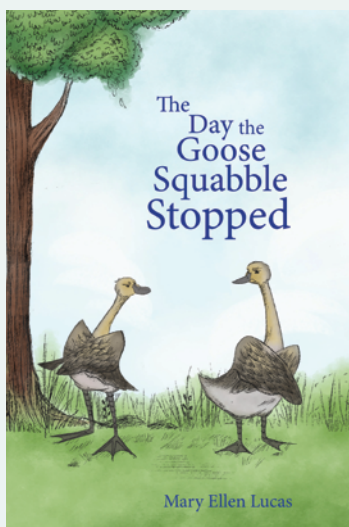
lunch with a friend. She had parked her car away from other cars at the farthest end of the parking lot. Returning to her car after lunch, to her amazement, a car had parked next to hers with her son's last name written on the license plate.

Not every parent will resonate with this belief, but if you do, you can encourage your child to watch for signs from the departed loved one. It is very reassuring and comforting for children to know these relationships do not really die, that only the form has changed and that the communication can continue in a different manner.

Not everyone believes in the hereafter. Formulating the message you want to impress upon your child about death is important. Even more important than

the language used is a parent's steady presence. Remain open to answering questions, listen to the feelings expressed and pay attention to the nonverbal cues as well. All children need open communication and loving support from their parents when they are grappling to understand a loss.

***Mary Ellen Lucas**, an Interfaith / Interspiritual Minister, believes we can learn to make wiser choices that create pathways of connection and collaboration to ensure a better world for our children. Life on Little Puddle Pond is a series of children's books she wrote with silly goose playfulness along with meaningful lessons. The books are pre-chapter books and appropriate for children four to eight years old. Available from online retailers worldwide.*



SACRED ACTIVISM

for Ending Violence

by Rachel Mann, PhD



Our world is a violent place. Currently, there are ongoing conflicts in up to 40 regions. Indeed, western commentators have logged only 268 years of peace in 3400 years and an estimated 1.5 billion people killed.

This number does not include those: who have died, been injured, suffered poverty, or were made homeless due to genocide, slavery, sexual assault, incest, autocratic dictatorships, and all forms of oppression based on

class, religion, race, culture, sexual identity, and gender.

Over time, the effects of such conditions multiply and show up in myriad ways in individuals and societies: mental illness, addictions, health problems, abuse, and other dysfunction within families, communities, and nations.

The picture is indeed grim, and it seems to be getting worse. It is critically important that we engage now in *sacred activism to end violence*.

Activism is often thought of as being a socio-political activity. Governments, non-profits, activists, and others seek to use—depending on their philosophy and approach—either weapons, the rule of law and civil society, peaceful protest, and/or programs for ending violence and peacebuilding. All of this can be beneficial, but it is a slow drip and much of it is lost in the tidal wave of this self-perpetuating bloody stream.

Nevertheless, sacred activism embraces the importance of such work (without the weapons and other

modes of coercion and force, however subtle) while also standing on the truth that the solution is spiritual as much as it is material.

It is important to recognize the root causes and conditions that have created this radical imbalance in human thought, feeling, and action.

Any appearance of harm to others or self, no matter how subtle or overt, individual or group, arises from a transgenerational legacy of unhealed trauma that started eons ago with a separation from Unity Consciousness.

There are stories of a time long past on the planet when beings came here from a place of oneness to create a world and experiment with existence in myriad forms in this denser spectrum of light. Yet, they did so while remaining connected into the oneness from which they emerged.

As illustrated in the story of Adam and Eve, some engaged in physical pleasures, sensations, and activities. Eventually, they fell into a consciousness of absolute separation—an illusion that they were here alone. Out of the disconnection with the higher matrix of

the light-filled Creation, fear overtook them. Out of fear, arose attachment, greed, and even hatred.

Grasping for a sense of security in a physical world seemingly separate from the ultimate source of love-light and nourishment, they started to fight over resources to survive. Eventually, our separation from Unity Consciousness was forgotten and filled with pain; a belief began that to grow and evolve, we must suffer.

Whether we believe this story as fact or as just an allegory, it points to a core truth—the solution to our problems with violence arises out of an aspect of *consciousness* first and foremost.

Violence in all its forms is a particular vibrational field within the holographic matrix of reality akin to a deer path in the forest—the way the ground gets grooved and plants pushed away from repeated use. Humanity has plugged into this bloody stream for so long; that we have forgotten that there is an even more powerful vibrational field of peace.

For millennia, there have also been and continue to be peoples and

places without violence. There has been no war, no abuse, no neglect, poverty, and fear. Indeed, the recorded and remembered histories of some indigenous peoples and even western chroniclers who came to the Americas 500 years ago tell a very different story.

They remind us that it is possible to evolve and grow through love and live in Unity Consciousness. When we live in that state, there is no lack or limitation. All that is needed arises in the field of experience. In truth, there is more than enough for everyone on this planet.

Sacred activism to end violence embraces this message. But what does this mean in practice?

In the system of *Awakened Heart Peacebuilding*, we recognize that the first step is to develop radical self-reflection. This process courageously enters the shadow dimension of our psyche to find the underlying roots of any imbalances leading us to cycles of pain and conflict within and outside of us. There, we will invariably find the causes and conditions of violence. Since this is a vibrational field, it is then necessary to use energy healing to

transmute the personal and ancestral wounds we carry. Sacred activism recognizes that as we heal ourselves, we contribute to healing the world.

But our work does not stop here.

We are ultimately born to be of service. Being in service is an acknowledgment of the existence of interconnection. Even through breathing, we are in service: the carbon dioxide we exhale supports the Plant and Tree People, even as the oxygen they expel feeds us. Everything is in sacred reciprocity.

As we tap into and expand the vibrational matrix of peace on the planet, we open the doorway to harnessing powerful energies of transformation and change for everyone.

There is yet more to do.

If we are called to the mission to end violence, the next step is action in the world. Grounded in the transformational energies of *Awakened Heart Peacebuilding*, we will begin to dream forth new solutions to our problems, along with hundreds of thousands of people with awakened



hearts. We will find our communities of awakened heart activists whose mission is to change the destiny lines through engagement on every level—body, mind/emotions, soul, and spirit.

As we live in these times of great peril and promise, there is no time to lose.

Rachel Mann is a sacred activist, shamanic healer, social scientist, and holistic psychotherapist. She mentors women and men who wish to integrate their spirituality into their service to others. Find out more at rachelmannphd.com.

Write for Good

by Laura Staley



Sometimes breaking trauma bonds becomes essential for a person's growth and transformations. Just like a butterfly breaks free from the chrysalis, people must differentiate, disconnect from relationships which smother, suffocate, or oppress the evolution of their life purpose and passions. The relationship might be with a parent, a boss, a colleague, a spouse, or your best childhood friend. A trauma bond happens when a person attaches to an unhealthy individual who causes trauma, which can include physical, emotional, psychological, mental, or spiritual.

If you are chronically fearful and suppressing your own needs, preferences, emotional expressions, ideas in deference to an abusive individual, you have likely formed a trauma bond sometimes formed by an "I hate you, but don't leave me" edict from the abuser. Mustering the commitment and courage to create consistent boundaries can be a powerful first step. Walking away in grace and dignity might save the only life you could ever save.

Breaking free from a trauma bond with another human being can become a foundation for the deep internal work to untangle yourself from the voice of the oppressor that likely has become your very own inner bully or inner critic. Most of you know this voice that tells you everything it hates about you or knows you cannot do or be or convinces you not to speak up, stand up, or show up. This inner critic becomes your furious fearful foil. Being able to notice you have this fierce voice inside yourself points you to the next steps for breaking the ties that bind, for a much-needed divorce.

I've learned the most important trauma bond to break is the one I formed with myself. To release the inner bully as the voice of my perpetrators through active practices over time with trauma-informed professionals and body workers; to connect, listen, and cultivate the tender "still soft voices" of my younger selves who I silenced long ago; and shift towards self-nurturing practices for my whole body takes great courage and commitment. Meditation,



spending time in nature, and yoga practice have created pathways to a quieter mind, a happier heart, a healthier body. Connecting with the silent pause between stimulus and response allows me to quietly check in with my deepest values and commitments, and then

respond from a soulful, centered place. I practice this skill every single day.

Shedding limiting beliefs frees you from the unhealthy mental traps you, understandably, likely created.

Two suffocating limiting beliefs which might make you physically ill:

- I cannot disappoint anyone, so I will persist in disappointing myself, silencing my own voice, and suppressing my emotional experiences and expressions.
- I am responsible for other people's thoughts, emotional realities, reactions, words, choices, and behaviors.

New beliefs which support living aligned with your soul liberation:

- I can and will disappoint other people.
- I can live true to my deepest held values in small steps and in meaningful choices.
- I am responsible for my thoughts, emotional realities/expressions, words, choices, attitude, and behaviors. The only person I can transform is me.

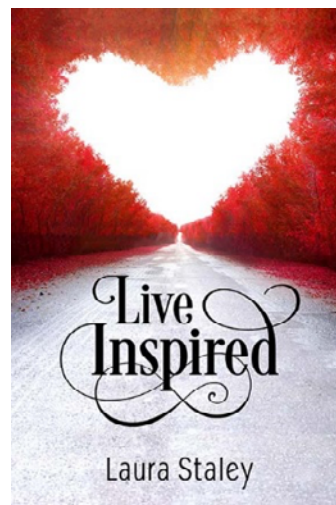
Clean up on aisle Laura is some of the most important work I have ever done and will continue to do.

Maybe clean up on Aisle You can become some of the most important

work you will ever do for the world.

Breaking free of the oppressor inside of you can open doors to unlimited possibilities for your being, heart, mind, and soul. From the struggle, the disorientation, the confining chrysalis of your creation, I wish for you to flutter free as a beautiful butterfly.

*The founder of Cherish Your World, **Laura Staley** passionately supports people thriving by guiding them to a holistic transformation of space, heart, and life. Laura is the published author of four books including [Live Inspired](#) which reveals the brave and deep work of self-discovery and her upcoming book of short writings and poetry *Abundant Heart*.*





**I alone cannot change the world,
but I can cast a stone across the
waters to create many ripples.**

— Mother Teresa



EXCERPT FROM

JONAS AND THE MOUNTAIN

A Metaphysical Love Story

Janis Harper

CHAPTER 1

Either the world exists, or it doesn't. Jonas drops into meditation easily, like a pebble into a deep pool falling down, down into the quiet dark. The light flickering of thoughts occasionally nudge at the edge of his consciousness, but mostly there is silence. Stillness. Nothing.

A deep breath expands his lungs, and he feels the welcome peace fill him,

palpable, soft. And although he doesn't think this, because he isn't thinking, it feels like pure relief. Or maybe he is aware of the feeling when those flickers of thoughts filter down like wavering ribbons of light from the surface into the depth of his still pool. Relief. One flicker. The awareness of the slowing down of breath. Another flicker.

Either there is something out there, or it's all in here and reflected out

there. The world mirroring our own inner landscape, allowing us to meet what we need to. The world as symbol, metaphor, always personally meaningful if you can see it, if you can understand, interpret the symbols.

This is what Jonas's post-graduate English degree in literary criticism was good for. He was adept at interpretation. He could apply the same skills he learned to analyze metaphor, symbol, plot, theme, and structure in literary fiction to his own life, another kind of fiction. What is the overarching theme? Main conflict? Important metaphors? Repeating symbols?

In life as in literature, repetition is very important, a big clue, pointing to issues that are uniquely yours. Repetition can indicate theme, and theme gives a life shape, separates it from others, creates individuality, or at least the illusion of it.

What's the theme of Jonas's life? The major theme? For a period of three years, the theme seemed to be betrayal. Betrayed by his wife of ten years, by the college he

gave seven years of his life to as a sessional instructor, by his best friend. Everything fell apart, one after another in close succession, like a line of dominoes falling down. No, dominoes don't create a sturdy structure, and Jonas's life used to feel sturdy. Maybe it was more like an earthquake that shook a house down to shambles on the ground. Or a tornado that swept it up in its vortex, bits and pieces of staircase, table legs, and light fixtures flying around.

Nothing he did for a few years was right. His whole world looked wrong; he was wrong. Obviously, "the universe" was banging him on the head, trying to get his attention. No, wrong way! Stop! But it wasn't until he had nothing, not until his life was unrecognizable, that he finally stopped fighting for himself (or was he fighting *with* himself?) and heeded the call.

He never asked himself, "Why me?" People who did that seemed to not understand something fundamental, that being what you imagine to be "a good person" doesn't mean you aren't

going to experience bad things. And why would you not want to experience it all? The whole life show, including the ugly parts? Why would you think you should be exempt from a whole realm of experience just because it doesn't feel good? Maybe there are some people who do feel like they're better than others. Maybe they are the ones who ask, "Why me? What did I do to deserve this?"

Or maybe there are those who naively believe that if they're being as good as they know how to be, nothing bad will happen. Cause and effect. Karma. Of course, Jonas didn't "deserve" it, any of it. He was the victim, any way you cut it. And there's another strange thing: why people believe that some people deserve what they get and others don't. You often hear this kind of thing said about murder victims: "She didn't deserve to die." What does that even mean? Anyhow. "Why not me?" is the better question.

Falling apart is common enough in literature. It's almost a requirement. And more often than

not it precedes greater personal awareness, a never-before-imagined perspective, a setting out on a new path toward a new world. Jonas could see those possibilities after the fact, a long time after. At the time, he could barely see a thing; he just concentrated on getting through each day, which took all of his attention and effort. But that's how stories end: crisis is reached, conflict is resolved, denouement occurs, and the protagonist walks away changed, into a new, better life.

So, did he have to go through all that to get here? Where is here?

Sitting with thirty other people at the feet of his guru, D, in the open-air meditation hall in an ashram at the foot of a holy mountain in India. And obviously not meditating anymore. His dark still pool is now all lit up by these thoughts. Just let them go, Jonas. It's okay. Be here now. He breathes in "here," he breathes out "now."

Jonas drops again into the deep, dark pool. He feels his body relax, his shoulders fall, his stomach

muscles unclench, his breath slow.
Relief. Here comes the soft peace.

CHAPTER 2

Two months before Jonas found himself in India, something unusual occurred. Sunk deeply into a familiar stagnant pool of limiting thoughts, he came up for air and heard himself crying out, Where do I go from here? And an answer came.

Where are you now?

The voice seemed to come from somewhere, but he couldn't determine the location. Was it outside his body, over there to the left? Or inside of him somehow. In thin, ringing tones he both heard and saw the words, each one turning into a balloon, disappearing in a moment and filled with that sound.

The ringing echoed in his head.
Where am I now? What a question.
Then Jonas knew the answer:

I am here.

That felt right. Here. He was just here. It was enough. He wasn't

anywhere ugly; he wasn't on the brink of desperation; he wasn't stuck between a rock and a hard place. He had thought he was there, but he wasn't. He was just here.

Jonas felt something loosen inside. It was as if he had tightened the strings on his guitar too much but didn't know it, and now they were loosened. They could make sounds. He could hear the voice again, less thin this time, fuller, sweeter, a chord. Maybe A. Or D.

I am here too.

Jonas knew that if he thought too much about what was happening that he would get in the way of it. He felt an opening, the size and shape of an almond, and it started to vibrate. He knew somehow that there was a kind of backlog occurring, something—words? sounds? images?—was piling up. Jonas heard a popping sound, and felt himself recede.

*Great galleons cross faraway oceans
to bring untold treasure and delicacies
to those gathered around bonfires
outside the caves that are their homes.*

Book Excerpt: Jonas and the Mountain

*Time is measured by the motions
of currents and wind and moon.
Moods allow for rhythms of feeling
that synchronize with the wonders of nature.*

*Why has this boat come in?
There is little on it.
Where are the provisions, the food?
This one is not bringing in but carrying away,
and there are some who may choose
to leave on this boat
and take it to a far-off shore
undreamed of in the measured moments
and pungent air in the caves.*

CHAPTER 3

Anna was eleven years old when she started having nightmares—or “night terrors” as she overheard her mother whisper in her “concerned” voice to Auntie Joy on the telephone. They weren’t just bad dreams with scary people in them chasing her. *Those* were bad dreams, or maybe even nightmares. “Night terrors” might just be the right term. They were terrifying, but not in a movie way, not like a horror movie-nightmare.

Anna was so afraid of having these “dreams” that before she went to sleep, she put out her colored felt

pens and paper and asked her mom to tell her to draw a picture the next time they came. She knew she’d need help to get her out of her scary place and back to normal. Her mother had been bringing Anna to the living room to look out the window at the city lights of Vancouver as a way to get her out of it. But it didn’t help. The darkness, the squares and pinpoints of light from the buildings across English Bay, out the huge window...all that kept her in her scary place. Even with her mom by her side, saying gentle things to her and putting her arm around her, Anna didn’t come back to her “normal” self. She just heard her own voice coming from far away, through a long tunnel.

“God. Oh my God. Oh my God.”

Anna tried to describe her night terrors one day to her mother, but could only say stupid-sounding stuff like, “It’s like there’s this one black hair, and it’s at a normal distance away from me, then suddenly it’s huge right in my face, then it’s going back back back and it keeps going back, and the empty place where it

was is huge in my face, but it's still back and there's no end."

Anna was not in time and space. She was not in her body. Dimensions appeared and disappeared. She glimpsed infinity. And when she did, of course it was too immense, too huge for her perceptive faculties. Waking up didn't take her out of it because it wasn't really a sleep-dream state. And she was overwhelmed because she didn't know what was happening to her—and that was the most frightening part.

In biological terms, Anna's pineal gland was opening. In Western science, which still finds the pineal gland mysterious, it supposedly regulates sleep-wake patterns and reproductive hormones. Rene Descartes called the pineal gland "the seat of the soul," and in many philosophies it is considered a portal to the spiritual world, a physiological "third eye." The opening of the pineal gland isn't uncommon in adolescence, and is often the precursor to creative pursuits, the flaring up of artistic passions. And in Anna's case, it was a creative time

indeed: she was bridging worlds. She came tumbling through the portal. Her third eye opened wide and didn't blink. It was as if she were on top of a mountain and could see the entire lay of the land, everything, stretching out every which way she looked.

But it was also as if she were being given something that was almost too much for a person, for anyone with a body—much less a skinny little-girl body with long brown braids that curled at the ends and dark almond eyes that crunched up into crescent moons when she smiled. How can anyone experience such ineffable enormity, such expansiveness, such powerful creative energy; how can anyone see through transparencies in reality and into other dimensions just as real, and still be able to walk and talk and eat soda crackers with butter and play kick-the-can with the kids down the block?

It can be done. Anna did it. But as she grew through some very rocky teenage years into an adult, she was always aware that she was merely keeping up appearances. She'd inherited her mother's

talent as an actress to mimic other people—more than mimic, to understand their motivation, why they said and did what they said and did. So she acted as if she were in the same play they were in. She was good: she could tell in an instant what part someone was playing and what part she should play in response. And she could play with the best of them—because she knew the range of motivations and emotions and which were appropriate for which scene and cast. She was good with language, too. (She had also inherited that from her mother, who had taught high school English after her acting career ended.) No one suspected a thing.

Anna the 25-year-old had several friends, a casual boyfriend, a job tending bar at a local watering hole, and the occasional role in a community theater production. She still had long brown hair, loose now and curly, and crunchy eyes. And she knew everything. She knew beyond a shadow of a doubt all of the answers to all of the big questions, all of the “whys” and even some of the “hows.” She just

didn’t know what to do with all of it. So she hid it. She wanted to be liked, after all. She had inherited that from her mother too.

And it was so hard to express, for another thing. It was so different at its very roots from what others were saying. She had tried college for two years, and read eagerly, trying to find what she knew in literature, philosophy, science, psychology, religious studies. Anna was an excellent student and asked many good questions. She certainly looked like she was on an academic path. She then turned to the mystical and heretical, the metaphysical, the spiritual, the paranormal. Her friends saw the books on her coffee table. She certainly *looked* like she was on a spiritual, maybe even “new age-y,” path. And she did find bits and pieces of what she knew to be true in various places: Eastern spirituality, Western mysticism, ancient Greek philosophy, neuroscience, quantum mechanics, metaphysics, channeling.

For Anna wasn’t on any kind of path. She was retracing her steps,

doing it backwards. As much as it looked that way to others, Anna was not looking for the truth. She already knew it, of course. She was looking for some discipline, some system, someone *else* to have come up with it, too. For how could she continue to live a life faking it all the time? She wanted to belong to a community—or, at least, she needed a way to be herself in the world. Being able to point to something else and say, yes, I'm that too, would be nice and normal. She'd have someone to really talk to. She began to envy religious people and political activists.

Sometimes she thought she would explode with all that she had to keep inside of her. So, occasionally, 25-year-old Anna would experiment, usually when she was having a drink or three after her shift at the bar was over: she consciously, albeit tipsily, fell out of character and told the truth when she was asked her opinion. And the results were usually disastrous. People got very angry. She occasionally tried this sober, too, in serious settings with open-minded, intelligent people. Same results.

So Anna took a different route. One day, she simply receded from the world. She all but disappeared from the face of it.

And this is how Anna, the little girl who sat in the dark with her mother on a living room couch, looking out at the city lights of Vancouver and uttering "Oh my God," became Anamika, the nameless one. And how she came to appear at the holy mountain of Arunachala in the state of Tamil Nadu, in the land of India.

CHAPTER 4

Jonas came out of what could be called a "trance," and shook himself. He grabbed the nearest pen and wrote down the words that he...heard? Felt? Saw? They seemed to form a kind of poem, though he's pretty sure no one in academia or in the literary community would call it one. He wasn't sure what to make of it, but there was something about it that he liked, some quality. What are *galleons*? He looked up the word. Wikipedia said, "A galleon was a large, multi-decked sailing ship

used primarily by European states from the 16th to 18th centuries.” That was it, the quality: it had an “old” feel, 18th century-ish maybe. Jonas himself would never use words like *delicacies* or *untold*. And the people in the caves? The boat is for *carrying away*, leaving for unknown shores, not for providing sustenance to the cave-dwellers, not toward maintaining a lifestyle. Interesting.

Measured moments. He liked that. *Time is measured by the motions / of currents and wind and moon.*

There was some sense there. Perhaps time isn’t a real thing or whatever in itself, but only a measurement we make. In the case of the poem that arrived, it is nature that dictates time, the movement of ocean currents and the moon and the way the wind blows. Or we use nature’s movements as a measurement, a way of ordering our day-to-day lives. There is night and day, after all. And seasons. But maybe those are not passages of time until we make it so.

The more Jonas studied this “poem” that came out of him

without him knowing, the more excited he got. It was a different kind of excitement than he felt when he discovered a new way of looking at a poem in a literary analysis course. His body was actually tingling. But his mind seemed calm. What just happened, anyway? Of course, having studied English literature at university, the first person he thought of was Coleridge and the much-discussed way he wrote his famous “Kubla Khan” poem, one of his best. In Coleridge’s own words,

The Author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time he has the most vivid confidence, that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines; if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as things, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort. On

awakening he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, and taking his pen, ink, and paper, instantly and eagerly wrote down the lines that are here preserved.

In university, Jonas always attributed Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" to the painkiller he'd taken before a nap. But obviously he hadn't thought about it much. Drugs usually don't enhance creativity, but stifle it. He knows that now. He knows that well, after taking whatever pain-numbing kind of drug he could get his hands on after Carla left him, then adding amphetamines when he had to get back to a regular teaching schedule. And he wasn't even trying to be artistically creative. The drugs seemed to wear away his very neural fibers so that just preparing his academic writing class felt like slogging through waist-deep mud.

You don't get this from drugs. Jonas knew the lingo, too: "automatic writing," even "channeling." But he didn't want to think about that now. He felt good.

Excited. Alive. Curious. Could it happen again? And what should he do with this poem thing?

Why has this boat come in?

.....

*and take it to a far-off shore
undreamed of in the measured
moments and pungent air in
the caves*



Jonas didn't really know why he was going to India, except that a friend was going and invited him along. Since he was growing tired of his job at the print shop and was feeling that a daily change in his life was on the horizon, to match the inner changes he was experiencing, he said yes. Why not? He had enough money saved and India was cheap. Besides, he hadn't traveled since he and Carla took a trip to a resort in Puerto Vallarta, which was the beginning of the end of their marriage.

Jonas didn't know what to do with these inner changes. He had had several more "experiences" where something shifted inside

of him, he backed off (it was indeed almost like taking a nap!), and the next thing he knew there were these images rising up and he felt corresponding words toppling out of the images, sometimes slowly, other times rushing up like a fountain. Now he always had a pen or keyboard handy to take dictation. That's what it felt like: taking dictation. Often his eyes were closed, and he didn't know what was going on until after, when he read the words written.

But he hadn't heard that voice again, that other voice that seemed to talk directly to him and asked him where he was. And he didn't want to address the "poem-giver," ask him or her (or it?) questions. He was scared of the response. He didn't want to be a channeler, didn't want to be thrown into a strange new world. What would happen next? People would want things from him, want to hear what the poem-giver said. He would be labeled a "psychic," a "medium," a "channeler." He knew about famous channelers who looked weird and spoke in strange

voices when they were doing their thing. It polarized people, divided them into camps of skeptics and believers.

Jonas wanted a quiet life. He didn't want to have to defend himself. He had enough of his own problems, thank you very much. He liked these apocryphal poems, though. They interested him, and made him feel something. Different. Special. Like there was indeed more to life. But he didn't tell anyone about them. Except Bruce.

Jonas's travel companion was a fellow worker at Kinko's. Bruce never went to university but read voraciously, and often over a print job when it was just the two of them working overtime. Jonas and Bruce would have long conversations about what Bruce was currently reading. Jonas admired and envied Bruce's *joie de vivre*. He was Jonas's age, mid-thirties, and had spent his life seemingly enjoying himself—working happily at various joe jobs while traveling intermittently to hot countries, surfing, climbing,

and having casual relationships with hot women. He had an innocence and enthusiasm about life, and believed in everything. He was lucky, too. He hadn't experienced the dark side like Jonas had. Bruce was also Jonas's physical opposite—a perpetually tanned, blond, muscular, square-jawed, Greek-god type, a contrast to Jonas's serious academic-nerd look: tall, pale, and skinny, with a long face under a mop of unruly dark hair. People think he's Jewish, but he's not.

Lately, Bruce had been on a serious spiritual kick, learning to meditate and chant, and reading about Buddhism and, more recently, Hinduism. Jonas could contribute to the conversation because he had taken a couple of courses in Eastern Religious Studies at university, and did some yoga and even meditated sometimes. Bruce had read some of the *Bhagavadgita* and various books about eastern mysticism and philosophy, like *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda. After he read a book from the 1930s,

A Search in Secret India, by Paul Brunton, he got especially interested in Advaita Vedanta philosophy, or non-dualism, and a prominent Indian sage who died in 1950 named Sri Ramana Maharshi who had lived in a cave on the side of a mountain for a couple of decades. As far as he knew, lots of people (and animals and insects!) were drawn to this quiet man who just liked to be alone and meditate in his cave. So when things got too busy and his group of followers got too large, he moved to another cave. Now there's a whole school of thought and teachings and a "lineage" of guru-disciples originating with Ramana, and he's considered to be one of India's greatest sages of all time. A real master.

Ramana's own guru was the mountain in whose caves he lived. Mt. Arunachala is supposedly a very special holy mountain in India. Jonas didn't understand a lot about this place. For instance, how can a mountain be a guru? And what's so special about this mountain that it draws all manner of spiritual seekers and gurus and

sages from all over the world? And apparently it always has. The mountain is said to be the god Shiva incarnated. But in Jonas's knowledge of India, Shiva seemed to be incarnated everywhere. It's also called the "magnet mountain" because it draws people to it, and many find it difficult to leave. And it's supposed to be filled with iron ore.

Well, Jonas would soon find out for himself, because Mt. Arunachala is where he and Bruce were headed.



The cab ride to Tiruvannamalai from Chennai was four long, hard hours, and Jonas was still suffering from the two-day air travel from Vancouver through London and Delhi to Chennai, in Tamil Nadu, India's large southeastern state. And then, upon arriving, the shock of it all: the incessant heat, the swarms of people, the filth, the smelliness, the cacophony of honking horns. It's true what they say: India is an endless assault on the senses.

Tiruvannamalai, or "Tiru" for short, looked like all the other dusty, dirty towns they'd driven through on the way to get here: cows, dogs, oxen, motorbikes, cars, rickshaws—and people—all weaving around each other on narrow garbage-strewn streets lined with tiny store fronts and food stalls. The difference in Tiru is that, in addition to the hundreds of Indians—women in brightly colored saris and men in plain lungis—there were many white people walking around, dressed in traditional Indian clothes and riding motorbikes and bicycles. And another difference was the number of old Indian men draped in bright orange cloth, with long grey beards and knotted dreadlocky hair. "Sadhus, holy men," their cab driver said.

After Jonas and Bruce found a room in a travelers hotel, Mountain View Towers (apparently there were cost-free rooms at Ramana's ashram, but they were too tired to look into staying there), Jonas left Bruce napping in their room, and hiked

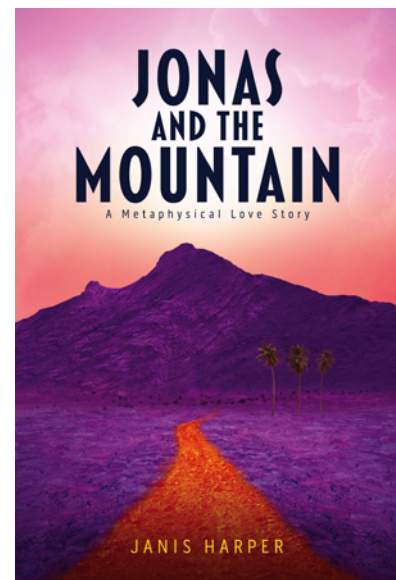
up the four flights of stairs to the rooftop, where there was an open-air restaurant with cushions for seats and low tables on the cement floor. Jonas plunked himself down cross-legged on a cushion, grateful to be out of the car and sitting in a different position.

And there was the view, as advertised. Mt. Arunachala sat there, a nondescript lumpy red-brown hill, with some scrub on it and patches of rock. But as Jonas gazed up at it, wondering at its ordinariness, the tail end of his spine began to hurt. No wonder, he thought, my tailbone is aching after hours in the bumpy cab. But the sensation was different than an ache: it felt like there was a heavy weight in it. Sometimes after yoga when he was sitting and trying to meditate, he felt like this, like all of his body's energy was settling into his base chakra. Jonas's lower spine seemed to extend past his body and down down down into the earth, like the roots of a tree. He felt he would never move again; he was rooted to this spot. And that was somehow perfectly fine. He didn't

want to go anywhere. More than that, he had no desire for anything. His tiredness vanished—all he was aware of was the deep, heavy sensation at the root of his body. And a feeling of immensity. And peacefulness. Immense peace. He is here. After all.

END OF EXCERPT

Janis Harper is a former adjunct English professor turned expressive arts therapist, as well as a writer, singer-songwriter, and actor. Her lifelong passions for the arts, metaphysics, spirituality, and philosophy come together in *Jonas and the Mountain*. Although she has published mainly nonfiction, she considers this novel to be the truest work she's ever written.



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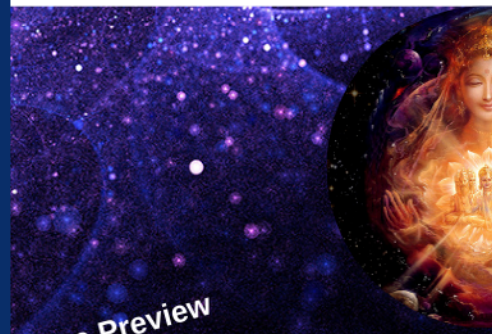
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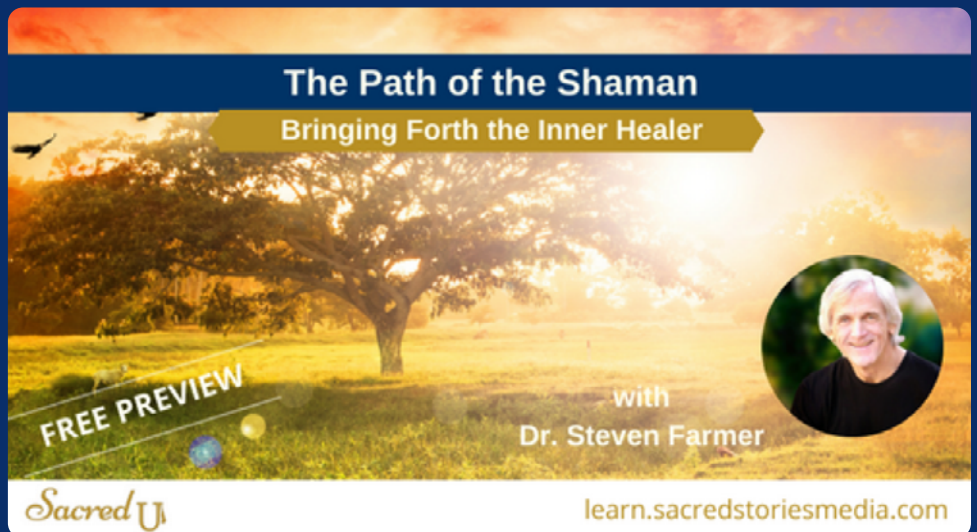
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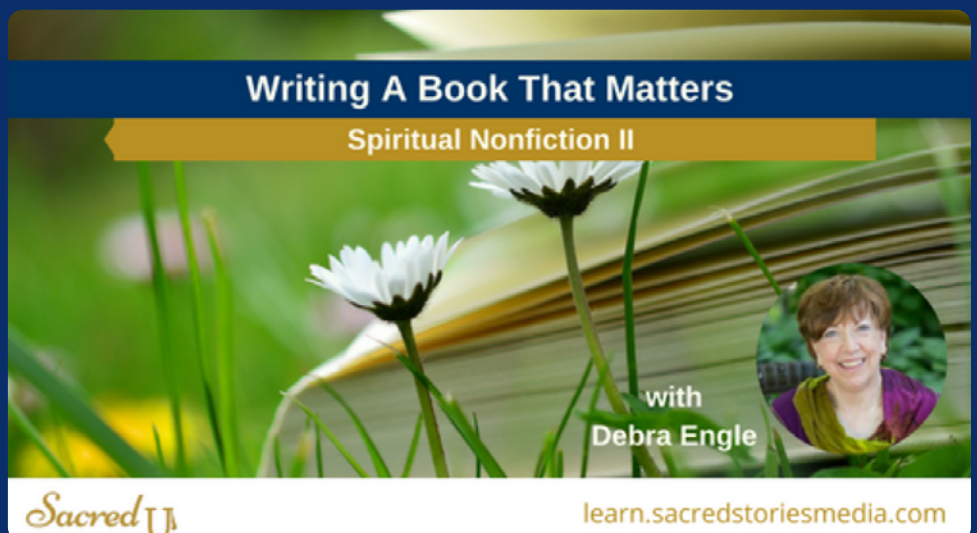
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