

MEDITATION: DOORWAY TO YOUR INNER SELF

AN AMAZING ADVENTURE WITHIN YOU AWAITS!

By

M. H. CURTIS

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Meditation: Doorway to Your Inner Self

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Dedicated to My Divine True Friend

FOREWORD

In some ways this is a continuation of my last book. It provides more insight about the spiritual path and experiences of people while on the spiritual path, including experiences of direct connection with the Infinite.

The stories are amazing, and hopefully an inspiration for anyone who has had similar or similarly unusual experiences, or who has a desire to explore the spiritual side of life. The experiences presented herein are to help you realize if you have unusual experiences, they may be a message about life being more than just the material world around us, one worth exploring within. Like the last book, it has been a joyful and blessed experience for me and as such again I am filled with the deepest

gratitude and humility and thankful for this opportunity.

In life we seem to plod along, sometimes wondering about the purpose of it all, and if you the reader have pondered your purpose and you seek something more, this book may be helpful for you. If not hopefully the stories are at least somewhat entertaining!

Thank you for your interest. May this work lead you to have consideration for the possibility of there being more to your own life than the complex, sometimes joyful, sometimes challenging, and sometimes painful material world in which we live.

M. H. Curtis

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank my friends and relatives who provided insight into this work, editorial support, patience with this process, and encouragement. I would also like to thank those who provided feedback about this work and offered suggestions to improve it for you, the reader. It has been a continuing process, and one undertaken for the benefit of those who are interested in their own inner spiritual world and would like some motivation and/or guidance, or anyone interested in the personal experiences of some people on the spiritual quest.

I also offer sincere and humble thanks to His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama for providing his

quote in support of my work encouraging meditation.

I am also grateful to friends who were patient enough to read this work and provide suggestions. A big thank-you to Christine for her editorial help! Sincere thanks to my friends in India who in many cases exemplify the concept that, "The Guest is God!"

I would also thank all of the spiritual guides in life that help us on our journey! We often aren't even aware of their guidance, and it is purely out of love that they help us on our way...

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INTRODUCTION

Having been on the meditation path for more than 20 years, a strong feeling to "give back" has manifested within me. Through this work has been the opportunity to share the personal experiences of some friends and myself, hoping they might help lead people to explore another world, one that is different than the material world and is within each one of us. The stories of experiences of my friends and myself shared herein are quite different, yet in spite of their uniqueness, a common thread binds them. What it takes to get in touch with this other world within is having the patience and inclination to seek it. Once that desire and drive are developed the rest usually takes care of itself.

There is one common experience often connecting people to the spiritual side of life I believe happens fairly often. It is when a loved one passes on, and a close family member or friend has an experience with the individual who has left. The experience may be a sensation, a sound, or even the feeling of the presence of the person within or around them, and sometimes even more obvious and significant interactions occur. A search of the internet reveals many stories about people having "visitations" or receiving "signs" from a loved one who has recently shed the body. This kind of experience alone should provide some incentive to explore life after death, or what may be referred to as the spiritual world. There is one story which follows later in the book about such a spiritual connection between a friend and his deceased relative.

There are people who take the attitude, even after having a spiritual experience with a recently deceased loved one that, "they are gone but I am still here." Assuming there is a God, and assuming we believe God created everything, then wouldn't it mean we are all part of this one creation, whether here with our bodies or having shed the body and residing in a spiritual world?

Sometimes we are surprised by unique spiritually oriented events that seem to spring upon us when we least expect them. These unexpected events I am referring to are associated with a spiritual side of life, and can challenge our awareness of the moment, awareness about the course of our lives, and even challenge us to rise to the occasion of connecting with the spiritual world

all at the same time! The following experience is a great example of just how unusual they can be.

During one of my trips to India, a friend who was also in India at the time, shared an experience he had. My friend was in India on his own spiritual quest, his own inner search about the meaning of life, and how it related to his current circumstances. A young Indian man approached my friend telling him he had seen him in a vision, and that my friend was his guru. My friend said he was taken aback, and felt unusual about the declaration of the young man because he never had feelings indicating it was his mission in his current life to be a guru. He asked the young Indian if he knew a certain advanced meditation technique, and the young man answered "yes." My friend told the young man that he should consider that specific meditation

technique his guru to take him to his heavenly goal. The young man smiled and understood, and thanking his "guru" parted with the kernel of wisdom and encouragement he was seeking. It was an amazing story and revealed to me how meaningful our spiritual search can be for us, and how our current lives may be influenced by our past ones, and to doors opening to different potentials in life if we choose to search for them, if we embrace the possibilities, and if we allow it to happen.

Having had many of what might be considered spiritual experiences in my own life, all of them unique and all memorable, though some definitely more than others, I don't believe these kinds of experiences are unique to me and my friends who have shared their stories in this writing.

I believe that most people have unusual experiences, and because of the unusual nature of them they are often dismissed and sometimes even avoided when the possibility of repetition occurs. The dismissal or avoidance can probably be attributed to many reasons. One reason is it tends to be our nature to fear the "unknown," and instead seek our levels of comfort in the familiar. Why is this?

Perhaps it is human nature, to a greater or lesser degree, to be comfortable and complacent. Yet as children we often explored the world, with some parents actually installing locks and latches on cupboards to "keep us from getting into things that the adults don't want us into," restricting our explorations, usually for our own safety, or to reduce the annoyance factor created by the

inquisitive mind of youth! This is an indication that instead of allowing us to explore more, in the material world we often find ourselves confined with less opportunities to explore, and we let it happen as we adapt to the constraints placed before us. Don't be afraid to explore your world!

Instead of seeking the spiritual side of life, conditions of our environment lead us to view most everything from a material perspective, and even our explorations are materially based. We steep ourselves in the material world and feel good when we buy a new car, or new clothes, or whatever it may be, and try to convince ourselves that with these new acquisitions we should be happy. But don't new acquisitions bring new worries, new things to take care of, new responsibilities? Often, these additional "burdens" balance out the joy of

the new acquisitions, and the newness wears off but the burden does not. I once bought a certified used car with very few miles on it, and it came with very a small dent. It made me happy to have that little dent because from the moment I drove it off the lot, I wasn't worried about where to park it or if I needed to give it an inspection after each trip to the store. What a great place to be, not worried about a basically new car!

At this point you might be wondering, who is this strange person? It is true, some of my family and friends think I am a bit off, and because I am relatively particular and peculiar about some approaches to life, admittedly at times I have been known to seem quite challenging. You also might ask, "what does the material world have to do with meditation?" Good question, thanks for asking!

When we engage in meditation, we attempt to "shut off" the noise. That noise includes not only external distractions from the material world around us, but also and perhaps more importantly, the internal ones as well. With meditation we work toward shutting off the mind and most anyone who has engaged or attempted to engage in meditation knows how challenging it can be. Once, at a Buddhist meditation program, the Monk leading the meditation referred to the constant chatter of the mind as "monkey brain." I laughed to myself, knowing exactly what she meant, but a friend who was also there got offended by the reference, focusing on the words rather than the deeper meaning...a reaction which also made me smile!

Presented herein are some fairly unique experiences from several friends and a few from

my own life. My hope is that you the reader have had similar experiences and come to realize, if you don't already, that those experiences may be a blessing and something worth exploring within. Such an exploration is undertaken to gain an understanding about the experiences themselves and about the spiritual world which they may reflect, which happens to encompass a life that is significantly more than the material world around us.

Please enjoy the stories with the realization they are being relayed as accurately as my friends and I can recall. The reactions from a few of the people with whom the stories have already been shared have been complete disbelief. Hopefully that is not your reaction, but if it is just think of all of the things in life you can relate to and have not

done...would these experiences really seem much different? So please keep an open mind. I should also say that if you have had some unique experiences that seem as though they may be of a spiritual nature, hopefully these types of experiences continue to be a blessing for you in this lifelong journey of the inner search. Thank you!

SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES AT AN EARLY AGE

Very young children have been known to have "unusual" experiences that are spiritual in nature. From a spiritual perspective, these experiences are often attributable to being the result of the spirit of the young person having just left a spiritual realm to inhabit a body in order to continue the growth process of life. Many of the doctrines of the world's religions include the belief in reincarnation. Buddhists believe that the attachment to the material world itself binds individual spirits to the life and death cycle. The Sikh religion is based on the belief of one God, of reincarnation, and of working to become perfected and merging with God through devotion, truthful living, and service to humanity. The Hindu

religion provides a very similar outlook to Buddhism on the cycle of the spirit inhabiting and shedding bodies due to desire for, and attachment to, the material world. The cycle is tied to ego driven actions and the attachments created by those actions including: desire; aversion; anger; greed; lust; and others along with the ever-apparent feeling of "I." Even Jesus inferred reincarnation. Assuming it is true, then perhaps it is not such an oddity that spiritual experiences come to little people because, as mentioned, they are essentially spirits returning to continue the growth process with the goal of breaking the cycle. Unfortunately, these experiences we have as children often fade as growth occurs, in part due to the overwhelming number of material-based sensations we are surrounded with and experience as we grow. The material foundations of life cause us to forget our

true spiritually-based existence. The following stories are about spiritual experiences happening to children, which support the spiritual cycle of life. One is an event that happened to a friend and one is personal to me.

Very early in life, I was blessed by one very memorable experience having to do with knowing. At this point you might ask, "what do you mean knowing?" Thanks again for asking! In this case I am talking about knowing with certainty that something was going to happen, ahead of time, and the something is very specific in nature. This particular knowing happened for me when I was around 6 years old. An older sister and her fiancé, Harry, were at our home. Harry wanted to play ball, meaning he wanted me to pitch the ball to him so that he could hit it.

We went outside to "play," and lined up in our yard, Harry with the bat and I with the ball. I became overwhelmed sensing that after pitching the ball to him he would hit it back and it would hit me in directly in the stomach, so I protested the situation. I told Harry I did not want to pitch to him because he would hit me in the stomach. Harry assured me he would not hit me. Again, I refused. Again, he assured me that he would not hit me. Being very young I was quite torn about what to do, but being familiar with the concept of a "promise" I asked him to promise me he would not hit me. He gave his promise which provided me comfort, believing his promise to be true.

How foolish I was to believe the promise because it happened exactly as I knew it would, I pitched the ball and Harry hit it directly to my

stomach. I fell to the ground in pain and crying, but even more overwhelmed that I was not believed. I started yelling at him, "why didn't you believe me?" Harry may have been as shocked as I was, and of course playing baseball was over for the day. I have reflected on that incident many times, and it didn't take long after it happened, even at a very young age, for me to realize that there is more to life than what we see and experience in this material world. I often wondered how it was I knew what would happen and what could cause that knowing. I also learned that we need to listen to our inner voice, especially when it is so clear and precise!

Another story comes from a friend who at an early age received a blessing from a sage-like person in a most unusual way. My friend was very

young, about 6 or 7 years of age and he and his family had recently been joined by a baby brother. Not long after the birth of his younger brother a fellow from India, a holy person, was brought to visit his family by some distant relatives. Having never encountered a person of dark skin my friend, with the honesty of youth, pointed out the new experience of seeing someone with dark skin...much to his parents' dismay.

My friend conveyed that the Indian found humor in his honesty and was not put off by it. Recognizing that this guest was kind and open, my friend engaged him in conversation. First my friend asked him why he was at their home. The Indian replied that he was there to "bless the baby," meaning my friend's baby brother. My friend asked this Sage why he was blessing his brother to which

the Sage responded, "because he is special." My friend, through some strange insight continued with this conversation, much to the surprise of his parents and asked, "am I special?" The Sage responded, "of course." My friend then made the surprising demand, "then I want a blessing too!" At this point the parents of my friend interceded and told him enough. Surprisingly, my friend said, "no, he said I am special and I want a blessing," demanding as only a child can.

What a predicament. The Sage, seeing where the situation was potentially headed, bent over my friend and putting his hands on his head, gave him a blessing. Also like a young child, my friend was not terribly humble about the blessing and his new status of "being special." In his later years my friend did choose a spiritual path in life,

and also became a little more humble about his spiritual experiences.

SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES WHILE GROWING UP

When we are just getting into our teenage years, we are beyond being very young children but we aren't yet fully grown. During this time of life, though many ideas about life along with some experience with life-events have already helped to develop a foundation of our character, we often still search for understanding. We also still remain open to experiences that help explain what life is about. During these years we tend to test the boundaries of the physical world because it is where our existence seems to be. Sometimes, because of our openness to experience, we also get exposed to some indications of the spiritual side of life and the lessons that it can provide. Our openness to experiences often diminishes after we

develop some ruts of habit, and the conditional surroundings in which we live tend to consume our time and attention. During this growing period in my own life, I have recollections of my own such searching.

During my years of going to school and growing up I had experiences that stayed with me. One was the deepening feeling of there "being more" than just the material world, which was a feeling carried over from my youth and the "knowing" experience I had several years earlier. I often tried to meditate, to find out what was "out there," and yet at the time believed it was beyond myself. During this period, I also spent a lot of time outdoors. Nature seemed to make sense to me, it represented a pure "cause and effect" of life and was often beautiful, often entertaining, and

sometimes also exemplary of the life and death struggle, which provided its own sense of awe and awakening for me.

Also, during this period, I had gone through a tough time and often questioned why...why are we here, what could possibly be the purpose of life if it was so daunting? These questions are probably not foreign to young people during their teen years, but mostly we feel alone, and not necessarily aware of the trials other people our age go through. It was because of the challenges of youth that I did spend a lot of time outdoors where I searched for answers.

Coincidentally, I ran across a book about "out of body" experiences. I say coincidentally, but in reality I don't believe there are many coincidences in life. The book relayed that we have

spirits along with our bodies, and with practice our spirits can leave our bodies and travel to other planes of existence, to the spiritual world. Many times, I read that book from cover to cover and practiced often for a period. I believe this interest in the spiritual world deepened my resolve to understand life, and ultimately put me on a path to meet some spiritual people, become involved with a spiritual group, and get to a place where meditation eventually became a part of my life. Like most other things in life, it seemed that becoming firmly rooted in a spiritual path required a desire to do so.

Another experience is that of a friend who had a very tragic thing happen in his life during his teen years. His older brother, about 4 years older, was killed in an accident. A lot of time was spent by my friend searching for understanding and

continually wondering what he might have done to prevent this heart-wrenching event from occurring. He conveyed to me that as he grew up the feelings of helplessness about the occurrence did not really subside.

Time passed for him, and eventually my friend had his own family and children. He told me during that period he had a spiritual vision about his brother who had passed away many years before. He believed that he had the experience because of the feelings of helplessness he still carried from the loss. He said he saw his brother in some other-worldly abode. He recognized him instantly, not really having changed...he was still a young man, and yet seemed ancient somehow. He asked his brother how he was, to which his brother replied he was "great." He also noticed, though his

brother's earthly life was extremely challenging, in this dimension he was very content and life seemed very good for him. My friend asked his brother why he appeared the way he did, and was told that his appearance and location were products of my friend's anticipation. My friend also asked his brother if he would be coming back to earth, like in reincarnation, and his brother told him he wasn't sure. One last thing he asked was how it came to be that he was able to visit his brother in this spiritual realm to which his brother replied, "because you have the ability to do so." This experience provided a great relief to my friend and filled a big hole of emptiness that he had carried in his heart for so many years. It also encouraged my friend to remain on a spiritual path, convincing him that there is a spiritual world to which we will all go when we shed our bodies.

This experience of my friend also provided support to my belief that there is much more to life than we are generally aware of, and when we have strange occurrences in our lives we should work to explore them. As parents, if our children have such experiences, we should help our children try to understand them even though we may not understand them ourselves.

SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES DURING ADULTHOOD

Though children may have experiences of a spiritual nature when they are young, as they get older often those spiritual events stop. In the lives of other people I have known this has not always been the case. Some have stopped, but for many of us the spiritual experiences have continued. This is especially true for those people who have established a spiritual foundation in their lives. The reason for this continued association may be, because the people who we choose to associate with have similar beliefs as our own. In my case, I have chosen to associate with people who tend to believe that there is more to life than the material world, and one of the primary goals for us is working to understand it.

The following examples explore spiritual events experienced by adults. It is true that the people having these experiences also had spiritual inclinations and experiences in their youth. This is also not to say that all people who have spiritual experiences as adults had them as children. Many adults are drawn to a more spiritual life because of events in their adult lives, or because of inclinations in a past life, or because they get to a point where they realize through experience and self-evaluation, there must be something more!

One friend had a most amazing experience as a young adult. He had a relatively normal childhood with a large family, many siblings, and a mother who worked hard to raise them properly. My friend was on the younger side of the group and

spent some time going to church in his earlier years. As he grew he became more certain about the existence of God, and about God being in his life. As a young man, because he also contemplated a life serving God, he was friends with a minister who at some point introduced him to a woman extremely entrenched in her devotion to God. After meeting my friend and recognizing his devotion, the woman had a group session of sorts and had everyone present sit at a table. Then she told my friend that he was going to be touched by the Spirit of God. Immediately, the moment she told him he was going to be touched, he was transformed by the experience of God within him, and for several hours he was in a state of elevated spiritual bliss. This experience ultimately became a life-changing event for him. The rest of the group present recognized that there was something going

on, but did not fully understand what it was. After the experience, over a period of many months, most every day he spent hours meditating in what felt to him to be a higher level of consciousness. The experience itself, and the continued meditation, created a change in him which was noticed by people to whom he became a spiritual magnet. In time, many people came to him for advice of every sort. Eventually he withdrew from those circumstances feeling that his life's work was to help people but not on that particular path.

It is interesting to note that many yogis of an Eastern spiritual background, once they have found a definitive link with God, spend the rest of their lives devoted to developing that connection, and the bliss accompanying it. Some people, like my friend in this story, instead feel their way to help

others is by being more involved with people who are living in the material world, to which people have an attachment, and which generally must be overcome to move on in the spiritual world on a permanent basis. Another interesting aspect I have read about, is that people with a deep spiritual connection, by their very presence, have a beneficial influence to those around them. This experience of my friend, when he was filled with that spiritual bliss, is an example of that effect.

Another story which provides insight about the spiritual world and even a different insight of the world around us, is the experience of another friend. He was a young adult and while in college had a classmate also in college, whose father was a beekeeper. My friend used to help his classmate's family work with bees including bottling honey,

moving bees to different bee yards, and gathering honey from the hives. On one occasion my friend joined the father of his classmate on a trip to the bee yard, where hives were kept for the bees to gather nectar from the local plants. This particular bee yard was located in the mountains, where the clouds were thick and it was a cold day. Both having donned bee suits, my friend and his classmate's father, the only two people along on this day, began to "pull" honey. Pulling honey means taking the frames upon which the honeycombs are built by the bees and the honey is stored, and replacing them with a frame and a foundation that does not have honey. My friend relayed one important thing to understand about bees, when it is warm and there are lots of flowers with nectar, the bees are happy and will pretty much leave the beekeepers alone. However, when

it is cold, the bees can become very protective of the honey they have stored. It turned out, the holes in the hat of the bee suit my friend was wearing were just big enough for bees to get in and sting his head. After he started getting stung, he ran out of the bee yard away from the little armed warriors, and pulled off his hat along with the netting attached to it which protected the rest of his head, face, and neck. This turned out to be a mistake, because the angry bees followed him and relentlessly continued the attack. My friend told me he sat down and got to the point where he didn't care about the bees stinging him, nor about life much at that moment either. Miraculously the bees stopped stinging and for a few minutes he just sat there. He said that when he lifted his head, instead of seeing a green forest, all he saw was light in the form of trees, earth, and the mountains around him.

He realized that he was seeing the energy of life that was creating the material form. The father of his classmate kept working, and soon the truck was loaded up and they were headed back to his classmate's family home. After they got back, not one stinger could be found, nor was there any indication of the nasty attack he had experienced. For my friend, the strange attack of bees, which at the time seemed like a horror movie, turned out to be a very spiritual experience and was in many ways a significant blessing, though very unusual and painfully so at the time.

One additional event I should relay is about the experience of another friend of mine. At this point let me say that I have been truly blessed to have a few friends who have also developed spiritual ardor from their personal experiences and

who have graciously agreed to share those experiences and allow me to pass them along in this writing!

This particular experience happened when my friend awoke in the middle of the night, and his spirit seemed to travel and join with a great eagle. In his experience he said he could feel the wind on the face of the bird, that he could feel the movement of the feathers of the bird, and could see through the eyes of the bird for great distances. He said he also felt that he was not actually the bird but was more like a passenger, his spirit inside the eagle. The flight took him over a vast desert, with cactus and dry river beds, and no sign of humanity. He said that eventually in the distance, strangely a stack of boxes came into view. How curious he thought. As the boxes became closer he noticed

one small box on the top of the stack that was slightly caved in at the sides. With a thought, he said he willed the bird to pick up the box and with the talons to pull out the sides of the box. Then, just as carefully as when the box was picked up, it was placed back in its spot on the stack. Shortly after placing the box back, he was back in his own body, awake again and though moved by the experience he said it was draining for him and he went back to sleep, leaving the event and its symbolism to ponder at a later time. He did however write about the experience shortly after it happened so he could remember it clearly and relive the feelings, and I am grateful he did, so his out-of-body experience can be shared with you!

GETTING INTO MEDITATION

In my late twenties or early thirties, I happened to meet a young woman who asked me if I would like to go with her to a "meditation" service. With my history of spiritual events I was intrigued, and eagerly accepted the invitation. We drove to the location of the "church" where the meditation was held. I was deeply interested, and on the way we discussed the meditation process, objectives, etc. She was a great person and very patient with my many questions, some of which she could answer and some she wasn't sure of, and very open about her uncertainty. This was a blessing in itself, having someone so straight forward and honest guiding me in my first organized meditation service! Along with the meditation she told me about a book that had been very inspirational for

her, and even offered to buy me a copy. We went for the 2 hours of meditation and drove back talking about the experience and again she offered to buy me a copy of the book which had inspired her. I assured her I would get a copy of the book and we parted, sadly in some ways as I never did see her again. I also ended up forgetting about the book.

Fast forward more than 10 years. I was working with a great guy who managed the production operations for a manufacturing company. After we got to know each other, work together, and spent some personal time together, he told me he had a book he wanted to lend to me. He said he thought I might get a lot out of it. He loaned me the book and I recognized it to be the same book the kind woman had told me about, and

offered to buy me years earlier. It turned out the book was extremely inspirational for me, possibly as much as it had been for the wonderful lady who had taken me to that first formal meditation. The book gave me the feeling that finally there was someone who discussed life like I always believed it to be. I kicked myself more than once over not taking her up on her offer to buy me a copy of the book. I did end up buying the book after returning the borrowed copy to my friend. In fact, over time I bought a lot of copies, and gave them to friends and loved ones. That process of sharing my interest taught me that other people did not receive the same inspiration from the book, nor my interest in the spiritual side of life, that I did. It just goes to show that sometimes our spiritual inspirations are meant for us, and not necessarily a part of life our friends and loved ones will understand. I still have

multiple copies of the book and occasionally give a copy to someone I meet, if I feel they might find the book inspirational. The name of the book is, "Autobiography of a Yogi" by Paramahansa Yogananda.

As a result of the influence and connection I had with "Autobiography," I joined an organization dedicated to meditation and attuned to the Western way of life. Meditation instructions came in the form of mailed lessons. The organization also had a large annual gathering, along with opportunities to go on retreats. I went to retreats on a fairly regular basis during the early years of membership.

After a set amount of time following the lessons, a "member" can move on, which means getting some advanced meditation training, which

also requires a certain commitment of dedication to the organization. The process of the receiving advanced training included a formal ceremony of induction. That ceremony required all initiates to pass by the images of the line of gurus before arriving at the founder's picture to whom all are supposed to give inner commitment to. I did not, but rather gave my commitment to a previous guru in the lineage. At the point I was walking by a strange feeling came over me which was like a magnetic pull, and I mentally bowed before this other guru. Of course, it was not something I discussed, at least not before many years had passed as a member of the organization. All I could think of at the time was that I was moved to make this unusual sidetrack of the very regimented process.

The organization providing the lessons I subscribed to is SRF (Self Realization Fellowship). It was founded in the United States by Paramahansa Yogananda who also founded a sister organization, Yogoda Satsanga Society, in India. Yogananda is the author of many works, however that one book, "Autobiography of a Yogi," is the one which had an amazing influence on my life. It has also been rumored that "Autobiography of a Yogi" was a book Steve Jobs had on his personal iPad, and may have been the only book he had there. The lessons, when I took them, were in paper form, sent out periodically. The current introductory or first stage of lessons, as of this writing, are offered in a 9-month course and provided in both paper as well as electronic versions. Nine months sounds like a long time, however it turns out to be just the

beginning of a lifelong journey...one that is very rewarding!

Ananda is another organization that was founded by a follower of Paramahansa Yogananda, Kriyananda. Kriyananda was a direct disciple of Yogananda and after Yogananda's passing, Kriyananda was very active in SRF for a while and it is my understanding the he was even on the SRF board at one time, but eventually split off from that organization. Kriyananda himself has passed on but the Ananda organization has quite a following and also offers meditation and advanced meditation lessons, techniques and retreats. I once had an interesting encounter with Kriyananda, the founder of the Ananda organization. It was my first attendance to the big annual gathering of SRF, an International Convocation held every year. One

morning of the event I, along with many other SRF attendees, was walking to the Hotel where the week-long convention meetings and gatherings were held. Along the way I noticed a man handing out fliers offering to give them to the SRF attendees while asking, "why are you suing us?" I had no idea what was going on, but the man seemed very warm hearted and sincere and so I smiled as I passed by him. He did not offer one of his fliers to me and instead tried to hand fliers to those around me. I was curious and later inquired, discovering who he was and that he was not a friend of SRF. Immediately I felt sad about the "politics of organized religion." The sad thing is that the beliefs of people, when driven by their egos, tend to create a world of division, rather than a joining together in the celebration of a spiritual existence,

no matter the foundation of the belief, because at the core of all beliefs in God is God.

THE WORD AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Sometimes people have such profound experiences they cannot really be captured and reduced to words, even though we sometimes try describe them for the benefit of others. Such is one experience of a friend of mine. After joining the SRF organization and meditating for a while I developed a friendship with someone also a member of the SRF organization. One of his experiences is relayed below in the form of a poem, and is a reason moving me to continue to seek the truth of our existence and the purpose of our being. When asked why his description of the experience was in the form of a poem he explained that the experience is virtually impossible to describe in words and a poem embracing the experience seemed a great way to share it.

THE WORD

Sitting calmly
Mind an empty place
Focus up
Launched into space

Out in the middle
Of the great Abyss
Aware of myself
A part of the Bliss

Becoming aware
All around
The Vibration present,
That Great Deep Sound

It was the Word
Passing through All
Without which
Creation would Fall

Feeling it through myself
A reminder to me
That Love is His Will
Without which we cannot see

I was sustained
By that amazing Word
The Vibration of All
By only a few heard

Blessed by that Sound
Which is deeply sought
Remembering and aware
Without which there is naught

It is true for All
None can exist
Without that Word
That can bring us Bliss

Each Whole in themselves
Yet only a Part
Longing to become
What Thou Art

This poem has had a significant impact for my friend, not only in his spiritual life, but also in his perception of all life. As I mentioned, his sharing the experience was also very moving for me, knowing the nature of this experience provides a true example of contact with God.

One thing I have discovered about spiritual experiences and about the direct experiences with God that people have, is that they are all similar but also different. Some involve the AUM sound, some involve the colors and beautiful settings of the astral realm, some are manifest by simple peace and harmony in the world, and there are many other symbols of such a connection.

One additional point about experiences that connect people with God. Sometimes people have

these experiences and the effect is so overwhelming, so all encompassing, and provides such a state of freedom while experiencing the spirit outside the body, people believe they are God. This is akin to saying that the wave is the ocean, which is not the case. That the wave is a part of the ocean is true, and the analogy is true for us all whether we have God-connecting experiences or not. Though people have these experiences, coming to believe they are God is not the best perspective of the experience nor in their best interest to maintain the belief. Based on what is known, God is all knowing, both omnipresent and omnipotent, or as I often refer to, "The Infinite." So, unless someone has those abilities, they are still their little selves who have experienced something wonderful, something amazing, something reflecting the awareness of and unity with God.

Essentially they have been given a blessing, intended to encourage them to continue on that path of searching, with the object to eventually become one with the Infinite, which happens at a point of essentially losing their own identity.

At the end of the last chapter of this book is another poem about the spiritual out-of-body experience which is quite moving.

RETREATS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Retreats are a great way to get away! One thing a retreat can do for us is to remove us from our usual routine, and being outside our routine can be very helpful when we are trying to explore different approaches to life including a more spiritual side of it. Often retreats are "silent" which means no talking and definitely no cell phones! This approach is a very beneficial way to help us turn our attention inward toward our inner selves instead of outward toward the world around us, which is where our attention seems to be most of the time! As I continued to explore other avenues of the spiritual world, through a series of events I ended up at a retreat in Australia organized by the author of some spiritually oriented books who lived there. Before talking about the retreat itself,

providing some background about the author as well as the unique story leading up to my attending the retreat will be helpful to set the stage.

When my spiritual inclination got ahold of me I seemed to be on a continual search for "spiritual books" that resonated with me. One of the books I came across, at a yard sale no less, was a book about nature that definitely had a spiritual side to it. Instantly it touched me, probably due to my having spent so much time with nature during my youth. I could not pass it up and read the book from cover to cover in no time! It was inspirational for me and I started to look for other books by the same author and sought information about him which eventually led to learning about the retreat. During my research I discovered that both he and his wife were originally from England and moved

to Australia as young adults. Part of their time in Australia was spent raising cattle on Tasmania, and eventually they moved to the mainland. Because their lives in many ways had been an adventure I was intrigued and drawn to their "energy."

I became aware of the retreat from a posting on the internet, less than a week before it was to start. Because I had been reading the author's books for a while I felt extremely uplifted by the thought of going to the retreat. It was Sunday afternoon, and in the kitchen of the house we were living in at the time, a vision came to me along with an understanding. I could literally see a field of energy before me, and understood if I stepped into the energy the ability to go to the retreat would all work out, even though I did not have a flight, a

visa, or any idea how it would work. Did I mention the retreat started on the following Thursday?

I literally stepped into the energy and amazing things began to happen. I contacted a travel agent who was able to get me a fantastic deal to Sidney. Through some research I also discovered Australia recently began allowing electronic applications for visas and I applied for mine online. I was not sure how I was going to get from Sidney to Brisbane which was the closest major city to the retreat, but I had faith. When contacting the travel agent to confirm the flight, which left Tuesday and arrived on Wednesday, he happened to mention a layover in Brisbane...wow, change the ticket to make Brisbane the destination! Monday night, notification of my approved visa showed up in my email.

I caught the plane on Tuesday, and after arriving in Brisbane Wednesday morning caught a bus which took me to the hotel where the retreat was being held, and I actually arrived early! During the session on the first or second morning, we participants were all asked to share our experience of how we happened to be at the retreat. I probably had the longest story to tell, and almost everyone, including the author, were a bit speechless. The wife of the author however was the one individual who did not seem to be overwhelmed by the story...as if it were something she might have expected.

The retreat was fascinating, attended by people with amazing stories of their own. One woman relayed the story that she had been afflicted with MS and had been healed...this occurred in her

life prior to the retreat. Another woman, who was in charge of a non-profit organization received a huge donation while she was attending the retreat. Peter, from Europe, was a musician who played many instruments, and made several of his own including an acoustic guitar and a flute. Matthew who was from Australia founded an organization, "Trees for Earth" and was very into saving the planet through reforestation. Matthew also came to the United States for a visit and we ended up going to Yosemite for a few days to see the Sequoia Groves there. Another retreatant, Peter from Australia, had known the author for many years and had attended several retreats during that time. There were others, all on the spiritual path and most all genuinely kind and sincere with interesting stories and lives!

Every day we practiced exercises intending to help us get in touch with our inner selves, and we shared stories about our experiences. Peter from Australia was intriguing, partly because of his acquaintance with the author which may have led to him having a somewhat aloof attitude. I was always very nice and friendly toward him but he seemed indifferent.

On the 4th day it was the wife of the author's turn to conduct the retreat. She picked a verse from the bible to share as an example of the spiritual life Jesus exemplified and encouraged his disciples to follow and reflect. The night before I had opened a copy of the Gideon's bible in my room and read the exact same passage before falling off to sleep. How unusual I thought, and during a break shared my experience with her. Her reply, with a smile,

was "serendipity." It was so true, and apparently we, she and I, had a connection not fully understood by me.

Toward the end of the retreat two people, Jeanine from The Netherlands, and Scott from the Melbourne area, both had the experience of "seeing the light." What an amazing thing to have happen, and because they both experienced that event for the first time on the same evening they developed a very strong connection.

One other happening sticks with me to this day. It was the morning of the last day of the retreat. We were returning from a break when Peter from Australia and I reached the door to our retreat meeting room at about the same time. I wished him good morning and before either of us

could reach for the door to open it, I heard him say, not with my ears but his voice in my mind as loud and clear as if it were with my ears, "why are you doing this?" I focused and with my mind immediately responded, "you know why." He had received my communication, my words mentally, just as I had received his...and he was shocked. Peter immediately changed. He just had an experience that he did not understand, except to realize that more in life existed than he previously believed possible. His expression softened, he opened the door for me, and he was at that moment, kind. The experience had an instantaneous and beneficial effect on his life!

After the retreat I was invited to spend a couple of nights and a full day with the author and his wife. They lived in a lovely home with a nice

yard, a pool, and a pond with fish which had been moved under a cover to prevent the kookaburra, a very large species of kingfisher, from eating the fish. Both the author and his wife were very kind and endearing people. We shared a warm day together, and I thoroughly enjoyed the peace and solitude. The author asked me to read a book he had written and was hoping to publish. I spent a part of the evening reading it from cover to cover. It was a wonderful story and I told him so. Because of my enthusiasm he called some friends in the US and had me relay my impression of the book to them. All great stuff, and his book did eventually become published, I believe with the help of his "Yankee" friends. I purchased several copies after it was published for myself and to give to people I felt would appreciate it.

I was taken to the train station the next day where I headed for Cairns. The train ride was more than 24 hours and provided a lot of time for reflection, although later I decided if I found myself in a similar situation in the future I would fly! I never saw the author or his wife again in person, though I spoke with them on the phone several times and even explored places for them to hold retreats in the US. Several years later I was called by Matthew from Australia who informed me the author's wife had passed away. It was sad news, yet because of our connection I felt strongly that she had passed on to a better place, a spiritual realm where her inner beauty, kindness, and love would fully shine forth.

There are many people these days offering retreats. Some are self-proclaimed "gurus" or

"yogis" or have other intriguing labels that are intended to provide you the seeker, with a sense of awe and comfort that the person is qualified to help you in some way. The truth is, and I will go into this a little more later in the book, everyone is on the "path" so to speak, but very few individuals have achieved full enlightenment or complete self-realization. Some retreat programs may be educational, some entertaining, some will stir your energy, yet many retreat programs are set up to make the host money. Please keep that in mind.

There are some ashrams where an individual can volunteer exchanging work for what the ashram offers in self-exploration. There are programs offered by Ananda and SRF and other established organizations which are reasonably priced and get at the heart of the inner search. So, if you are

interested in getting away to a retreat, investigate what you are getting into, and you might want to consider first going to an organization whose goal is the enlightenment of its followers. That being said, retreats not necessarily having the goal of enlightenment for the attendees, but which do help guide people toward an inner spiritual exploration, can still provide some benefit for those seeking answers about their inner selves.

YEARS OF MEDITATION

As previously mentioned, during the years I have been meditating some pretty amazing things have happened, and as many of the stories have indicated I also have friends and have met people who have experienced some unique and even more amazing things. More stories about spiritual experiences are relayed in the next few pages. These are occurrences that happened, and I became aware of, after I got on the meditation path. The first is another story about a friend. Though he was not on the meditation path, he had a very interesting experience with a church service and was kind enough to share it. This is an example that not all spiritual events happen to people devoted to a spiritual path or with deep devotion to the Infinite.

Imagine being invited to go to a church. Not being a church going man, my friend was once invited to go to a church service, and being of a curious nature he accepted the invitation. He did not have a complete awareness or understanding of the types of activities which took place at the church he was invited to, and was pretty surprised when, after a very intense sermon and singing of scriptures with very high emotions, people started speaking in "tongue." He then became aware that he also was speaking in "tongue." After the event he did not recall exactly what he was speaking, nor the interpretation of the language. He left with the feeling of not knowing what to think about the experience, and he seemed to maintain an uncertain perspective about it over time. He also never returned to the church. When he relayed his experience to me, I told him it sounded like it could

be a sign to further explore his "inner" world. He was also unsure about my interpretation, and I got the feeling he may not have been comfortable with continued exploration of the subject so we let it go. This is one example of a person not exploring the unknown, including the spiritual side of life, when an experience is very unusual and is also not comfortable. It is a reminder that we should be cautious in our spiritual search, working to avoid getting involved with people whose objectives are not in our best interest, and be aware when our inner voice alerts us to something that may not be good for us.

Another experience happened to a person I had met when I was travelling for work. I was performing an accounting audit as part of the due diligence for the merger of two companies, and I

had a lot of interaction with this new friend who was a local controller for one of the companies. Spending time in his office I noticed some things that indicated he may have had a spiritual inclination. I asked him about it, and he told me that he and his wife attended church and were both very devoted to God and to their church. Further discussion about spiritual phenomena over lunch revealed that both he and his wife had been blessed with visions of lights and colors and other things that were so amazing they were beyond description. Apparently the experience happened for them more than once, yet he was very humble about it. I felt grateful that he was willing to share his experience with me. It was amazing to hear this story from a Christian man because up to that time, most of the stories I had heard about of this nature happened to

people who followed an Eastern-based spiritual philosophy.

These next two stories are about events in my life relating specifically to my son. As a single parent with custody of my son from the time he was very young we had a connection, a blessing really, which I believe most mothers may share with their children. One notable consequence of the connection happened when he was just a toddler. I found I could look at him, not a glance, but intensely look at him and could understand what he needed. The needs would be things like if he was hungry, or tired, or needed changing, all just by looking at him. That was a truly awesome experience and one for which I have been very grateful. For all the mothers out there, and fathers fortunate enough to have this kind of connection

with your children, kudos to your experiences reflecting that tremendous "motherly love."

Another experience involving my son occurred when he was no longer a toddler but still very young. We were on a road trip and he got car sick. We pulled over off the road, and I felt like I could help "remove" his sickness. I held my hands under his stomach as he was bending over in pain while was throwing-up and literally "willed" healing energy to flow through my hands into my son. It was amazing, my hands got quite warm and I could feel the energy flowing. In a very short time, perhaps only a minute or two, my son felt better. I was very grateful when, as we continued the trip, we did so without his car sickness returning. In fact, as I try to recall, I don't ever remember him getting car sick again in his youth. I

am no healer, but I do believe that God is in each of us, and at times if we have faith, energy from the Infinite flows through us and we can help others. There have been other times when that has happened with me, when healing energy has flowed through me helping others with their mild ailments, and always I have been grateful for the experience, and to be a vessel through which the Infinite has worked.

Perhaps we have all had acquaintances or friends who know of someone positively impacted by prayer. Over the years I have heard a number of stories from different people who have prayed for others and those prayers were answered. Usually, they involved someone being sick who became healed, or people with an urgent "need." The one thing the people who were doing the praying had

was "faith" in believing that through devotion their prayers could be answered.

Faith also seems to be a necessary element in the belief in God. Jesus spoke that if people had the faith of a mustard seed they would be able to do what he did and even more. Having discussed that passage with many devout Christians, when I have asked the interpretations have varied slightly, but all have tended to center around the mustard seed being small and growing into a large plant. In a sense that is true, but those various explanations of the connection between the growth into a large plant and the faith of the small seed has not ever seemed to explain the connection of faith and growth. Jesus said having the faith of the mustard seed can move mountains, but I have not read where faith is the result, or provides the results of

great material growth, though I suppose it could under the right circumstances.

To continue with the faith of a mustard seed passage, in meditating on the issue it has occurred to me that a mustard seed, which is an example, knows nothing but what it is based on. What something knows generally is what it is, and in the case of the mustard seed, its arrangement of atoms and the energy of life contained within it is the thing that it knows and the blueprint of what it can become, the large plant in this example. So, in a sense, the "only" thing a mustard seed knows is "what it is," and its faith is what it can become, no matter the potential of size or growth, only its own blueprint. We humans on the other hand may have forgotten what we are while playing in the material world and masking our true nature, a spirit with a

body. Perhaps our faith and attention needs to be focused on our spiritual reality, and not the material surroundings and the physical body we must someday leave behind. Our potential is to recognize that we belong to, and are part of something more!

KNOWINGS

In an earlier chapter I relayed the story of "knowing" I was going to be hit with a ball, and sure enough it happened exactly as I knew it was going to. It is amazing to have that kind of experience of insight, the actual knowledge about life from time to time, but there is another perhaps more interesting and more common aspect of knowing. It is when we have hunches or feelings that something is going to happen, or when people know something is probably bad for them but "do it anyway." Most everyone gets these types of messages, and they happen in almost every part of life. Common feelings are like, "this person seems really nice but I'm not sure I should go out with them," or "I'm not sure I should be taking this new

job," or "I'm not sure I should be purchasing this 'whatever' at this time."

We should pay more attention to those feelings, provided they are not part of our typical ego-driven thought processes. When they occur as something not part of our normal thinking they are probably worth listening to as they are within us and are trying to guide us. Unfortunately, people are often impatient and want things "now." Some people actually categorize their wanting and acquiring "now" actions as a, "casting their fate to the winds" type of attitude. In reality it is just the opposite, because if they were relying on fate they would be listening to that inner voice rather than letting go of the message they have received and creating speed bumps in the path of their spiritual growth.

But then who is to say. It would take a very connected person with extremely deep insight to know if a decision is "right" or "wrong," or if any specific decision really makes a huge difference in the pages of someone's life. I have read how followers of Yogananda would bring their prospective bride or groom to him for his blessing or not. He would provide his honest input about whether or not a person was "right" for the follower. This could have been insight, or perhaps it was actually the conveying of what is written in the book of life. It should also be noted that at times apparently Yogananda's personal feelings did not necessarily initially align with the intent of the Infinite, and he knew this because when meditating about a certain person, his meditation would provide a response that was different than what he initially "thought" or "felt." This is a good example

of how someone well along their way on the path to enlightenment may not always be certain of how things should go. This isn't to say we should not listen to the advice of others who are obviously far along in their spiritual progress, but we should also use our own inner awareness as a barometer for ourselves. and when we do we should try to make sure our inner awareness is an honest reflection of who we are.

Another interesting and informative story about "knowing" involves the minister of a Christian congregation. The woman I was married to at the time had met and become friends with an amazing and very loving woman. I had met her and she had that inner beauty that seemed to make her glow. It turned out that the woman's husband was a minister. I was on the spiritual path and my

wife thought the minister and I could have some interesting conversation about spirituality, and invited her friend and the minister husband over for a visit. The visit started out pleasant enough. We talked generally about the love of God, and other common beliefs. Then I started sharing some of my more unique experiences. One of the experiences I touched on was precognition. This approach went over a bit like a "lead-balloon." The minister turned out to be a relatively old-school Christian when it came to the types of experiences I was relaying, and he stated as much. He ended up telling me that anyone who had those kinds of experiences was of the devil. I asked him about the new testament and how Christ knew what people were thinking and intending. His reply was, "that was Christ, and no other person has that ability." So, then I asked about having the faith of a

"mustard seed," and how Jesus said if people had that faith they could do what he did, and more. The reply from the minister was, "that's not what he meant."

By this time in the conversation, I was finding the proverbial "communication wall" the minister had raised interesting and I was also developing some insight about this person before me. One insight was that he controlled his congregation through fear when necessary. It was a sad revelation. Then I thought of something, an example, that has happened for most everyone. I asked if the phone ever rang and he knew who it was before answering it? His response, "that would be the same, devils work," came just as his wife was saying, "I have." The room got very quiet. To divert his attention from his wife's response and

make me the "bad guy," I told him directly that it did not feel like he had much love in his heart. He became even more upset with me, as it should have been under the circumstances. Needless to say, we did not become good friends, and I sincerely hoped that the meeting did not alienate the two wives, nor the wife and her minister husband.

This may be a good time to discuss another common phenomenon that can occur with "believers." Sometimes they tend to develop religious or spiritual pride, which can make a person rather closed about anyone else's belief that isn't exactly in line with their own. With spiritual pride there often seems to be a limited love rather than an open love for everyone, because they believe theirs is the only way. Some people when meeting others not sharing the same beliefs, "pray

for them" rather than accept them as having a similar love for the same God, or a similar purpose of life, or a spiritual existence. Having religious or spiritual pride tends to create walls that shield openness and understanding from us, and limits our capacity to be truly loving people.

Another knowing I personally experienced happened after I had taken meditation lessons and while I was referring back to them on one point or another, which was something I often did. I was reviewing one particular part of the lessons when an overwhelming feeling came to me that a part of what I was reading was not written by Yogananda. I was moved enough to call the member services group of the SRF organization and reveal my "realization." I was connected to a very kind woman who, after I explained the feeling of truth,

confirmed to me my feeling was correct, that other devotees contributed to some parts of the lessons. I have to say that even though the lessons coming from the organization are not entirely written by Yogananda, they still have value beyond words for someone interested in pursuing an inner search!

SPIRITUALITY & RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Religious organizations generally exist to bring people closer to God and in some cases closer to our higher or spiritual self. Considering that a formal gathering of people becomes an organization, then one also might realize that with an organization comes rules, defined purpose, goals, and other supportive but sometimes limiting factors. Regarding a spiritual search, often students must engage in certain types of meditation to prepare themselves for higher states of consciousness. A true guru or highly advance yogi has the training and insight to understand where the progress of a disciple is, and can help guide a person based on the specific needs of the individual.

What about religious or spiritually established organizations that don't have such insightful leaders, or have leaders who want to help others but are not really developed enough in their own progress to have the understanding of what is needed for a specific individual? Actually, there is a lot of that kind of leadership in business, but I digress. Such is the case with many religious and other organizations, filled with people who have the desire and may even wear the garb, but don't really have the substance to fill the specific need of every individual, and so "general rules" are developed because doing so is the best that can be done. The point here is to reveal and help recognize that sometimes there are limitations of organizations, and those on the spiritual path should work to avoid having general restrictions actually limit their own

individual progress. We should also be aware that in a one-on-one basis, sometimes the leaders of religious organizations can be much more engaging than they can in the group setting. The following is an example of this type of circumstance.

I once was engaged to a Catholic woman and she wanted a Catholic wedding. Because I had been married before, this presented a little bit of an issue, and put before us some requirements that were not expected. We were required to attend a counseling session and then we had to meet with the Priest, where I had to discuss my prior marriage. It turned out the Priest we were meeting with was Irish. I was a little concerned believing he may have been a very stout purist, and we would never get through the interview. Nevertheless, I made up my mind to be completely honest in my

answers and leave the rest in the "hands of God." One of the questions he asked was if I believed in God and if so where He, God was. I answered that I certainly did believe in God and that He was mostly not in the church, that He was everywhere. My fiancé looked like she was ready to crawl under the table, but the Priest had a different look. He gazed at me and said that he essentially agreed, but he couldn't tell the parishioners that or they would never show up for services. There were a couple of other questions that I answered in a way that was unusual, and uncomfortable for my bride-to-be, and yet I left the interview feeling that the Priest had a very strong connection to God, and today I believe it more than ever!

At that time, though my statement to the Priest was that God is mostly not in the church, I

would certainly modify it today. Since God is everywhere and all churches can be reminders of God, or a reminder of the potential of a higher self, depending on what our beliefs are, we should definitely respect churches for what they represent, and if we attend the services we should keep our spiritual goals in our hearts. I would also add that the place to find God is within ourselves first. The question then becomes, how to do that? Many religious organizations don't subscribe to a direct connection with God, but rather impress upon the attendees that the minister/priest/monk/etc. is the connection between the followers and the Infinite. Some spiritual organizations want people to become one with God, and yet create a path that is very slow and controlled. That being said, sometimes moving slowly and on the correct path provides significantly more progress than moving

quickly, flitting from here to there. Realizing that most religious and spiritual organizations have one set of rules to accommodate all of the participants, then with the expanse of followers comes a set of rules that must "fit all," like those in any other bureaucracy.

As discussed above, if spiritual or religious organizations have a single set of rules for everyone, then could we consider that those rules don't fit everyone, or perhaps anyone, precisely? The rules are usually more general guidelines and then we wonder, how do we get to the specifics? I had an acquaintance who was fairly active in a spiritually oriented church I was attending. He would talk to me about the issues of politics in the organization, how some people were favored more than others, etc., the people things that can

sometimes tend to deflate our enthusiasm and make an organization seem more political than spiritual. He mentioned that he discussed his concerns with the Monks from the central organization and was told that he had a negative attitude and should leave if he was unhappy. Sadly, from my perspective at the time, leaving is what he ended up doing. The point here is, even within the membership of an organization based on meditation, we need to search within ourselves for God, and not get involved with those other non-spiritual issues which can distract us from our goal. We need to establish a personal relationship with God or our Higher Self. With such a personal relationship, it doesn't matter that there are politics or other nonsense because we are seeking and finding the truth within, and not amongst the tedium of formal doctrine or the nonsense politics of people.

Almost every major religion has a core foundation based on the fact that someone originally had a personal relationship with God or a Higher Self. If true, then that alone should provide some indication a personal relationship is not only possible, but desirable and probably absolutely necessary to truly learn about, and advance our knowledge of our spiritual self. Another thing often realized by sincere seekers is finding the regimentation of church too restrictive and actually a barrier to progress in their personal search. Many prefer to continue their relationship with God outside of the chapel. Even so, most churches do have the intent to bring people closer to God, or to their spiritual selves, and should be respected as such!

One takeaway here is, if God is within then we must seek within, and meditation is a first step on that path, because with meditation we shift our focus from outward to inward!

LOVE THE INFINITE

There seem to be a lot of people who are on the fence about God, which I also often refer to as The Infinite, and in this writing they are essentially interchangeable. The people on the fence tend to be younger people, perhaps not having had to deal with mortality yet, or at least not in a serious way. Many are having success in life and believe they are completely responsible for that success. In some ways, the drive for success is a self-driven event, and yet that cannot explain the differences of two very similar people, with similar drives, upbringings, and interests, but with significant differences in their results. The point of this is to consider that there must be some different element causing those differing results. This isn't to say that finding a four-leaf clover isn't lucky, but when one

person finds one and another does not it might be an indication that there is something else effecting the success of their "luck."

Among different religions we find beliefs are different relating to spiritual life, reincarnation, and karma. Some believe in reincarnation and some do not. Without reincarnation, the idea of karma, the cause and effect of action and reaction that stays with a person, would be limited to this single life. In that scenario, the example of the two people with similar drives and interests but greatly different outcomes would not be explained, because there would be no discernable reason for the difference.

If we are spirits and our bodies are just shells, then essentially we are a spirit with a body rather than the other way around. Since, when we

die we are not taking any material elements nor our body with us, what our spiritual selves are left with is the essence of our being, such as values, feelings, character, and karma or atonement for our actions, both good and bad. Karma means action, and consequently the effects created by action.

Reincarnation and the concept of karma might explain why some children behave well and others seem to get into trouble...neither behavior actually explained by the child belonging to the "other" parent, as some would profess! Rather, one explanation for behavior of children accepted by believers in karma is because of those ingrained characteristics and karma of the spirit entering the body. This could also explain why sometimes bad things happen to seemingly innocent people, because of what they carried with them from a past

life. Often people blame God, "how could God do such a thing?," yet maybe it is not God at all. Perhaps it is ourselves, and what we do, and have done in the past, that catches up to us! Every God-based religion maintains that God gave man "free will," and for anyone who truly believes that we have free will, how can God be blamed? It is true, and sad, that we are allowed to get into as much mischief as we choose, but again those choices are the result of the influences in our lives and what we have done with them. Having been blessed by more than one vision of what has happened to the spirits of people who have died, you could say that I am a believer in karma, and the spiritual self that carries the effects of it from one life to the next.

If the case is that we have spirits and karma follows us, then His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

is entirely correct in his quote provided in support of my work about meditation, "...Our every ethical action involves the practice of mindfulness and conscientiousness...." Then comes the question of, what is right? And also, what about the notion of working for God?

From what I have read and experienced: gossip; ego-driven decisions; decisions based on entitlement; decisions for material gain leading to unnecessary accumulation and at the expense of others; and engaging in criminal activities, all fall into the category of actions leading to karmic debt, or bad karma. Conversely: serving others unselfishly; donating to worthy causes; feeding the poor; and performing your natural actions without regard to personal gain, are actions that tend to lift us and provide us with good karma. There are

some who believe that when we are truly working for God, our actions are not ours but God's, and in those circumstances no karma accumulates.

Actually, good karma is also a burden of sorts, but the results of it tend to make the material life more pleasant, or offset accumulated negative karma.

Following the logic of this concept, if we love God, love the Infinite, and give all of our work to God we do not build karmic debt. However, if that is not your belief then at least do good things to generate good karma!

Buddhists generally don't believe in a God, per se. Yet they do believe in a higher self, a self that has the potential for perfection, which is necessary to achieve Nirvana. In Buddhism, achievement of Nirvana is believed the highest state and releases one from the cycle of re-birth.

This is very similar to other religions, yet without the belief in the God element.

Believing in God requires faith, the belief in something that cannot be proven. It is an interesting concept and one that has accompanied man for eons. Then there are people who have had actual God connecting experiences. For them, they no longer have faith, they know, and with that knowing comes an unshakable foundation that helps to carry them forward on a path to eliminate karmic debt entirely and avoid returning to the life of this material merry-go-round. Faith or belief is true of many things in life. One example is when people believed in something, such as the world being flat, and then an explorer goes to the ends of the earth and does not fall off! The explorer knows and others believe.

PASCALS WAGER

In the 1600's Blaise Pascal, a man commonly known as Pascal, used probability to evaluate whether or not someone should believe in God. The foundation was essentially a 2 condition 4 square decision model. One condition was whether or not God exists and if so, there were conditions equivalent to heaven and hell and the destination of each individual depending on whether or not a person was or was not a believer. The second condition is whether or not there is a belief in God. Based on these conditions, and assuming the chance of God existing is 50/50, if you were a believer and if there is not a God you are not going to hell, and if there is a God you are not going to hell. On the other hand, if you are a non-believer and God's existence is 50/50, you have a 50%

chance of hell. The only way to avoid suffering in hell for certain was to believe. A huge amount of discussion could be undertaken about the details of Pascal's wager, and this is basically a fundamental summary used only to show the existence of a statistical approach undertaken centuries ago about the benefit of believing in God.

One thing interesting about Pascal's wager is the concept of "belief." Belief is more than "saying" you believe, and generally only you know whether or not you do. Belief, or an activity more commonly known as worship, takes time. It becomes part of one's life. So, applying that to the wager, with belief comes the use of time which would be spent on other activities if a person was a non-believer. From this we can conclude that there is a cost to belief. Extending this to the condition

of there being no God, we might ask the question, could there be a benefit from believing anyway?

Following the foundations of most of the world's religions, the doctrines of which support concepts such as: the Golden Rule; love rather than hate; honesty and integrity; helping those in need; etc., then perhaps living a life the same as believers makes us all better people which could be a good thing in our ever-shrinking world, even if we don't believe in God. After all, we are not taking with us the material things we accumulate, but our character may very well follow us if we are spirits with karma, where our good and bad deeds follow us after we shed our bodies, so why not engage in good activities while we are here and have a balance of good karma when we go?

LETTING GO - A SPIRITUAL NECESSITY

A big part of the spiritual search involves "letting go." I once mentioned this concept to someone close to me and was asked, "let go of what?" It was and remains a valid question, but first let me relay a personal experience specifically relating to "letting go."

It was many years ago and I was at a lull in my spiritual progress, and not feeling good about being there. One day I made an inner resolution to meditate until I received a response of some kind to reassure me of my path. At the time I didn't have a specific space dedicated to meditation, so I went into a room that was used very little, set up a chair and sat down, wrapped my shawl around me and

began to meditate. It was sometime during the 3rd hour that I heard an inner voice say, "let go." That was it, that was the complete message, and I didn't realize it at the time, but it was exactly what I needed! One point about this last sentence is that we often do not realize what we truly need for spiritual growth...

Immediately after that experience I began a search to understand what "let go" meant. Because this was an inner voice, much like the experience I had with Peter in Australia, but originating from within rather than from another person, I took heed and carried that message with me in my spiritual activities. Mostly I re-read a lot of spiritual material and meditated about it and gradually I began to understand. Many people believe we have to discard all that we have, meaning our material

possessions, in our search for our inner selves, but in reality how can we live without anything in this day and age? My search ultimately provided an answer, that letting go did not mean I had to get rid of the stuff I owned, but simply meant I had to not be mentally attached to it.

I use the word simply here, but it can be quite dicey and present a significant challenge. People would argue, and there is a point, that what we own is connected and that ownership in itself means attachment. It is true, but if we consider and treat all that we have as tools to help us in our lives, hopefully furthering our inner search, then eventually the perspective changes. It is not always easy to understand for the material oriented, but as our inner search deepens the "letting go" process

begins to make sense, and the detachment does have a very significant meaning.

Sometimes the term "letting go" is one of those popular phrases people adapt and embrace for their own convenient interpretation. This can lead to some interesting yet non-spiritually beneficial activities! One such situation I recall is about "Mattie," an acquaintance at work. She was a successful woman whose husband had a debilitating disease that would eventually be terminal. It was a terrible experience for Mattie and one which had gotten to the point where discussing her own personal "needs" with her husband was impossible under the circumstances. Mattie buried herself in her work and spent a lot of time away from home attempting to satisfy the needs of the marriage in other places and in other

ways. It wasn't that she didn't have empathy for her husband, but more that she was unable to fully embrace what was happening in her life so she "let go" of it for years. One sadness of this story is that her husband had a real spiritual outlook, and Mattie may have learned some significant lessons about life in a much greater way if she had embraced the experience as an opportunity to grow, rather than the approach of mostly denial and rejection. She was not alone because many of us have used denial and rejection to avoid dealing with unpleasant circumstances in life, and yet that seems to postpone what we need to learn to grow, and it can also lead to repeating the essence of a situation or lesson, until we face and deal with it!

Letting go is a concept that is at the heart of many religions. Jesus said to not worry about

where food and shelter will come from. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna conveys a similar message about the correct attitude toward the material things in our life. It has been said that desire for things we like, and aversion to those things we do not like, are two anchors which keep us coming back to the earthly plane. Both attitudes are "attachment," and attachment is the binder of unfulfilled wants and desires.

Life in the material world can be a beautiful experience, but often those things we find wonderful in life also end up bringing us pain. We are joyful at our wedding and feel like we've suffered death during divorce. We can spend decades of enjoyment with a partner but death is a reality for us all, and many find sorrow from a gaping hole left by the loss of a loved one which

can never be filled, and the reason for the loss is never completely understood or accepted. We want and get a new car and enjoy it for a while, but then it becomes worn and shows signs of age and we seek to replace it with newness, or we simply get tired of it and want something different. What a spiral of cause and effect we create even with the simplest decisions!

The mental fixation of wanting keeps the cycle going without end. The only way to eliminate the cycle is to understand this part of the nature of life, and stop the cycle. To understand life, we must feel a need for understanding it. This means a shift in our desires from material to spiritual, and the way to get in touch with our spiritual self is through the door of meditation, because the answers lie within us rather than

outside of us. Eventually the inner search for understanding drives us to develop an attitude of neutrality about many if not most of the material things in our life and at that point we have essentially "let go."

Material attachment does something else in many cases which also becomes a block to our spiritual progress. People often use their possessions to define themselves. This becomes a limitation to spiritual progress, as well as a reinforcement of the need for material objects. It is impossible to develop the ability to let go of our attachment to items if we constantly feel we need them to define who we are!

Once we are able to clear our minds, the process of meditation brings a peaceful state

without the pushes and pulls of objects, or the desires and aversions which cause us to define our lives in such a complex way that we often don't understand it ourselves. The meditative state is one of almost nothingness where there is no mental demand for "stuff." Meditation helps us to find true peace. It is an amazing experience during meditation to realize that the emptiness feels good, that there are no desires, and at that point there is a sense of true fulfillment. Actually, that is the beginning of the fulfillment we all seek, and a point at which we can really start to find our spiritual selves! One might ask, if during meditation we get to the point where we have no desires, how are we fulfilled? The answer lies in the possibility that true fulfillment does not come from material things but rather from peace, and joy, and the love of life with no attachment or aversion. We can get this

from simply being in touch with, and becoming friends with our spiritual self while we are here, which will allow us to understand and continue with that approach to life once we shed our bodies.

COMPASSION - ALSO A SPIRITUAL NECESSITY

This brings us to a concept which is also predominant in many of the world's religions, compassion. Compassion is an act of giving, and often involves self-sacrifice. One basis of this lies in the awareness that if there is a God, we have been given the gift of life, and the gift of life is an act of love. If we are to follow in the footsteps of our creator, as Jesus indicated we should, we should give help to others in need, being compassionate.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna goes so far as to tell Arjuna, his disciple, that he must fight because it is his natural condition as a warrior and will be forced to do so even if he chooses not to. In

the Bhagavad Gita, two groups are on the brink of a huge battle, but there is also a subtler and more important message of the inner battle we must all contend with including decisions in life such as: to be honest rather than take advantage; give because someone needs our help rather than for gain; and other moral and ethical crossroads we all face from time to time. Believing necessitates being grateful, much like the appreciation a child shows his parents for the gifts they bestow. Shouldn't we be grateful because after all, most of us could find ourselves in worse conditions than we have? After being on a path of meditation and spirituality for a while, most people eventually come to the realization that being on the path is a true gift!

For Christians, Jesus said to love God with all of yourself. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna tells

Arjuna that our essential purpose should be to work for God. In the Koran, Muslims are to worship God as the only true reality. For Sikhs the worship of God and self-perfection are the foundations of their belief. Even in Buddhism the goal is to seek personal perfection, and one aspect is to treat all creation as precious and parts of a single whole. Even if someone did not believe in anything, there could be an awareness of the causes and effects of life, and that awareness may include the realization that the energy generated relates to the energy consumed, so why not use energy for positive results and growth rather than destruction? This means be compassionate!

The first meditation book I wrote, "Meditation: Great for People Great for Business," was reviewed by a Buddhist Scholar - Geshe

Ngawang Sonam. One of the issues Ngawang pointed out to me in his review of the book was that it did not contain any discussion about compassion, which is a central concept for Buddhists. I agreed with him, and explained my belief was that being compassionate is being selfless in nature and generally involves self-sacrifice. I also told him it seems in the Western society, compassion has taken on a more relaxed definition than the pure self-sacrificial approach of Eastern philosophy.

So, what is compassion? Looking it up on the internet the words sympathy, pity, empathy, concern, and others are often used to describe and define it. Yet in our Western society I have witnessed people adapting the word compassion to one's own perspective. An example of this adaptation is a person donating money to a charity

for tax and recognition purposes, and then that person considers themselves compassionate. In the strictest sense of the word this would not be close to the true definition of compassion. On the other hand, if someone gave a truly anonymous gift without the expectation of reward, recognition, or benefit, and it was given for a very worthy cause, that could be considered a compassionate gesture. One might ask, what is the difference...giving is giving. So true, but like so many subtle things in life, intention and frame of mind play an enormous role in the motivating factors behind our decisions and what they truly represent!

The Buddhist philosophy about compassion begins with understanding the transcendental nature of life, of which we are all a part. In this philosophy, each living thing has a bit of

compassion within, and exercising compassion is a part of the path to perfection or becoming a Buddha. This definition is not really different from the discussion above because from the Buddhist perspective, compassion involves extending one's awareness beyond oneself to the world around us and accommodating everything as part of one whole. In that case, how can one forsake someone or something in need when they are considered part of ourselves? In those circumstances, when we do not forsake someone in true need and we help them without expectations, we are compassionate. Also, in the Buddhist and other philosophies, compassion extends to all life.

If we are connected to all life, how does hoarding anything help with the health of the planet and everything on it? Throughout most of nature

there is a balance, and if due to unusual circumstances things get way out of balance, there comes an effect to create a counter balance. In my earlier years I recall reading about a plateau which was inhabited by deer and predators of the deer.

The predators were eliminated by humans.

Eventually the deer population became too large and with the shortage of food came disease, and eventually the deer population was wiped out completely, naturally. This is an example of how nature works where there is an imbalance. That the imbalance in this example was the result of human intervention shows how humans have the very special gift of reason, but perhaps not always the long-term consideration to use it wisely in some cases. Misapplied reason, driven by ego, can justify almost any action. In the example above, believing elimination of the predators was a benefit

to the deer, or perhaps to the humans who wanted to hunt them, was a misjudgment and actually became a significant detriment to the entire deer population on that plateau. The point of this is, if we extend our compassion not only to other people, but to our living planet, then we would probably develop a keener sense of understanding and approach life a bit differently. To be successful we must realize that all living things are a part of the equation in the balance of life.

DOORS IN LIFE

Sometimes we seem to have doors open in our lives, often referred to as windows of opportunity. We are traveling along in the grooves of our lives and all of a sudden an opportunity arises. Or perhaps we push for change and change comes. If we consider that life is a learning experience, then we might also recognize that some lessons are easily learned while others come with varying degrees of challenge. How many of us have gone through a lesson in the school of "hard knocks," and upon reflection wished we would have listened to some sound advice given by someone in our past, a parent or grandparent, or someone else who truly cared about us? The other side of the coin is when people give us advice which turns out to be not so good for us we end up

wondering why we listened to "that person."

Advice then definitely becomes a two-sided coin and knowing the perspective of the person providing the advice is important. This is why we always need to try to listen to our inner selves in terms of what is right, as well as what is right for us in our circumstances. This however does not mean self-justification because one action is easier and beneficial to us personally, but may not be beneficial for the greater good.

When doors in our lives open, some of them grab us because of the potential to provide us with more status, more comfort in terms of material wealth, more opportunity to advance, but few offer us simplicity and a reason for self-exploration. One thing that has always intrigued me is the many times I have met people who are "happy with life,"

without a lot of money or material concern. Most often these people have been devout worshippers of God. When I have met such people, usually I have respected them and often have become friends with them because of a shared approach to life, including hard work, fairness, respect, and a love for God.

On a different note related to the same song. Am I the only person who has been offered a job, taking the offer after a great interview, only later coming to the conclusion that it is one of the most dysfunctional places I have ever been associated with? Or what about bosses who provide you with assurances of support, only to later discover that they will just as soon throw you "under the bus" to save face as do anything to actually take care of you. Or the realization that the teamwork your boss

assured you of is actually something foreign because the word teamwork isn't really in his/her vocabulary? These kinds of doors, when opened, become part of our "hard-knock" experiences that educate us, and at times buffer our enthusiasm and temper our beliefs about the things people tell us, especially if what we are being told seems to be in someone else's best interest. These lessons also give us cause to evaluate ourselves and question if we are responding correctly to any given situation, or are taking the right path for ourselves. We also need to beware of the tongue full of sugar because it is often sugar-coated poison, figuratively speaking!

How do we know, when doors of opportunity open, if we should enter? As pointed out in the last paragraph, it is said that the wrong doors initially

taste sweet, but turn out to be quite bitter, and the right doors may initially seem challenging, but turn out to be pleasant. The doors of our decisions are often like people. There are those we sometimes meet who initially seem very friendly but turn out to have ulterior motives, while others take time to really get to know and end up becoming our true friends.

So it is with the door to our inner self, meditation. Initially it may seem foreign, unusual, and perhaps even uncomfortable to engage in. Yet over time it can be very calming, very relaxing, and provide much needed time and space to "decompress" from the challenges of daily life. Eventually this personal time and space can lead to questions of inquiry such as, "who am I," or "what is my spirit?," or "who is this inner being?" At that

point you begin another step in the journey of understanding your life.

OUR CONNECTION WITH SPIRITUALITY

If we have experiences in life like some of the ones already described, or different experiences that are so unique we recognize them as something not in the norm of our lives, it is natural to question those experiences and try to understand them. Many people instead of trying to understand them simply write them off as "something unusual" and go on. These events can actually be gifts! In many cases their purpose is to stimulate us to explore them, and hence explore ourselves in a different way than we normally have or would.

Once on the spiritual path experiences happen, sometimes occasionally and sometimes frequently. When they happen, it is usually for one

of two reasons. The first, mentioned above, is a stimulation to help us continue on the path of our spiritual search. Meditating, as the primary vehicle for our inner search, is a process that can take time to experience even small steps forward. Becoming discouraged can happen in the process and the Infinite encourages us by sometimes providing experiences to let us know that our efforts are not wasted and we are making progress. Those experiences encourage us to meditate more.

The other reason for spiritual experiences is a natural consequence of our efforts. When meditation along with devotion to our inner self and our connection with God, or our highest Self, continues and develops over time, we experience things. Insight is one such characteristic that develops, meaning we gain a deeper understanding

about life. Some people turn this understanding outward to make the material world and their position in it "better." This is a temporary benefit, and one that often does not help our spiritual growth, but actually retards it by leading us into voluntarily submersing ourselves more deeply into the material world and hence our attachment to it. When we meditate, our efforts are not lost, but it is possible to slip away from spiritual growth by continued strong connections with the ever-present material world. If this happens, though we don't usually "lose" our prior efforts, when materially minded or using our gained insight for material benefits, we don't progress in our spiritual growth. Because our efforts are channeled toward material rather than spiritual gain, they actually become a distraction in our attempts to better understand the spiritual side of our life and progressing in that

direction. However, if we use our gains to continue to develop a deeper understanding of our spiritual existence, then we do progress. It is like being given a bucket of cool water on a hot summer day. If we use the water to dump it on someone or something else, then we don't benefit, but if we use it to pour on ourselves we do benefit from it.

MEDITATION - THE DOORWAY

Are all of the unique experiences shared herein generated as a result of meditation? No. Many resulted from a strong belief in something more, some were due to the karma of the individual having the experience, and some were intended to stimulate the desire to seek an understanding of life and of a spiritual existence. I can say that after having engaged in meditation for many years there tends to be a shift about the outlook of life, and a recognition that we are part of a large "whole." It is also true that feelings of connectedness to life have increased because of meditation. The connectivity I am referring to for myself is of a spiritual nature and with nature generally.

Meditation itself has been adopted for many uses. In my previous book, "Meditation: Great for People Great for Business," the benefits of meditation for people generally, and how those benefits help people in their roles as employees, and hence benefit their employers, are reviewed. Most all of those efforts relate to benefits in this physical world, primarily. That work was reviewed by a Buddhist scholar and received quotes not only from that scholar, but also from His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama in support of the book and the work encouraging meditation.

In the West meditation often involves the repetition of mantras or other activities used primarily to help with issues in the physical side of life. Some yogis would refer to any effort not specifically directed to a deeper understanding of

self and the connection with our spirit as simply concentration, and to some extent mind conditioning. From an Eastern perspective, meditation has the purpose and intention of self-discovery. This does not mean that the meditation we perform to help us deal with stress, improve concentration, and other benefits are not beneficial...they certainly are! After all, we are living in this material world. However, all of those benefits occur naturally when one focuses meditation on the inner search, so why not set a goal to understand our spiritual life and become acquainted with our inner self, where we gain the spiritual benefits of meditation and receive the other benefits as well?

One reason people may not engage in meditation in such a manner is they have not been

exposed to that potential. Another reason, I am sad to say, is because in the hectic world in which we live people often do not feel they have the time and patience to pursue a self-exploration. There is no time for slowing down, for reflecting, and for understanding. The world seems to be set up in such a way that we are driven toward material success, and that drive consumes just about every part of our lives, from where we live, to what we hope to gain, to who we associate with, but often does not provide for the intangible and possibly more meaningful benefits of spiritual growth. The process takes sincere desire, and if you believe in a higher self or God, then having faith is also important. Most anyone who has been on the meditation path for a while would say it is worth the effort!

Many of the other methods of meditation such as general mantras, are focused on self-reinforcement, to uplift an individual. This is very important in the world, and helps bring out the best in who we are. However, meditation as taught by Eastern Yogis, involves energy moving up and down the spine in specific techniques. It is not something I am teaching in this work, but mention as a point of clarification and to provide some understanding of the difference between what may be commonly known in the West as meditation, and a more focused effort specifically used for understanding our true spiritual self, which will remain after we shed our bodies.

Another point about meditation. In the Eastern philosophies, Yoga is referring primarily to meditation. In the Western world, particularly

North America, Yoga is usually associated with exercises. The word Yoga means union. The exercises were originally, and still are, intended to condition the body so that it is not distracted by aches and pains during our efforts toward the union with our spiritual selves through meditation. The exercises are good to keep the body healthy, however the body will at some point be shed when we die, and our spirits will be left to go on. So, perhaps we should focus on meditation, and continue with the exercises rather than approach exercises as the end goal.

WHAT ARE WE - OUR SPIRITUAL SELVES

It is obvious that we live in a body, but is that all? In the Christian Bible, it tells us that Man was made in the image of God. If God created this world and everything in it, then it may be reasonable to assume that God is a Spiritual Being who manifested the world from spirit into the physical form we find everywhere. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna tells Arjuna that we are all going to die, or in other words shed our bodies. Krishna also tells him that we keep coming back in human form, and that the goal is essentially to escape the bonds which hold us to the cycle of birth and death. Buddha indicated that to live is to suffer, and the goal is to rise above the suffering by

perfecting ourselves. Jesus said we should be Godlike.

With all of the documentation about who we are from some very great individuals and doctrines throughout history, it seems safe to accept that there is more to us than just a body. Jesus said something else that is very interesting to consider when he was told his mother and sisters were waiting to speak with him. He replied, "who is my mother and who are my brothers?" He went on to say that those people doing the work of God were his sisters and brothers and mother. This takes on more meaning after one has been meditating for a while because some significant realizations may take place regarding the nature of life as well as the people in our lives.

It is not uncommon for the Infinite to play with us, sometimes providing us with the thrill of unique encounters with nature or other amazing happenings, but until we have succeeded in becoming fully self-realized usually the Infinite does not support familiarity with any one object lest we become too enthralled by creation and lose sight of the Creator.

Many people have written interpretations of works, such as the Bhagavad Gita, and other books intended to benefit people. From all of the readings and study I have engaged in, it seems clear that most of the fully enlightened souls generally do not write, but their disciples undertake those tasks. This is part of both the devotional and learning process for the disciples. Vyasa may be a notable exception, as he wrote the Bhagavad Gita and the

Mahabharata, both great works helping to make up the foundation of Hinduism and benefit mankind generally. Yogananda may also be an exception with his writing of his Autobiography, interpretation of the Gita, and other works, even though it feels like Yogananda's work is edited to lesser and greater extents. Even in Christianity we find the disciples of Jesus writing the books of the New Testament, which also has been modified over time. From the descriptions provided by enlightened beings about the connection with the Infinite, it would make sense that people who become fully enlightened or fully "self-realized" are so devoted to that connection they would not be writing great works about it, but they often undertake the training of a few or many disciples who carry on that work.

There are of course many people who are very far along in the path to enlightenment, and it is these who often provide verbal and written encouragement for people seeking understanding. This is one reason to look at several approaches and several perspectives of the "truth" while you seek understanding. One example is that many people believe only in their religion and that other religions are not the truth. Most of these people will offer, or admit, that God created everything. Following this reasoning, how could anyone actually confine God to one religion if everything was created by Him? The common answer to this question is because the "book" says so. This is where one needs to be discerning in how things are interpreted and whether they make sense, and for what purpose the words were written, intended, and edited. We need to use our information, our

beliefs, our perceptions, our understanding of when information was written and for whom it was intended, and not be afraid to question the meaning of information put before us, or seek justification for the opinions tendered about it. We need to be detectives in our search for truth, and when necessary ask for internal guidance to obtain a true understanding!

One additional point for consideration. There are groups providing meditation lessons and advanced lessons for very reasonable prices, and there are those who set themselves up as the "answer" and provide essentially the same information at a very high cost. God is free, or almost so, and people who charge a lot of money to provide the "answer" are like the traders inside the temple who Jesus cast out saying that people

should not make the Temple of God a place of barter or for gain. Previously mentioned organizations offering reasonably priced lessons include Ananda and SRF, both of which have a similar goal, the advancement of all sincere seekers. I am sure there are other organizations which accommodate sincere seekers for reasonable costs, and often enlightened people accept "students" if they show sincere interest and the life of the student can accommodate such a change.

APPROACH TO SPIRITUALITY

Time is the monster that consumes us all! We cannot escape it living in the material world. Though some things seem to last forever, they do not. The message is to not waste time chasing after things that will not last, and may even turn into an anchor slowing our growth in this life and the next. Start the inner search now! What harm can it do? You may find that the process is comforting in this material world, as well as helping you develop an understanding of the spiritual one!

The approach to getting to know oneself is much like a simplified process of problem solving in business. In business the first step is to realize there is a problem, or in this case identify the need to discover who you are. The second step is to

define the problem which often includes "root cause" analysis, which for this purpose means setting the goal of understanding who you are by getting to the core you, your spiritual self. If you don't believe in a spiritual self, meditating long enough may help you discover and understand a different facet of life and you will be glad you meditated. The third step in problem solving, after a problem is identified and defined, is to find solutions and in this case the solution is to figure out how to get in touch and develop a relationship with your spiritual self by the time you have to cast away your body. Meditation is the step to begin getting in touch with your spiritual self.

Sometimes in the self-realization process something happens which plants a seed of inquiry about the possibility of there being more to life than

this material world. Occasionally it is a realization about the spiritual nature of the wonders of life and how anything can be so special and not be created. Sadly, sometimes it is a tragedy which drives one to question how life can be so cruel, so daunting, so unfair. One other thing that often causes one to seek answers is the reality of mortality itself, when people start to wonder what, if anything will happen after we die or shed our bodies.

When a person gets to the point where he or she is questioning life and sincerely wants to understand the spiritual side of it, through the law of cause and effect, some form of guidance will usually develop. This is the process of our beginning to let go of the material world and develop a relationship with a spiritual side of life. It is often a rather gradual process, but sometimes it

comes upon us like a tidal wave. The tidal wave effect often happens when something so tragic occurs in our life we would just as soon give up rather than go on, but it can also occur when the awareness about the beauty of life becomes so overwhelming we realize there can be no explanation but that we were all created from love. Another reason for the immediate impact of spirituality in our lives has to do with our past karma and getting to the point where we are ready to be submersed in that part of life.

Then some interesting things happen, advancement toward spiritual understanding occurs. As a side note, there are also some stories about people who have been disciples and who have believed they should be advancing faster. Often, in those cases events occur to show them

how they are not really as advanced as they feel they are, or would like to be. There are also stories of very humble people who are on the spiritual path and become very enlightened but you would never know it because their humility is a mask of their great progress. Be humble, it is one of the greatest virtues!

This reminds me of an approach once occurring to me about training in general. My nephew had taught me how to install and texture sheetrock. We had some significant water damage to our house and a lot of sheetrock had to be replaced. My nephew, who spent many years installing sheetrock for a living, showed me how to install new sheetrock and mud, tape, and texture it, as well as how to install bull nose (rounded) corners. We liked the rounded corner effect so

much that I got a lot of practice by installing bull nose corners on all of the window framing in the dining room, a total of 13 windows. Fast forward a few years when my nephew came to visit us at another house. In one room we showed him, I had retextured the walls. He asked me if I had retextured and I said to him, "yes, but before you comment on my work know that if I did a good job I had a good teacher, and if I did a bad job I was a poor student." He said it was a good job, and I reiterated he had been a good teacher. He reflected on what I had said. Having worked in the construction industry for many years, he was more used to everyone else being at fault for mistakes on the job rather than people taking responsibility for their own shortcomings. If we use the approach of either having good teachers or being poor students to everything in life, I believe we would create the

potential to learn a lot more about ourselves and others, and make the world a much better place!

The advancement of our "spiritual" education has a lot to do with the amount of dedication we pour into our understanding of it and the time we spend meditating. In much of the material I have read over the years, the more we meditate, the more understanding we gain. In some of the research done for my first book several of the studies showed that more meditation also meant more beneficial effects from meditation!

GETTING OLDER AND MORTALITY

An interesting thing happens as we get older, we get closer to our mortality and many of us begin to think about it, dwell on it, develop a fear of dying, and all of the other things that come with the realization that we are not occupying our current bodies forever. Another realization which occurs is that the "golden years" may not be so golden after all.

Often people want more understanding about life, but don't know where or how to get the understanding they seek. Religious organizations are often too restrictive about their approach in searching for God personally, and some even subscribe to the notion that the minister or priest is the conduit to God and that God cannot be

contacted directly by an individual. Meditation is not affiliated with any one specific religion, and yet most major religions do promote, in one way or another, engaging in meditation for understanding life.

In the bible God said, be still and know that I am. The Bhagavad Gita, often referred to as the Hindu Bible, has a basis of meditation to contact our Spirit, which is proclaimed to be the foundation of our life and that our spiritual connection is a part of God. Buddhists are known for their practice of meditation and have it as a foundation of their entire belief system and the primary means in the search for the higher self.

What all this indicates is meditation is good for you, and is potentially good for anyone. People

are drawn to it based on their individual lives and those events in life which have made them want to understand the purpose of life, or provide some benefit to their life. As previously mentioned, besides the inner search meditation can provide general benefits to health, stress relief, patience, and others. The message here is that meditation is beneficial no matter what your belief and you should give it a try!

Mortality is something all of us have to face, and many sincere religious followers believe that we keep returning to remedy our past mistakes, or in some cases it turns out, to make our current ruts deeper. No matter what our belief, at some point we all shed our bodies. The type of life we have led in our current one may be a huge factor in determining when and how our spirits find their

way into new bodies along with the type of life we will have in our next incarnation. Essentially it is up to us to decide. If there is even a chance of us carrying our character with us along with the residue of good and bad actions and approaches to life, then shouldn't we strive to have the best character we can to come back with?

Another interesting approach I encountered years ago was that many successful business people would say they look forward to coming back and continuing to climb the ladder of success, which from their perspective also often means continuing in their ways of taking advantage of others. If karma exists, those business people will have to work out any bad karma caused by abuse, perhaps in another life of service to others to balance the karma, as well as gain an understanding of why

they find themselves in such a life. Many people will not grasp this concept and simply believe that life is unfair, yet how many of us have known someone so abusive or someone who has lived a life so full of lies and deceit that others actually hope they "get what they deserve." So, in a sense, people already hope for the very possibility of karma! It does work and in infinite ways it does happen, not only for the obvious malfeasance, but for all those little wrongful thoughts and actions, the convenient lies to avoid having to deal with tough situations, and other nonsense people create to avoid unpleasantness in their lives or to create distress in the lives of others.

Older people facing mortality seek answers to life. Sometimes they "get religion" in the hopes of being saved. Getting religion is a good thing,

and an even better thing is to not only repent and give alms, but to seek an understanding of our own spiritual lives and our relationship with our higher Self or God, also commonly referred to as our Infinite Creator.

Many of us have lost someone close to us who was "too young to die." It is sad and it also drives home a very important point about life, that very few people actually know when their time is up. One suggestion of this work is for you to start your understanding of life now through meditation...don't wait!

GET STARTED

Like the message in the previous chapter, we don't really know how long our spirits will inhabit our bodies, so there is no time to waste. Kind of like being told to save money when young but finding too many things to spend it on. Pretty soon time passes and we have not saved any money and have to work even harder to try to be prepared for retirement. Getting to know our spiritual selves is similar in that the more time we spend getting to know ourselves the better off we will be. It has been said that even a little effort in the practice of meditation will help us by giving us some peace in our golden years as well as the benefits we can gain in general health and in other ways.

We can read about the benefits of meditation, we can think about the benefits we can gain from meditation and how wonderful it will be (for example) to have low blood pressure when we are older so we don't have to take medicine to keep it low, and we can imagine other benefits. Yet the only way we will achieve the results from meditation is through self-effort. We, ourselves, have to make the effort and meditate. No one can do it for us. The good thing is, meditation really doesn't take a lot of time to begin with, and if we persist it can become part of our daily routine and what a good habit it will be for us to develop!

As I said, the purpose of this work is to help you help yourself, so why not start working to know your inner spiritual self through meditation now?

What follows is another poem about a spiritual out-of-body experience for you to enjoy.

"I Am Not My Body"

I am not my body.
I am other,
a living breath-less part
of an unimagined
gold and orange tide
of early morning light,
slowly reaching out
in a more than brilliant sun,
rising in the freshness
of an ending summer rain,
engulfing me in warm and moving
gentle waves
of liquid love and joy,
and rising up within,
and with me,
above all existence
in a golden-red and orange-purple
ocean swell
of life beyond an endless sky,
compelling me to rise with it
and flow within that living stream
of which I am.

"By Richard H. Will with permission"