

My Story

Ramblings on a Spiritual Journey

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DEDICATION

To all my teachers,
past, present and those still to come.

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INTRODUCTION

I have found that this incredible journey of life leads many unknown ways, and this book covers multiple phases of my spiritual path. I suggest reading it piecemeal, a bit at a time. Find what appeals to you and skip the rest. Some of the heaviness of the trek lightens if you see it as a kind of shopping tour, different parts for different carts.

What I write speaks to me. It gives me a sense of the inner me accommodating reality, confident of myself belonging to a larger whole. Trusting what transpires within me, I pass from analyzing to experiencing. Belonging to a oneness makes me whole, open to its embrace. Life is a process.

As I recount my walk through life developing my spirituality, I make many assertions, but the overall intent is that each insight resonates with other levels of meaning for a total response. I pluck my own heart strings and hopefully yours, to unify scattered energies into a kinder relationship with others, the universe, and God.

I attempt to show an openness to flow with the whole, with everything I encounter in life. Growth comes slowly and usually through a feeling awareness. It is love that loosens my will to listen and follow my deepest urges. Love makes life simple, but that doesn't make life easy. Always choosing love fashions a unique self. I speak in time about the timeless, hoping that lasting love overcomes the fleeting realities of this world.

Throughout there is the goal of personal transformation from within, which is what the world's great religious and spiritual teachers have sought. My wish for you is "Bon Voyage" as you continue your own spiritual journey.

1 THE BEGINNING

My decision to become a priest was the equivalent of desiring oneness with God. At the time, however, I saw it in terms of divine and human will. As a college senior working in a Pittsburgh steel mill during the summer of 1951, I came across a booklet of quotations. One caught my notice: “We do not pray in order that we may change God's will; we pray rather to change our own.” I was struggling to know what I wanted after graduation, yearning to know God's will for me. Although I had never gone to a Catholic school, my parents were active church members and I was an altar boy. I had a strong religious formation at home and the idea of God's will held a dominant place in my life. My dilemma was finding out what that was.

On July third in the mill, I found a piece of scrap steel about two and a half inches long and an inch wide in the perfect shape of a cross. I kept it and later had it inscribed with INRI (Jesu Nazarenus, Rex Judaeorum—Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews).

That evening, as usual, I pleaded, praying to God to show me what He wanted from me. I had been feeling lost and

distraught for over a year, and now I had only one more year of college left. "What will I do when I graduate? God, please help me!" My father had been a professional baseball player, a jury investigator, and a councilman in our town. My three older brothers were all working, married, and successful. And here I was, twenty-one years old, not knowing what I wanted to be or what I wanted to do with my life. I was lost and in agony.

Suddenly, through my tears of desperation and with the steel cross in my hands, the clouds lifted and in a flash everything became clear. The certainty and the clarity left no doubt: I wanted to be a priest. I made the decision in an instant. I looked at it as God's will and found the peace I had lacked. I broke the news to my family that I would not return to the University of Pittsburgh for my final year. I called and made an appointment to see the Director of Vocations for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh. He told me I would be sent to St. Vincent College, Latrobe, PA, and my major would change from creative writing to philosophy, the requirement of the seminary.

The experience was a great lesson in my life—of understanding and discovery. I had received what I thought was the answer, but the path opened new challenges for me. I decided that only my own free will had held me back from becoming a priest, but that now it no longer was my will but God's. I was full of joy and certainty. In fact, I was in ecstasy. I felt that I belonged, that Someone cared for me. My course was set and nothing could hurt me, for in my mind everything else was less significant than this. It sowed the seed for what would later become a conviction in my life: No man or movement can undermine what God has set in motion.

It had been obvious to me that things had a built-in will, like the earth nourishing, the stars shining, flowers blooming, or people loving. I had reasoned that people also have a built-in

will, and to find it is oneness with God. The overriding feeling was that the decision had been made for me.

I could not have come to that conclusion on my own, and this decision signified contact with “the other,” the non-localized I, the willful stream of the universe. Something deeper than my intellect seemed to speak, for whenever I had thought about the priesthood in the past, I quickly dismissed it, thinking it was not for me. I had specifically asked myself as an altar boy whether I wanted to be a priest, and I answered “No.” Now, something greater than myself had spoken, a powerful force was directing the show. I had felt thrown around by a hurricane but now, finally, I broke through to the calm and peace at the center, to the eye of the storm. I made contact with what I thought was the Center of the universe. My will now linked up with The Universal Will.

At the time, I went from a dire and depressing period in my life through an exhilarating experience that was totally satisfying and fulfilling. I felt, at the time, that all my questions had been answered. More questioning would come later. It took time for me to realize that commitment to God and allegiance to a church were two different things. The awesome experience surrounding the deciding event put me into an idolizing mind-set, stripped of finer considerations.

I had no inkling whatever how immature and short-sighted my state was, cast by the euphoria that engulfed me. I had made it all "God's will," not understanding how much of it came out of my own need and desperation. I had narrowed down the whole of the life in front of me to a single episode that cleared up everything forever. I saw later that life unfolds only gradually, change is inevitable, and that I must live in the here and now with what I bring to each occasion. I was stuck in the moment and let that determine my life afterwards. "Would I change or

stay the same?"

Later, after much meditation, soul-searching, and personal experiences, I saw that my needs back then sprang, at least in part, from rejections or discouragement when I sought help in my childhood and adolescence. I can even remember the persons involved: mother, teacher, girlfriend, and employer. I reached out, but there was no hand to take mine. It made me turn within to stand on my own. If we have a public self and a private self, I favored the quieter side and became somewhat of a loner. I was still sociable and friendly, but I kept deeper thoughts and feelings to myself. I was fortunate enough to be able to develop an interior life that gave me the strength I did not know I had.

I entered the seminary that fall, believing God called me. The big decision had been made, but I still sought further clarification of God's will. I wanted to know everything I could about God, and saw the way to do that by furthering my studies in theology and teach in a seminary or university. While preparing for the priesthood, I asked my superiors whether I could join them in the Society of St. Sulpice, whose sole purpose is teaching and preparing men for the priesthood. Happily, I was accepted. Time passed quickly during those seminary years, and seven years later I was ordained a priest in Pittsburgh, PA, to be released to the Sulpician Society.

Looking back, I see how my three years at Pitt contributed to where I am and what I am doing now. I majored in English, which gave me a love for some of the world's great writers and poets, at least those of the English-speaking world. I still go back at times to Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality" or Keats' *Endymion*: "A thing of beauty is a joy forever," which still inspire me. I had a great writing teacher for whom we had to write a theme every week for the whole semester. He meticulously graded our papers and offered suggestions. If I

were to write, I needed to heed what he said.

As a Catholic I had been warned not to go to Pitt because it was a center of secularism if not atheism; I should go cross town to Duquesne, a Catholic university. But I wanted to go to Pitt because it had an excellent English Department. My most memorable experience from my years at Pitt happened, however, not in English but in Psychology class. I was a freshman just turned eighteen in a class of over one-hundred students, most of whom were veterans of World War II. These older and experienced men questioned just about everything. They asked why they had to take a lab section with this introductory course in Psychology. The professor was a brilliant man and head of the department. He said that it was important to be familiar with the scientific method, to know its strength but also its weakness. Then the vets would ask why they had to have so many credits outside their field of business or engineering. The professor told them it was to give them a broader education. The questions went on and on, why this and why that. The professor finally and very calmly answered to another "Why?" question, "The final why to any question is because God so wills it." His reply ended the students questioning but also told me that Pitt was not a center of atheism or secularism. I saw the danger in categorizing. Most important, his answer gave me something to think about for the rest of my life.

Before continuing with my story, the fact that the decision to enter the seminary came while praying made a lasting impression on me. As described above, I was lost and felt abandoned, desperate and needy. My prayerful pleading sparked a miracle that swept me out of despair and brought me into a glorious place.

Starting in junior high school, I kept a private journal of famous quotations and sayings that inspired me. It had three

sections, the first was "Unsifted Seeds," and the last was "Fruits of the Seed." The middle section, "The Seed that Died," had only one quotation, and that from Fulton J. Sheen, as quoted above: "We do not pray in order that we may change God's will; we pray rather to change our own." By "The Seed that Died" I meant the seed that found fertile soil, sprouted, and bore fruit. I discovered the quote on prayer in the spring of 1951, and from then on was praying to find God's will for me. When I came to the realization of what that will was, that evening at home in prayer when all was made clear, I saw that quotation as the turning point in my life, and so I made it the central or dominant portion of my journal. It serves as a perpetual reminder of how important prayer is.

The value I put on prayer determines my relationship with God. Too often I turn to meditation or other things and forget the power of pure prayer. I don't doubt that meditation can be prayerful and prayer can be meditative, but I need to stress the value of prayer as my own conscious and deliberate connection with the source and ground of my life.

As a child I learned about the power of prayer from Catholic priests and nuns. They taught me that prayers are ACTS, an acronym for Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. I was also told that prayer is man's strength and God's weakness, which made me feel good that I had a kind of "hold" on God.

I discovered the importance of these four acts later in life. Each represents a posture that I must assume at times in daily living to fulfill my humanness. I can adore an all-powerful and loving God. As a hero worshipper, I can easily get into a worshipful attitude, which is driven more by awe and love than by knowledge. Difficult as it may be for me at times, man himself as well as the world I live in demand and deserve my

honor and respect. I feel I owe it to them. As said earlier, the earth nourishes and renews itself, stars shine and await our exploration, flowers bloom to give me beauty and joy, people love to find fulfillment. In donning a revering attitude for these and other things, I can feel a powerful peace enrapture me, bringing a power that I know I am not capable of on my own. I can see the joy in my wife's eyes when I buy her flowers. If I truly cherish in this way my heart is involved as well as my head. It doesn't matter whether it's called prayer or something else.

The same holds true for contriteness, gratitude, and imploring help not just for myself but especially for those in pain and suffering. Depending on my mood, I dwell on each from time to time. For example, I make mistakes and need to be sorry for them, and it is OK to be sorrowful. Or, when I am gifted in some way by others or by circumstances, it reminds me that there is so much in life that deserves my gratitude. Or, daily news tells me how much pain and suffering exist everywhere. Others could use my sorrowing and profit from my compassion. Prayer or these personal castings make me more loving and therefore a better person; here is where the line blurs between prayer and rooting myself in these four qualities of good human behavior. Prayers are ACTS. "Am I willing to enact the role and become these four characters in the drama of life?" It is easier if I let myself be drawn by love. Prayer is so much more than kneeling with my hands clasped and pointing heavenward.

The value of prayer was strongly reinforced later by Buddhist monks, which I will explore further under Part 5. While seriously practicing meditation with my monk friends, they urged me to get deeply in touch with my own heart. They told me about the ancient technique of healing self and others that comes from the great power I have in my heart and mind when motivated by the real beauty of unconditional loving kindness, which dynamic is hard to comprehend. Suffice it to say that the

power I have in my heart and mind to heal and console illuminates and stresses not only the mystery of our interconnectedness and mutual dependence, but also the mysterious power of my own inner resources.

I see that the difference between prayer and a merciful mentality further diminishes when it comes to grieving. I used to think that grief was a weakness. But in truly being sorry for my own transgressions and for those rampant in the world, I become more understanding and take on a forgiving attitude. My grief turns into compassion. When I realize how much suffering my sins and the sins of the world cause, I cannot help but grieve. I need not have tears running down my face, but true grief gets me more in touch with my own heart, and then my heart bleeds. Grieving can strengthen the heart.

This kind of prayer asks for my personal involvement, and sincere praying makes it deeply personal. In my life, if I feel I'm lacking something, I need to pray for it, just ask for it, but always in order to change my will if necessary and not God's. Perhaps prayer indicates better than anything else the trust I have or don't have in God. I improve my commitment by engaging as much as I can in a heartfelt connection with God every time I pray. Because I would later leave the priesthood as a matter of conscience, I learned that prayer did not and does not take away freedom and personal responsibility. Prayer is not a "magical" solution to any problem. My prayers and my life are not so different.

Talking about prayer in this way makes me realize that this book may not be for everyone. To be as practical as I can, I would offer that this book is for other students of spirituality. I use the term student because I think all of us are spiritually young. I am a student of spirituality and in Part 6 will explain what spirituality is for me.

2 IN AND OUT OF FORMAL RELIGION

With experience and, I hope, with more maturity, I could see how I came to the decision to enter the seminary when I had just turned twenty-one. In those days, when I thought about God, God's will, the meaning and purpose of life, etc., I could not think outside the box that I was born and nurtured in. I believed in the "one true religion" as my pathway to God that I had been zealously taught. It wasn't just for me but God's will for the world. If I were to become a priest or a religious of any kind, it had to be in the Roman Catholic Church.

More insights came years and decades later. I came to see that part of my decision of ascribing my decision to God was in order to abandon myself. I said to myself that it was all God's will. I had reasoned that if all was God's will, then I no longer had to think or act for myself. Looking back, I saw the running away part that I only would have to face later in my life. Without denying God's role in the matter, I could not develop my own potential and spiritual unity with God by abandoning my own will.

The Church may have answers for many, but if I did not find them within the formal structure, I had to look elsewhere. I started looking over the fence during the three years (1960-1963) I spent at the University of Louvain, Belgium. After ten years studying literature, philosophy, theology to earn three lesser degrees, I was sent there to get my doctorate in theology and teach in the seminary. This illustrious university was awarding doctoral degrees before Columbus sailed (founded 1425). It drew students of all races from all over the world.

I befriended several black students who came from what used to be the Belgian Congo. They also were Catholic priests. In our sharing of what we thought about God, I saw that their understanding was very different from mine. I didn't see their views as contradicting mine, but merely complementing them. There is so much to God beyond theological statements and formal definitions. We are each unique individuals coming from very different cultures. The life of the spirit is connected with the singular individual, including the body and the culture from which he or she comes. The person adapts to nature and the world in which she lives. Theology often abstracts from the differences and the communion that surround us all.

During those years at Louvain, the pope convened Vatican Council II, and my professors spent divided time between working in Rome in the Council and teaching at Louvain. These world-renowned theologians were inspired by the changes they saw coming in the Church and were eager to share their views with us. One story they told us eventually changed the course of my life: John XXIII's openness to truth wherever he found it and the pursuit of that ideal in a peaceful rather than radical manner all his life. That route became my model.

My professor told us that Pope John would often come into their working sessions. They nervously stood when he entered,

but he gently told them to sit, adding that he came to listen to them. After a while, as they fell into theological argument, they forgot the pope's presence. Then, four or five hours later, he rose to leave, and the theologians nervously stood up again. He told them to continue the good work because the Church and the world needed them. He intended to invite representatives of all religions and even atheists to the Council. He said, "We all have the same address, Mother Earth, and we all have something to give." His message and my seeing him in Rome inspired me further to follow his lead wherever it took me.

After hearing that, my fellow students and I talked it over. We all were uplifted by such a statement coming from the church's highest authority. The window was opening to the winds of change sweeping over this ancient institution. As priests and brothers we wanted to finish our degree work and see how we could further the renewal engulfing us.

Although it wasn't to be the way we anticipated, the fresh air that John XXIII breathed into us enabled us to see his deep belief in freedom of conscience and to revere God stirring in every soul, to hear Christ's words anew and to become bearers of the truth. The "good pope" is responsible for the truth-seeking spirit found in the documents of Vatican II. For example, the DECLARATION ON THE RELATION OF THE CHURCH TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS, gathers the flowers of other gardens that perfume the earth's air. "In Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it....They seek freedom from the anguish of our human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust....Again, Buddhism, in its various forms, realizes the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or attain by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme illumination.

Likewise, other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing 'ways,' comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites."

"The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions ... (they) often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.... The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions...they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral."

If we young priests were impressed by the pope's remarks before Vatican Council II's documents were promulgated, we were overjoyed by how the bishops of the world in their official pronouncements were in unison in their approach to other religions. I read and reread the brief terse statements on Hinduism and Buddhism. As a serious meditator, I had been drawn to Buddhist and especially Zen practices. I was particularly interested in the "other" or higher stages of consciousness they experienced. It made me wonder, because as far as I knew at the time, they did not believe in God. Yet, if they reach such heights, I had to investigate.

As time went on, I finished my graduate work and successfully defended my doctoral dissertation, *THE SERVANT OF GOD IN JOHN 1: 29, 36*. Returning to the United States, my brother picked me up at the Cleveland airport since he lived a few miles away in Hudson, Ohio. After living in a foreign country with strangers for three years, where little English is spoken except what I could generate, and after three times a day eating a foreign diet, I was so happy to be back and to see my brother again that I wanted to kneel down and kiss the ground. I think I would have in simple gratitude if there weren't so many people around. I took it easy for the rest of the summer and spent

much time with my mother, my three brothers and their families. My Dad had died when I was sixteen.

In September I had to report to St. Mary's Seminary and University to begin teaching theology. In the ensuing years I taught full time at St. Mary's, Baltimore, then St. John's, Detroit, MI. I also taught summers at St. Michael's College, Colchester, Vermont, and The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC. I was writing and doing some publishing during these years. I was asked to become rector of one of our seminaries but refused because I thought it would interfere with my passion of learning all I could about God and his ways with the universe. After teaching for several years and publishing, I was also asked to accept a position on the faculty of The Catholic University in Washington D. C. By then, however, I was already having doubts about the authenticity of the Church in relation to the teachings of Jesus, and declined the offer.

I left the Catholic Church for three principle reasons. First, there was a retrenchment or abandonment of the Church in regard to the decrees and teachings of Vatican II. She was returning to her hierarchical and dictatorial mode of operating. She often has been called "Holy Mother the Church" because she loves and cares for her children. I saw that motherly caring coming out in Vatican II, only to be denied or abandoned in the ensuing years. To me and other theologians, an Ecumenical Council is superior to any one authority in the Church.

The second reason I left was that I thought the Church had not adhered to the message of Jesus as shown by his life and teachings. For example, it was the Church that led the Crusades and the Inquisition, apparently forgetting that "all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26: 52). Each of these religious campaigns spanned multiple centuries, persecuting and killing thousands, perhaps millions, of Christians, Muslims, and

Jews. I, as well as other theologians today, question whether Jesus intended to found a church at all. He laid the groundwork for people who would follow him, a community yes, but that's a far cry from what later developed. We have Jesus, his teachings, and the community of his followers. I believe that's all that's needed. The rest is up to us. His teaching centers on love, which we might call the absolute, the heart, of Christianity. My book, **THE HEART OF CHRISTIANITY**, emphasizes this fact. It is available free on my website findingoneness.com or for purchase on amazon.com. Love is the primary message of the whole New Testament, which really is a Covenant between God and man. I will develop this further when I discuss a divine plan, next, in Part 3.

The third reason for my departure was that I had to harvest the riches I saw growing in other fields, as Vatican II pointed out and as my research was showing. The Catholic Church does not have a monopoly on truth. A primary field for me was Buddhism. In fact, the pope asked a Zen master to tour the Catholic centers of Europe to teach the members how to meditate. Zen meditation is non-sectarian. It is a spiritual training that brings discovery and renewal. It is unbiased and unlimited. The fact that the pope's request was later rescinded was another sign of the Church's retrenchment. I will also take up Buddhism later when I discuss meditation at length in Part 5.

3 A LOVING PLAN

I think we all have a belief or philosophy of life. It may not be conscious, but we act out of underlying principles or notions that we feel are the proper way to behave. I also think it is important for our development to articulate our belief or philosophy as well as we can. For example, do I believe in making as much money as I can, or is success in a career most important? Where do I put justice? Is justice the same for all humans? Do I hold love as the highest value, or do I believe in an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth?

To push the thought further, how does my belief or philosophy work in practice? Is this how the world works? If it isn't, how do I reconcile my stand with those of others?

I deliberately pose these questions because I asked them of myself, and I wanted to narrow them down to what I hold. I need to say that I don't believe God has one plan for all mankind. I have chosen many paths, and with good teachers gained much from whichever one I followed at the time.

The path outlined below is one that I am most familiar with

and dearest to my heart. I'll skim it here because I treated it in depth in my book THE HEART OF CHRISTIANITY. Even as a briefer version, however, I cannot short-change what the New Covenant treats so thoroughly. I choose it as a way of life because its essence is love, the basis for my personal path to God. I believe love, the desire for oneness, is our deepest drive and built into our nature. As such, I think it is the goal of life and transcends religion since it is already etched into the heart of every individual in some way. If God is love, and if he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him, what else is needed? But my love has to be out-going, the same as God's love.

Because this Loving Plan and Meditation in Part 5 have been the dominating influences in my life, I will give them the most attention and they will be the longest parts of this story.

Real love needs no religion, and that is why I am not a church-goer any more. I don't doubt that churches can do a lot of good, especially if inspired by love. For me, faith often appears distant and barren without love, and faith often leads to violence. The greatest knowledge, even wisdom itself, yearns for its own completion. Love is eternal. Love is a different dimension outside thought and time. I may think about loving in the past or in the future, but that is thought and not love.

Love is now and active and yearns to be present. Wherever I go, I am really searching for love. Loving ends searching. All I need to do is substitute loving kindness for whatever I seek. I am dry earth that needs the water of love to become fertile. I cannot do anything without thinking that it is good for someone in some way. In desperation, I, the perpetrator can say, "It's better this way," for anything I want to do. This means that love comes out of my very nature. If I fully realize that every action of everyone is intended goodness in some way, this is proof that behind the

deed is love inspiring the action. And goodness is unbounded love.

This Part 3, A Loving Plan derived from the Christian Scriptures, I consider the heart of Christianity. In the seminary we read the entire Bible, Old and New Testament, once every year. Starting with Genesis and reading a chapter or two a day would do it. It gave me a love for Scripture, particularly Jesus and his words. I would use them in meditation and to inspire my prayers. I still do that, for I think Jesus is the greatest person who ever lived.

Another reason for making this Loving Plan my own is that it can stand on its own without any church or institutional backing. I doubt that Christ intended to found a church. He said real worshippers will worship God not in a certain place or location but in Spirit and truth. For a long time I thought Christ was contrasting external worship with internal worship. Rather than comparing, Christ is saying that the Spirit is the Spirit of God worshipping, not the spirit of man, which gave me a totally different view of how the Spirit and I are one in worshipping. Not only are we one, but the place of worship is wherever I am.

Jesus himself takes the place of the Temple, and his Spirit kindles the worship that replaces worship at the Temple. The Indwelling Spirit lifts man above the earthly level and enables him to worship God properly. After many years of study and meditation, I am convinced that the deeper consequence of what I am saying is that God is becoming man. He did it in Jesus, and I believe He is doing it in all of us.

The Gospel of John has claim of being "the most splendid treasury of Christian spirituality ever written." John 17: 20-23 makes explicit the goal of oneness in God as Jesus outlines how it is to be done: "I pray...that they all may be one, just as you,

Father, in me and I in you, that they also may be one in us....I have even given to them the glory which you have given me, that they may be one, just as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to completion as one. Thus the world may come to know that you sent me and that you loved them even as you loved me."

Jesus here is talking about future believers, that is, about you and me. He foresees a community on earth confessing his name, and he yearns for the eventual deliverance of that community so that its members will be with him in heaven. The result is oneness with God that begins in this life and continues thereafter. To me, the tone is triumphant, bringing clarity and surety once it is accepted as a way to live. I realized long ago that faith, as an internal disposition, could not move me the way I desired. Once I committed to loving Jesus and trusting what he said, I had a new engagement in my life. My heart took over from my head. Nothing is more comforting than to know that God is looking after me, which Jesus said and John affirmed. In the following I will transpose and paraphrase passages because they were not intended to be mere literary pieces but were meant for me to hear and live.

All the teachings and examples of Scripture are just pictures and words unless they are reborn in me. I cannot look upon Jesus as only a historical figure. Jesus as a great man and the best friend I could ever have, is about fostering a disposition in me that bears me up no matter what the circumstances. I have a sense of losing my old self but finding a new me with a new way of living.

God takes the place of everyone and everything around me, not as He is, but as he or she or it is. So in that sense it's always a personal encounter. I knew I had to give up SEEKING God all the time, and this gave me a new way of FINDING Him. I see

Jesus as the great gate for me to go through that ends forever any duality, any sense of separation from God. Jesus as Son of God could never be without the Father in him. I as a son of God, likewise, could never be without God living in me.

This oneness with God is not reducible to a mystical relationship with God. Nor is the unity simply human fellowship or the harmonious interaction of Christians. The fact that the relationship of Father and Son is held up as the model of oneness demands a type of vital, organic unity. It is a living reality. The Father gives life to the Son. So similarly, I am one with you and with the Father and the Son because I have received of this life. It turned my life around and gave me a high purpose that I could not better.

My life thence forth is not like the human life a son derives from his father and mother. The new divine life is overflowing in the warm embrace that only God can give. In the last words that Jesus speaks to his disciples during his mortal life, he prays that after death he may be IN ME (John 17: 26). I know that Jesus wants to be in me, guiding me, and I know that he is there, but I have to make room for him every day. This happens in prayer, in meditation, but especially in just simple awareness.

"The Book of Signs," the first division of twelve chapters of John's Gospel, dealt largely with Jesus' miracles, referred to as "signs," and discourses interpreting the signs. The second division, "The Book of Glory," narrates what happened from Thursday evening of the Last Supper until Jesus appears to his disciples after the resurrection. This section has all through it the theme of Jesus' (and our) return, to the Father. This return means the glorification of Jesus (and us with him). The signs of the first book anticipated the glory of Jesus in a figurative way for those who had the faith to see through the signs to their significance, but many greeted these signs with skepticism and distrust. The

action of the second book is directed to those who believed in the signs of the first, for it accomplishes in reality what was anticipated by the signs of the first book. Thus, with the believers of the Prologue I can exclaim, "We have seen his glory, the glory of an only Son coming from the Father" (1: 14).

We may not realize it, but the first disciples had to have faith to "see" beyond the signs to what they represented. As we noted, Jesus' miracles and words do not of themselves convince and convert his observers, for many still refused to believe. I, too, have to make decisions minute by minute to opt for the good of another or to satisfy my own ego. My love has to be outgoing.

I need to summarize as best I can the dynamic of love which begins in God. Love is from God with the emphasis on God as the source rather than the object of my love. His begetting me makes love possible. As a human being I am in the likeness of God, but that likeness is not through creation but through faith and love. Love is a criterion for knowing God. In the Old Testament as well as in the New, the absence of this love on earth is equated with an absence of the knowledge of God. I say to myself, "Can there be a stronger statement on the supremacy of love? Not loving is not knowing God!" A more modern statement puts it well: "God cannot be thought, but He can be loved." God did not become love at the incarnation but only revealed what He already was. Love is from above as Jesus himself was from above. Love is so much a part of what God is that the person who does not love his brother whom he sees cannot love the God he has never seen.

A key part of revelation is what happens within me. Love, which is received in and with divine life, must, like that life, be active. It is primarily going out to others, in imitation of God Himself. This is part of the revelation of "in us." It appears

meaningless to try to distinguish between an obligation based on commandment and an obligation based on the fact that God is love and acts lovingly. He gives the commandment to love because HE IS LOVE.

Although John's Epistle says that "No one has ever seen God," it also dares to make divine indwelling in some ways a greater intimacy with God than seeing Him. This intimacy, however, is dependent on and expressed by my loving my brother. God is love when God is loving. God's love is not perfectly what it should be until it begets me in His image who then loves. Transposing John's words, he had already said that as Christ laid down his life for me, so ought I in turn lay down my life for the brothers (1 John 3: 16). Then I am just the same as Christ is.

John abundantly discloses the fact of the mutual indwelling of God and me. The theme and criterion of that indwelling is the Spirit. The ability to see Jesus in his ministry as the Son of God and the Savior of the world was part of the work of the Paraclete/Spirit. This is not merely an intellectual knowledge, for the love that God has is IN ME.

Love is what assures God living in me. A statement about loving Jesus ("If you love me, etc....") and keeping his commandments/word(s) occurs three times (John 14: 15, 21, and 23); and in each instance there is promise that a divine presence will come to me who meets the demand. First it is the Paraclete, then it is Jesus, and lastly, it is the Father along with Jesus who comes (see John 14: 15-24). The three types of divine indwelling have been woven into a unit that begins and ends on the theme of loving Jesus and keeping his commandments. Most likely, in the final stages of Johannine theology, all these in-dwellings were thought to be accomplished through and in the Paraclete. The Paraclete is the presence of Jesus while Jesus is away; and since

the Father and Jesus are one, the presence of the Father and Jesus is not really different from the presence of Jesus in the Paraclete.

I think we have here the most solid basis for the conviction of my oneness with God. But Jesus spells out three times the condition necessary. When Jesus says, "If you love me, etc....", I can hear him pleading with me to love him so that he can enrich me beyond my imagination. With the Paraclete/Spirit in me, Jesus repeats it is love that ends duality and brings about my union with God. Certainty of God's loving presence in me as me gives me the strength and willingness to act with love in all I do.

This kind of love has no room for fear, for perfect love drives out fear. I cannot be judged negatively in this world or in the next by a God who dwells lovingly within. Love transforms. To squelch those fears, Jesus intervenes in the personal lives of the Samaritan woman, in the man born blind, and in the sisters of Lazarus by raising their dead brother to life. Love may be unspoken in the encounters people have with Jesus, but it is obvious that love is what motivated Jesus to act on their behalf.

It is not only John who drums continually on the power of love. The three Synoptic Gospels and Paul, in their exploration of the human condition of their times, widen my outlook on the importance of love in varying situations. As they showed the supremacy of love over other valued practices of their day, I would like to do the same for our times.

All three Synoptic Gospels deal with the same principle teaching of loving God and my neighbor. Mark, for example, says that love is greater than any holocaust or sacrifice (Mark 12: 29-34). Back then, live sacrifices and burnt offerings were a necessary part of Jewish life and Temple worship. Applying it to our times, I think of the sacrifices I make for health, wealth, well-being, position, or simply to get my way, etc. Even if I

sacrifice along these lines for a greater spiritual life or to draw closer to God, love is more important than any of these. If I'm truly convinced, the choice is obvious.

Matthew 22: 34-40 says the whole Law and the Prophets hang on the commandment to love. The Scribes and Pharisees were held in high esteem for their knowledge of the Law and their ability to interpret it in daily practice. For our times I know how important law and order and justice are for the protection and well-being of society. I also know the value of free speech and the power conveyed by what wise and learned men offer. Yet, none of these is as powerful as love for my own development or for the survival of society. Again, do I choose wisely?

In Luke 10: 25, a lawyer asks how one can gain eternal life. Since he was a lawyer, Jesus asks him, "What is written in the Law? What do you read there?" The lawyer replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." "You have answered right," said Jesus, "Do this and life is yours." Jesus declares for his own times as well as for all times that it is love that gives you and me eternal life. Whatever gives me well-being in this life cannot be compared to eternal life that begins now and goes on forever.

One of the most eloquent passages ever written on love comes from a former Pharisee, Saul, who became Paul upon his conversion to Christ. His praise for what he calls the greatest gift of all occurs in 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13: "If I should speak with the tongue of men and of angels and have not love, I am nothing but a sounding brass and tinkling symbol, etc." His exhortation to love is read at many marriage ceremonies in Christian churches of all denominations. Paul founded many churches in what is now known as the mid-East. He is pastoral and practical

at the same time as he tells his followers in Corinth and me how to practice charity. The whole passage is worth reading again and again, but here I will mention only some of his thoughts. He says that he could possess the greatest gifts of all, but without love he says, "I am nothing at all."

Centered in his letter, he says how to be loving: "Love is always patient and kind; it is never jealous; love is never boastful or conceited; it is never rude or selfish; it does not take offense, and is not resentful. Love takes no pleasure in other people's sins but delights in the truth; it is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes." In the brief moment when I put into play one of Paul's suggestions, I catch a glimpse of the peace and order that the world could be living in.

I think that Paul was touched by the Spirit to write such an inspiring passage, and I feel he reaches out to touch me on how I can progress in love. He takes the one great commandment of love, enjoined by the Old and New Testaments and especially by Jesus as seen above, and shows in simple ways how it may be executed.

For the Evangelist John (1 John 4: 16), I find what is perhaps the most famous as well as the most important line in the New Testament, "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." Some have said that if we had no other teaching at all, this one line says it all and would be enough for nothing else is needed.

Saying that "God is love" does not offer a precise definition of God, but describes God in relation to human beings. Love is from and belongs to God; it is from above as Jesus is from above. Begetting by God makes love possible. Love is presented as the criterion for the knowledge of God, for a lack of love indicates that a person has known nothing of God. To conclude

my comments on this Epistle, 1 John 4: 20 highlights the contradiction between love for God and hatred for a fellow human being: "The person who has no love for his brother whom he has seen cannot love the God he has never seen."

We have seen love, the one commandment of God and of Jesus, declared and repeated in Scripture. We also saw how the Synoptic authors, then Paul, then John, give us their particular view on the subject. In reading and meditating on these passages, I feel the need to take the one great commandment and to imitate what these writers have done. I need to personalize love so as to make it my own.

I am moved by the love a mother has for her child. She will do anything for his sake, even at the cost of her own life. She puts his well-being before her own.

Another example of love and dedication is the way a physician views a person who is in pain. Even if the person had just committed murder and is wounded, the doctor puts his mission to heal (love) before all other considerations. He vowed to do no harm and to take care of those in need. As a good doctor he accomplishes the purpose of his profession by dedicating himself to looking out for others, and so he does what he can to relieve the suffering of the man in front of him, no matter who the man is or what he has done.

I am not a physician nor a mother, but sex showed me something of the way I want to love outside the bedroom. In the throes of sexual ecstasy, I abandon myself. No thoughts engage me, nothing of the past or of the future. There are no problems and no worry. I am totally consumed by what I am experiencing in the present. Love is so much a part of my inner makeup that it rises in me and at its height, I and the other disappear. There is only the ecstasy. When intercourse is not so perfect and I desire

only pleasure, I become a viewer to the scene and the oneness disappears.

I believe I can love totally without sex coming into the picture because love is an interior reality. In real love there is no translation into thought; love has taken over. There is no duty, no burden, not even motive. I move outside my mind. And this is where self-abandonment comes in. I by-pass my ego and all its concerns. I think it is the only way I can love my enemies and do good for those who hate me, as Jesus commanded. At first, it seems impossible to love my enemies and those who hate me. But I can love the sinner and hate the sin. To love in this way I have to believe in love and engage it. I am trying to take love as my partner for life. It is easy to say, but I find it hard to do.

I think to love an enemy is heroic. We have the example of Jesus asking for mercy on those who killed him: "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing." I have always admired heroes and their often dogged determination to accomplish what they believed in, what I thought were their ideals. They could be athletes like Babe Ruth, inventors like Thomas Edison, physicists like Albert Einstein, researchers like Madame Curie who twice won the Nobel Prize, adventurers like Christopher Columbus.

Another hero of mine is Paul of Tarsus, and I saved part of my commentary on him to give here because I think he was a hero in choosing love as his greatest desire and achievement and in being able to describe it so well for my benefit: "If I have the gift of prophesy, understanding all the mysteries there are, and knowing everything, and if I have faith in all its fullness, to move mountains, but without love, then I am nothing at all. If I give away all that I possess, piece by piece, and if I even let them take my body to burn it, but am without love, it will do me no good whatever....Love does not come to an end....In short, there

are three things that last: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love....You must want love more than anything else" (1 Corinthians 13).

I believe we can love in this way, even though it may take millions of years for us to get there. Paul was very conscious of living simultaneously in two worlds, as that fact becomes more and more real to me in my own life. My prayer and meditations make me certain of a higher life that I can visit when I let my awareness take over my thinking, when mindfulness eclipses concepts. I need to live those ideals of perfect love as Paul did and as Jesus did before him.

In my condensed story of the Biblical teaching on love, I see the plan Jesus has laid out for me. The external works of Jesus were then preamble for the interior realization I can have by loving Jesus and keeping his word. It is uplifting and endearing to see in what this oneness with God consists. I know the warmth and intimacy of a loving home, and that is exactly what Jesus establishes for me, "If you love me, keep my word, and my Father will love you, and we shall come to you and make our home with you" (14: 23). He not only makes a home for me, but makes me his friend: "I call you friend, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from from my Father" (15: 15). To make my happiness complete, Jesus says, "I shall see you again, and your heart will be full of joy, and that joy no one shall take from you" (16: 22). It is to be noted that we are talking earthly life that carries over into eternal life. In John's thought, the followers of Jesus receive eternal life while they are in the world. To encapsulate his mission, Jesus says, "I came from the Father and have come into the world and now I leave the world to go the Father" (16: 28). On hearing this, I, his disciple can finally say, "Now you are speaking plainly and not using metaphors! Now I see that you know everything;...because of this I believe that you came from God" (16: 29-31).

I believe John wanted to assure me and comfort me regarding the presence of God in my life, not just while Jesus walked the earth but for all time. The word PARACLETE is peculiar in the New Testament to the Johannine literature. No one English translation can capture the complexity of the functions that this figure has, and has in me. He is a WITNESS of Jesus and a SPOKESMAN for him before his enemies. He is my CONSOLER for he takes Jesus place in my life. He is my TEACHER and GUIDE and thus my HELPER. He is thus the ADVOCATE par excellence, one called alongside to help, like my defense attorney. He dwells in me and becomes me if I make room for him. In trying to live love as Jesus wants, I feel these purposes of the Spirit arise in me as me from time to time.

As already indicated, the aforesaid and the following are not for everyone. I derive their substance and then decide to make it my own or not, as my transposing and paraphrasing above indicate. Whatever the source, the decision is always personal to accept or reject, and what is accepted today may be discarded tomorrow. I was very aware that I had to make a decision: "Write down what was coming into my mind and heart or not?" Frequently I felt I had to do it. Something was beckoning me. Then I had to decide again whether to follow that direction in my personal life or not. God loves with a divine love and concedes to everyone her or his uniqueness in coming to Him. Choices are always present to be made. I am more aware than ever that the choice is either to love the way God loves or the way I want to love. I ask myself, "What of the divine plan is for me? How can I be an echoing cavern rephrasing God's resounding voice? How am I God?"

As indicated at the beginning of this Part 3, God is becoming man, which also means man is becoming God. I think it is true to say, "I am God, not as He is, but as I am." In saying it, I have to ask myself, "How am I God?" Then I answer, " It's

right in front of me, I breathe, I am God in everything I do." I say that I breathe, but in the larger scope of things, I didn't initiate me as a breathing apparatus. Can I not also say that something breathes me? We get lost in duality, but many difficulties disappear in the oneness of all reality. If all is one without a second, concurrence and uniqueness go hand in hand. I also think we can apply the statement to all creation: "It is God, not as He is, but as it is."

I was directed day by day, step by step, to write what I did. Sometimes the direction was so convincing I had to leave my meditation and take notes on what I was experiencing so as to remember to include it in my writings. Or my hands and arms would slowly rise upon standing after meditation, to such a spontaneous extent that it would take a deliberate act of will to bring them back to my side. I was convinced of a different power operating. Or my wife would say something that was a bolt out of the blue that I know was true for my deeper realization. Often there would be a flash feeling, a thrill of hope, a glimpse of unsurpassed power. Accompanying would be the unmistakable conviction that all is right, all is well.

I felt I could not be doing all this on my own, but that I was an instrument or pipeline to channel information. I want to say that it was God directing me, and I believe it was. But I am also certain it came from within myself. Voices and revelations can be different levels of my unconscious surfacing and addressing me. I see no contradiction here because I believe in Oneness, that we all are one in essence, in love.

God concurs in different ways at different times as I progress. I believe the degree of concurrence and its lasting effect for good depends on the love or lack of love I bring to the situation. And that depends on how deeply I am connected with my own heart. I cannot tell the source of impulses, incentives

and inspirations. They may be common to mankind and inherited as part of our makeup as some analysts have said. If so, that itself is a link between my conscious deliberations and the Ultimate Source. Whatever enters consciousness hearkens to a source somewhere, which may never be determined.

I am particularly moved by the interplay between God and man when I recite the twenty-third psalm, in either the English or Japanese version. The English reads, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." And the Japanese version runs, "The Lord is my pace-setter, I shall not rush." I am particularly taken by the Japanese version because in so much of my life I am concerned about and hurrying into the next thing and the next thing. Only recently have I discovered how much of the present I sacrifice for an absent future. They both show God looking after me; I respond by not wanting or not rushing. And so I am walking with God. We become closer by God's endearing care and my loving response. Both versions end with my dwelling in the house of the Lord forever. What a glorious outcome when both parties play the same game!

4 A PERSONAL RESPONSE TO A LOVING PLAN

There are two primary reasons why I follow, or try to follow, this loving plan. First, I believe love is embodied in our nature, as already mentioned. Even murder or suicide is undertaken because the doer sees it as good in some way, however wayward the act may be. I need love's power to combat and overcome the violent impulses I have in me.

My childhood friends and I were brought up on the notion of "good guys vs. bad guys," meaning "cops vs. robbers" or "Cowboys vs. Indians." Childhood beliefs carry over into adulthood. But I no longer look at us that way because it is overly simplistic. We are not good or bad; we are both good and bad. Any day I can read about a father killing his wife or children or both. Every one of us can be a Jesus or a Hitler. Violence is not simply killing someone. My harsh word is violence. My hateful thought is violence. I may want to be aggressive and hostile. To maintain such a tendency as hate or jealousy or anxiety means I care to be that way, and I care for it in some way. The motive often is buried in my unconscious, but

somehow I gain from the disposition. I may simply want to get even with someone. When I feel unfavorable toward someone, my Buddhist friend suggested a corrective. He said to say to the person in your heart, "'May you be healthy, may you be happy, may you live with ease,' and bring all the love you can into these words."

I become a slave to my surface tendencies which hide my deeper drives. I could be acting out of the pain of not being loved. Healing begins when I look at what I am, what I have going on inside me. I have to want to be free of these unfriendly tendencies and desire to be more loving. My ego may strongly object whenever a choice is to be made.

But I do want to be peaceful and tranquil instead of warlike, hateful, anxious, jealous, fearful, etc. Unconditional love is not easy, but it is powerful. Love can overcome all obstacles, and to change I have to acknowledge and accept the value of love. Love begins in the will. At times love doesn't come "naturally," then I need to "will" to be loving. Loving what I do for a living goes a long way toward loving in the rest of my life. Love has to be living. The more love permeates all of my life, the more of a loving being I am. I love doing research, connecting it with my own convictions, and then writing about it. This book is a prime example. All that I have said moves me to say, "I am love." But "I am love because I am loved." Love is also frightening because it closes out the ego, which doesn't want to go away. It is scary to me but also exhilarating to see that there is no limit on how deeply or how universally I can love. That is the path open to me.

The second reason why I want to follow the loving plan is that I believe in God and the revelation that Jesus brought. Building on my own conviction that love is inherent, it is also extremely comforting to know that love is the commandment

that God gives me and is the dominant theme of the whole New Covenant. Love's inherency and the commandment I think are one and the same.

When I was eight years old, I had to memorize this act of love: "Oh my God, I love You above all things with my whole heart and my whole soul, because You alone are all good and worthy of all love. I love my neighbor as myself for love of You. I forgive all who have injured me and beg pardon of all whom I have injured." I have long accepted the command to love God above all things, but this little prayer gave me the reason: God alone is all good and worthy of all love, and I want to be like Him. I aspire to be better in what I do and in what I am. God is the origin of my endeavor, for He is the source of my striving by the seeds He has planted in me. So reliance on Scripture is not a proclamation I am making for others; it is a qualification on how I choose to live my life. For me, it is most comforting to know that a higher power and I are on the same page.

The one passage from Scripture that I do wish to quote is: "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." I don't think any other directive, Scripture or otherwise, is required. What I need is the conviction that love is the answer. If I truly father love in myself I fulfill whatever religion proclaims. I have already indicated that love is rooted in our deepest nature. If I avail myself of what is already in me, my whole life is simplified, as is all spirituality. All my other leanings and strivings are amassed under one magnificent royalty. I just need to always choose to do the right thing, the loving thing. It is simple but by no means easy. The ego is always lurking out of a misguided sense of self-importance. Once I break through the ego's barrier of "self" protection, I find that in loving I am most properly myself. Do I dare to put all my eggs in one basket? Am I ready to let one instinct rule all others?

There is another prime reason to make love primary in my life. God cannot be known but He can be loved. When I say God cannot be known, I mean in his very nature, in His fullness. God/Reality is free of all words, ideas, and concepts because truth has no boundaries. I need to discard such notions as being and non-being, birth and death, self and non-self, God and Nirvana. Understanding and love transcend all dogma, all notions, all divisions. It comes down to personal conviction.

To use an analogy, ideas and concepts are like waves on the ocean's surface. The waves rise to a higher or lesser degree, have a momentary existence, then fall back into their source, the ocean. Water endures as waves arrive then disappear. I am that ocean, the water itself. Waves of ideas and thoughts come and go within my being. To take it a step further, my being is not separate from God's own existence. If all is one and I am God not as He is but as I am, it is not out of place to say as Christ said, "Before Abraham ever existed, I AM." And lastly, to finish the comparison, "What is this amness that I share with God?" God's and my deepest core is love and understanding.

I am saying all this to use it as a springboard for practicing charity. There are untold numbers of ways to practice compassion, and anyone's way may be entirely different from that of another. Someone's way may not be the answer of how I resolve the issue.

I would like to give a few examples of how I might keep loving. Once I have my own direct experience of reality, nothing can take it away from me. Because the intellect falls short of knowing God as He is in Himself, this is where I need to have faith in love. Love brings the ultimate dimension into my own historical condition.

There are three great directives from the New Testament

and from my own meditations that I take to heart to keep me on track: Watch. Pray. Love. Watching is being awake, alert to what is happening around me and in me. I know my attention wanders unless I stay centered on my true purpose. It is prayer that pulls me back and strengthens me. In prayer is where things get clear again, where I can be forgiven and learn further on what I am to do. Prayer and watchfulness lead me to what I know is most essential: love. Love is not to be in thought only, but must be outgoing, carried out in word and deed. Sometimes, however, for one reason or another, I am unable to love. This is when I watch or pray. If I stay faithful to these three instructions, I often feel a power or presence inside. I know I am not alone. Something or someone becomes me yet is greater than me. I know that things are right. I am at peace again and joy returns.

Returning to love pulls me back from a fault I easily fall into. When someone doesn't follow my expectations, I often blame him or her, at least in my own mind. When I become aware that I am judging, it is easier to replace the thought with wishing well for the other.

I would like to add that seeking truth, peace, compassion, forgiveness, understanding, acceptance and especially unconditional love is for me the same as seeking God. I say this because for me God is all these qualities. What is in God is what is important to me, and Christ is the human encapsulation of what is great and good in God. Furthermore, it doesn't matter whether Christ said all these words of love or not. Love's implementation as a way of life doesn't depend on whether Christ lived or not. I am convinced that loving is the way I want to live, and that needs no outside authority for confirmation. Love for me clarifies the mystery of God. It puts a face on the existence I live in and makes it mysteriously beautiful.

Belief in God, however, brings comfort of wholly another

kind. In committing myself to the all-powerfulness of God and man's free will, everything is working out exactly as it should. I don't see how it could be otherwise if I really accept these two forces: God's omnipotence and man's free will. God is above all and in all because all takes place in Him. There can be no greater love than that God allows all to take place in Himself, which assures me that His love is unconditional. If all takes place in God, I may have to pay in the short run for all that I do, but all will be well eventually. The One Absolute of God embraces and includes man's free will. It may take a billion years for me to awaken, but God becoming man and man becoming God is inevitable. It is from Him I come, in Whom I live and move and have my being. He is above me, within me, and awaits me. And I also believe that behind all that I have said above, and under all the teachings derived therefrom, stands one man, Jesus, who brought all this to me and laid down his life for me that I may live and love as he did. His destiny and mine are the same. But Jesus is not alone. He needs me and all of us to continue God's work in the world. This is how God's revelation goes on.

The goal is oneness, and the indispensable means to that oneness is love. I think there is a duty encumbered on all of us to find the oneness that links all men together. It may be that the continuation of the world and the human race depends upon it. To move in that direction, I hope to tap heart strings that lead to personal growth. The heart has a mind of its own. Loving awareness is the key. There is a learning and expanding that comes from a felt sense of the mutual bond uniting the people of the world. This feeling awareness goes deeper than intellectual acknowledgement. It's more personal and more real. I can experience pure consciousness to be pure love when I am not saddled with individual needs and wants. All is one because in my basic nature I am love, and it is love that makes us one.

What I have said so far and what follows in this book may

seem like a hodgepodge. I am offering many different approaches that will appeal to some and not to others. They are intended to be glimpses into something much greater than thoughts or words convey. I urge the reader to take what fits and ignore the rest. Different strokes for different folks. Life is too rich to argue. Later in this book I will describe how a Buddhist approach can lead to an expansion of the mind and heart.

The intent is for the reader to look at the offerings and find the stream or river that best suits him or her to carry to the Greater Reality of the Ocean that the subject already is. If it seems new it may be because it was there all the time but I just haven't tapped into it. The direction is always toward integration and oneness, which are greatly facilitated by meditation, and so I will spend much time on meditation in the next part.

A different image involving light may be more conducive to capturing the idea. I am like a dew drop absorbed and transformed by sunlight into something much greater than I was before. It may seem like I disappear, which actually happens to my old self. It is a process in which that Ever-Greater Reality, which I call God, is becoming myself. Everything about me is God blossoming as me, for there is no second. I have to see through appearances to the Oneness and the Now, which means that whatever happens to me or whatever I do is God becoming me as me. That more will follow is also secondary. At the same time I become all things, for that is also what God is. All things are mine as they merge in me, because my me is God. There is no place where the Spirit is not, and God exists only in the timeless now. I get off track as soon as I make a duality out of the Oneness of all things and out of all what appears as time. This moment, too, is part of eternity. The one thing that does not end is the present moment.

The whole plan of God asks me to be open, open to His

inviting power and to my own capability. Obviously this requires knowing but primarily loving. I believe we all have known someone or something we loved. In childhood it could have been mother or father or a friend or a pet or a toy. And later in life it was another person, perhaps a prospective partner. Something drew me to the person or thing. I saw some goodness in it and felt an inner attraction drawing me out of myself. This is my nature, and God uses it for my benefit. I need to be open to this eliciting feeling, to the Ever-Greater God. I say Ever-Greater because I can never stop expanding into what God is and I am, a Oneness in which everything is in God and God is in everything. An example from the Upanishads is helpful here. They say there is a knowing reality inside myself. This reality is unknowable but it is the sole existing reality. If it is all that exists, then it and I are in some way God, exemplifying what was just said that everything is in God and God is in everything. And it is another way of describing a divine indwelling.

When it is said that this knowing reality is the sole existing reality, the assertion does not deny the existence of things outside myself. What it does state is that I can deal with those externals only as I perceive them, only according to my own perception.

I have mentioned belief in Scripture as an inherent part of how I choose to live. In addition to the Bible, I would like to mention some personal experiences that have carried me beyond known and normal perceptions; my meditations have often eclipsed what I ordinarily accepted as the way things are. I like to call it "Intimations of the Greater I." I think some part of all of us wants transcendence, something within us or outside us that buoys us up, takes us beyond the hum-drum of ordinary life to a wider and greater existence.

I have found such a berth in meditation that carries over into

my daily life. I cannot watch and think at the same time. In thinking I am in control of my mind. In pure watching I am not in control of the mind's excursions. I am a passive bystander witnessing whatever befalls me. Here is where I need to be open and flow with what comes, to be with all of it without judgment. It may take a loosening of desires, a freeing from my own wants, to fully absorb what is happening. Then I can rise with the tide of which I am a part. The oneness of it all and growth in this awareness will be constant themes as the reader progresses.

I find that in constantly watching my breath, my mind slows down, its normal activity vacated. The mind's endless movement stops, like a runaway horse finally corralled. Emptied of thought results in a spaciousness that brings silence and stillness. My consciousness expands to see that it takes in far more than I could anticipate, embracing all of reality of which I was a part while my separate self-disappeared. Witnessing becomes what is witnessed; in some way, I am that larger, vast self. The unlimited absorbed all parts and any limitations. All were united and all were one. The experience brings tranquility and joy.

Any such experience is so much more than one thing only. The mental lucidity and illumination entranced me, which I think paved the way for rapture and exhilaration. All of it was going on now with nothing left for the future or to be achieved. It was simultaneously known and unknown, but holding me in a state of bliss. I don't know how long the experience lasts. Sometimes I get up in an hour. Other times I finish in ten minutes because I cannot hold the attention any longer, all the energy drained out of me.

After such experiences, I am a different man, which changes the way I normally think. The ultimate source of these episodes doesn't matter. The awareness comes with such conviction that I knew I had to use it, include it in the way I live

and act. Normally my mind waffles between snagged by fear or melted in love. When my heart is exhilarated by love, all else is cast aside as love consumes all else. The one question I have to answer, and I believe we all have to answer, is this: "Is love my response, not only to my problem but to the world's problems?" I like to say to myself, "Behold love in all things; it is lack of love that leads me astray." Not by thought do I choose to live, but by love achieved and held. People and things hint of an "otherness," a need to be joined in order to be complete. In later sections of this book I will continue treating the expansion of consciousness. Those sections will be much shorter.

One ultimate benefit of love is that if I truly make love my life's purpose, nothing can really hurt me. It is a great aid if I can deep down accept that God is Love, which means that God is the Totality of Goodness. If I fear God I cannot love Him. The more I fear God's power, the less I can love Him. But if He is pure Goodness, then I can love Him with my whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. This ends all searching and takes the task out of all religious beliefs. It gives certainty, stability, and security. I can give myself totally to it because of Its Total Goodness. Love as the goal and practice of life takes it out of all religions and burns it into the heart of every individual. In this ongoing process God becomes me. How? By my being good and loving, by my being the best person I can be. I can love myself if I am always trying to be better. If I am God, not as He is, but as I am, and if things are God, not He is, but as they are, the seeking ends in being all that it can be, and making the world all that it can be. The buck stops here at my doorstep.

I think a great reason for not loving is that people are afraid to love, and men are more afraid of it than women. It may be that as mothers and life-givers, women move more naturally into loving responses than do men. To make it personal, when I am afraid to love, it is because I think it will take away my power of

control. The intellect is a most powerful instrument. Look at what it has done to change the world for good and bad, and I know how it has changed me. It takes great satisfaction in working things out. Then the intellect often creates the illusion that it can work out everything. The intellect is a wonderful servant but a terrible master.

If I forego thinking to be ruled by love, I fear I will be subject to emotion and everything I don't know. My intellect many times is not sturdy enough to survive living in the heart. To make the transition requires will and trust, which themselves are outside the power of the mind. They are more a matter of the heart where love abides. Deep down I know that loving is greater than knowing. If I love unconditionally, there is nothing to fear, for love overcomes fear. I make the choice.

In order to put love above all else, it helps if I am somewhat of a visionary. Can I see that trusting love will make me a better person? Can I believe love is in line with my true destiny? Such steps clear away the mists and give me an ever clearer vision of God. Everything that God is, He passes on to me. He is not only Father, He is Son, He is Spirit. The Spirit makes me a son so that I may father compassion in myself. I need to be a father to myself and to the world. This is how the world is glorified; it is deified.

There is the historical Jesus and the Jesus living in me. Living in me is how God becomes a reality, for the only place I can touch Jesus and the Kingdom of God is inside. No matter what happens outside, I have an internal response to the perceived event. Faith lives by my engagement, by my taking refuge in loving acts. Real love is not a matter only of devotion; it is a matter of my practice. Practice means to continue to be born every minute.

Here is where I often stumble in my own spiritual endeavor. Teaching has been so inbred in me that I frequently take that stance instead of letting my heart direct my actions. I find relief when I realize that practice can take me out of my head and connect me not only to my heart but also to my highest purpose. Since my highest purpose is not without mystery, connecting with my heart in a practical way helps me to live the mystery. I want to abide in love. While the high purpose may be obscure, practice brings it into focus. The two go hand in hand. The high purpose directs my practice, and the practice feeds the purpose I have chosen.

I know that enlightenment or loving kindness must grow every day. Jesus' teachings are to be practiced as they were lived in him. His Spirit is this energy of love and understanding. When I look inside, sometimes I think the Spirit is loving. And the next minute it is my heart that just wants to love everything. I need Jesus but Jesus needs me for his energy to continue in the world. The energy needed is not fear and anger but love and understanding. Devotion is knowing an ideal while love is putting that ideal in motion. Devotion is seeing; transformation is doing. My free will is the foundation of my transformation. Nothing obstructs me but myself.

My enemy is not the other person no matter what he or she has done. I have violence and non-violence in me. Looking deeply into myself I see that my neighbor's offensive act was a manifestation of a consciousness that we all share. When I see the seeds of anger in myself, I see that the person I call enemy is also suffering. Compassion is moving toward instead of turning away from suffering, my own pain as well as that of others. When I love my enemy he is no longer my enemy. Any dualistic response (me and my enemy) makes the situation worse. The only way to love my neighbor is to understand him. When I reflect upon what I'm doing, I like to bring my idealism into

play. I don't walk the earth just to bear life's offerings. Can I see more? Am I able to accept life and love it? When I am able to behold the privilege of being and to glory in its beauty, I realize how precious is the gift of life.

I look to practice the ideal in thought, word and deed. I am convinced that love is the ultimate purpose of life, so I need ways to put it into operation. I would like to give a few examples of how I try to keep loving. I am competitive and I have a tendency to put myself first, whether shopping in a super market, getting into an elevator, or driving my car. I am more loving if I let the other person go first in getting a better parking spot, in entering an elevator, or in checking out at the cash register.

Another thing about myself is that I have been called a perfectionist. As flattering as that may sound, the downside is that I tend to find fault and to blame others. For example, this morning when I was leaving home, I blamed my wife for forgetting to close the garage door with her remote. I said to myself, "How can she forget to close the door when she sees it's open as she backs out?" Once I pulled out, I was well on my way to our fitness club when I realized I forgot my membership card that I needed to get into the club and to get towels for showering. The incident reminded me of Christ's words, "Hypocrite! Take the plank out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take the splinter out of your brother's eye," (Matthew 7: 5).

And when an idea is expressed that I totally disagree with, like "We should keep all Islamic people out of our country," I don't have to call the person stupid or narrow-minded. I can say to myself I disagree with that statement but I can still love the person saying it. This recent remark made me look at any internal negative comments I have about another. I need to put a positive spin on them or I am not loving. I say to myself, "Judge

or love." In a public rest room, I don't have to complain about some people being sloppy and selfish. After drying my hands, I can use my paper towel to dry the counter around the sink. If I do the things I mention here, I can experience myself as trusting love. Finding ways to love is often just taking the trouble. When my cat jumps up on the tub, I can ignore her or give her what she wants by turning the faucet on to fine drips of water which she likes to drink. Love is love, no matter how directed. When there is snow on the ground, I like to throw cracker crumbs out on my deck. The birds have a feast and my cat is enchanted by all the activity she sees out the window.

The passage is from seeing to being. Being follows love. I become what I do. I go from seeing God out there to seeing God in here, in myself. All is God, not as He is, but as we are, as I am. Am I ready to become God as Son, as Father, as His Spirit abiding in me in the world? Am I ready to receive that mantle as intercessor, priest, savior? I don't go to someone else but to myself, to my own divine identity.

I am aware of the great power I have, but I am powerless unless I use it. I ask God to free me from what holds me back from my true purpose. Right here I am faced with the great mystery of how God becomes me. There are no borders, no boundaries, except the ones I put up. God and I can make me whole again. God is me as me, but only at my best. Can I go from seeking God "out there" to finding God "in here, in me"? Can I make such a leap? Jesus frequently mentioned that everything I pray for will be mine if I trust that I already have it. Only a radical trust can open the way for God and me to realize my deepest yearning.

I am drawn to the Infinite and Eternal. I ALIGN with That when I want to be all that I can be. I AM That when I practice all that I can be. As indicated earlier, for me, searching for God or

being God is the same as searching or being honest, compassionate, truthful, forgiving, and loving unconditionally. Loving unconditionally is the doorway to living in Infinity.

The Unknown God becomes Known by the way I love. The great question is, "Will I love and stay in love?" Not only is that how God is known, that is how God incarnates. I say to myself, "If this is too much for me now, I know it is in the farther reaches of my development." God respects my freedom and allows me to find my own way, no matter how long it takes. I heard a joke recently that I think has a bearing here. A devout believer asks God, "God, what is a million years to you?" God answers, "A minute." Then the inquisitor asks, "And what is a million dollars to you?" God answers, "A penny." Then the man says, "God, give me a penny." And God replies, "Wait a minute." I love the humorous tone of this little story which also points out two other factors: the patience of God and His capacity surpassing anything I can imagine.

The way God and the questioner differ in their reckonings point up for me the difficulty in writing about spirituality and inner realities. It is difficult to give concrete examples and imagery of any kind which then results in making the reading difficult. It is easier for the writer and the reader to identify with the emotional rather than with the analytical. It is one of the reasons people turn away from trying to understand things of a spiritual nature.

I will be treating love all through this book, and particularly in regard to spirituality. At this point it is fitting to go into an extended treatment of meditation because of all the benefits it has for others and still has for my spiritual life.

5 EXCURSION INTO MEDITATION

A zillion things can happen in meditation, and I will touch upon key experiences as we move along. Since meditation is of such importance to me, I will treat it at length and it will be the longest section of this book, drawing from many experiences and multiple sources. This book is my ramble through a spiritual journey, while this Part 5 is an excursion through meditation. It may seem drawn out and ponderous for the reader less familiar with the subject.

The whole of Part 5 deals with three main subjects:

1. Meditation methods
2. Counsels for meditation
3. Meditation experiences.

I try to bring together many diverse elements, but everything is aimed at direct personal experience leading to transformation from within. I think this goal is what the great religious leaders and reformers sought. This Part 5 represents the end of just over half of the book; all the parts after this are simpler and much smaller in extent.

In the forefront meditation brings discovery and renewal. As a spiritual training, pure meditation is unbiased and unlimited and reveals depths I did not imagine. Insights come from my own depth which need no further proof. It is a powerhouse for change. I will mention how meditation changed me in the past and continues to do so. It is a revealing adventure but an inner venture. The beat goes on.

The earliest method I learned was in the seminary. We students called it "the three halos": Jesus in my head, Jesus in my heart, Jesus in my hands. For Jesus in my head, I would visualize a scene from his life, such as his suffering on the cross. I would see his mother, Mary, standing under the cross with John, the Beloved Disciple. The Roman soldiers are there standing guard and waiting for him to die. I would dwell on the scene and let it seep into me. For Jesus in my heart, I would try to be one with Jesus, sorrowing with him and loving him and thanking him for what he did and is still doing for me. Love is paramount. His love is visible in the crown of thorns and nailed hands and feet. Blood drips from his wounds as I let love stream from his heart into mine. I ask myself, "Can there be any greater demonstration of love than what God is doing for me right now?" For Jesus in my hands, I resolved to be a better person this day. I see that I can be less antagonistic when my classmate disagrees with me, or less ego-minded on the football field. I pray for the strength to carry out my intentions. For each daily meditation, I would use the "three halo technique" and apply it to different scenes from the life of Christ.

The meditation created in me a desire to imitate Christ, to learn all I could about him by reading scripture, studying theologians and mystics, meditating, and by being the best person I could be.

After leaving the priesthood and marrying, I entered the

business world as a salesman then general manager that lasted fourteen years. I hungered for a style of life explicitly tied to a spiritual endeavor. So for four years I taught meditation in parishes and counseled in a private practice. After saving enough money and with my wife continuing to work, I was able to devote myself to research, writing, and meditation. I wanted to explore all the facets of Oneness in which I firmly believed. I knew Buddhism had a long history of meditation and how it converted millions to its peaceful way of life. Vatican II was particularly promising regarding Buddhism when it declared that devout people in Buddhism acquire perfect liberation, or attain by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme illumination. "Whew!" I said to myself. "Here's a Catholic world council acknowledging and praising Buddhism!"

That was enough for me; I was convinced. I visited seven Buddhist and Zen centers from New York to Hawaii to learn and to share ideas with knowledgeable masters at these sites. I give fuller treatment to these meetings in my book, **HONORING GOD WITHIN**, which is available for purchase from amazon.com or on my website, findingoneness.com under free books. I am much richer for all these visits, and will mention here the highlights of these meetings. Above I called my meditations a revealing adventure; these Buddhist houses were stops along the way.

A striking Zen lesson did not come out of meditation. The Zen center in Ann Arbor, less than an hour drive from my home, had invited me for a visit. It was a hot summer day. I was late, parked the car and ran up the steps to the entrance. A Buddhist nun met me at the door and showed me where I could put my shoes. I quickly took them off and laid them on the shelf. She said that since it's so hot I could remove my socks as well if I wish. I liked that, swiftly took one off, stuffed it in my shoe and started to remove the other. As I was taking off the second, the

nun removed my crumpled sock from the first shoe, stretched it out in her hands, carefully folded it and replaced it. My rushing and mindlessness embarrassed me. I folded the second sock, placed it in my shoe, and suddenly felt a calming awareness of what I was doing. At that moment I thought of the first line of the twenty-third psalm, not the version I learned long ago which reads, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." But I thought the Japanese translation was more fitting: "The Lord is my pacesetter, I shall not rush." The nun and I exchanged smiles as I entered the Zendo.

Zen Buddhists do not usually talk about "God," but when I explained on retreat that God to me is the ultimate reality or the supporting force that grounds all being and activity, they could then use the word God and talk about "IT." Some gave the opinion that as the ocean contains the perfection of the wave, so emptiness or the void must contain traits of consciousness and personhood. One told me he thought Buddha was the most religious person who ever lived, and that he, Buddha, never used the word "god" because people associated it with the idea of a person and therefore limited its meaning.

Right here I was aware of the cross-over effect. Upon reflection, Buddhists saw that their "emptiness" had broader possibilities than they first imagined, and I was aware of how much we Christians may be limiting our understanding of God in talking about three divine persons in God.

To be more personal, his words made me question whether my view of God was limited. Because I accept intellectually His infinity and omniscience and omnipotence, that often does not cut it when faced with the traumas of life. Robert Aitken, Roshi of Diamond Sangha, Honolulu, reinforced my questioning attitude when he told me, "You can have the best teacher in the world and meditate for all eternity, but they are worthless if you

do not find a new way of seeing and being in the world.” Am I "seeing and being" in the world in a more inclusive and loving way than previously? Am I growing or stagnant? Always there are ways to improve and grow. If I don't believe that, I'm kidding myself. I concluded from his words that I must look within to see and to become.

The result for me was that it's important to see myself succeeding, growing, enlarging. Later I could add that it is important not only for my sake, but so that God could do the same with me. I now see myself as a spark in God, capable of infinitely expanding to His dimensions. I have a great deal to do with my personal transformation, while at the same time it is a gift.

In Chicago, I was delighted to learn how Zen meditation can be comfortably joined to Catholic beliefs and practices. A Catholic priest from Amsterdam had practiced meditation for five years on a regular basis with the Zen community. He and several Catholic nuns had come to study with Rev. Kongo Langlois, the Director of the Buddhist Temple of Chicago. Langlois asked why Catholic priests and nuns would practice Zen meditation and how they would adapt their practice as Catholic religious. Langlois learned from the priest and nuns of the long history of mystical meditation in the Church, and that the non-conceptual nature of Zen meditation ideally suited their purpose.

I saw that its “empty” character and formless illumination of consciousness without an object slice down to our essential nature. I am greater than any thought I have. They intended to use Zen meditation as the ideal source and rock-like foundation on which to build a revitalized strain of mystical Catholicism. Kongo Roshi found unanimous agreement that Zen in no way drew them away but deepened their Catholicism. Not only did I

agree with their findings, but I felt freer to pursue my own course as to where meditation would lead me. I was convinced that these people, devout Buddhists and Catholic religious, were seeking their own internal transformation, which I decided was exactly the reason Christ came and why he taught what he did.

The experience in Chicago reminded me how so many people in their religious practices, myself included, will not change from what they hold to be indisputable positions. "Beginners Mind" refers to the childlike state of openness of Zen meditation. A Zen story contrasts this learning, "plain and naive as an infant," with common adult behavior. A university professor who wanted to know all about Zen visited Nanin, a Zen master. Nanin served the professor tea. He poured the cup full, and then continued to pour. The professor watched the overflow until he could no longer restrain himself. "Stop it! No more will go in!" "Like this cup," said the Zen master, "you are full of your own ideas and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?" The example made me question my own beliefs, "What is essential and what is extraneous?" I knew I had to follow my conscience and not external authority.

Roshi Robert Aitken's words about "a new way of seeing and being in the world" and Nan-in's example of a professor full of his own ideas helped me unwrap some of the trappings in which I had enclosed my image of God. When I was teaching theology in the seminary and trying to open students' minds to a vaster vision of God, I often said that we must stay open to "the Ever-Greater God." In one instance, a student challenged me and asked, "Are you saying that God changes or that we change?" I said the change is in us when we see God as greater than we had previously thought.

I clarified because I had been indoctrinated that there was

no change in God. The opinion of "no change in God" probably came from the Greek notion that reality is divided into being and becoming. Being was thought to be a perfection while becoming was seen as change and therefore regarded as an imperfection. And so, in the Christian world, God became identified with being while becoming was regarded as an imperfection.

I have no trouble now in seeing change taking place in God. There are several reasons for this. First, in today's world, change is seen as a perfection, and being itself is constantly changing. Secondly, God in his Unmanifested Absolute nature contains all possibilities, change as well as no change. He is above and beyond any concepts that I might have of Him. Lastly, we as humans are changing all the time, and if we are already one with God, then change must also be part of God's Being in some way. I felt that I was entering "Beginner's Mind," the childlike state of openness.

These conversations with Zen teachers as well as my meditations made me think of various ways in which I put limits on my understanding of God. Christian teaching of Father, Son, and Spirit casts God at once as a Person. Then I remembered that in the East, God is often thought of and portrayed as a Mother. At once I realized how difficult it was for me to think of God as a Mother rather than as a Father. I was locked in by my past conditioning. At the same time I could connect love more easily with a mother than with a father. So my notion of God can expand me or trap me.

However I imagine God, it is wise to remember there are always wider possibilities. This became obvious to me when I saw the difference between the English rendering of the Our Father, based on the Greek version, and the Aramaic version. The whole prayer is substantially different, but here I will give only the opening lines. The common English adaptation reads:

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, Thy Kingdom come." The less common Aramaic runs as this: "Father, Mother, source of all that is, your vibrations radiate throughout the cosmos. Make me a resonant space for your vibrations. May your sphere of influence come."

It helps my understanding of God when I realize that Jesus used words that at one and the same time had not only literal but also transferred or metaphorical meanings as well as universal connections. His words then have a much broader intent than a singular application. His language is particularly adaptive to simultaneous meanings as Aramaic draws no distinction between means and ends, or between inner quality and outer action. All are present, and no view excludes the other. Each insight resonates other levels of meaning for a total response. The varied layers of meaning unify our scattered energies into a harmonious relationship with God and the universe.

I realize my own shortcomings when I want one word or one idea to represent a single reality. My attempt to isolate the text into a precise literal meaning misrepresents the original sense. It is more valid to adapt the fluidity of spiritual writing in general and the referential richness of the Aramaic in particular. It gives me a more elastic notion of myself and of God. So now, I like the Aramaic version of the Our Father better than the one I learned in childhood and use it in my prayers.

I can look at God as Father, or Brother, or Spirit. My friends and I try to be more expansive in the way we begin our meditation: "Heavenly Father of us all, Divine Earthly Universal Mother, All That Is, Holy Spirit, Cosmic Beloved: all is One, we are your Son, thy will be done."

Any name I give to God can be helpful, but only to a limited degree if the name is thought to be all-inclusive. Because any

name falls short is why some critics describe absolute truth by negative terms only. They would say the cause of all things is not intelligence or reason, not being or non-being or becoming, not time or eternity. It neither stands, nor moves, nor rests. It is not unity, not divinity, nor goodness, etc. They say this not because the truth falls short of these qualities, but because truth so infinitely surpasses them. Their approach reminds me that any designation I apply to God is only piecemeal and never complete.

Thomas Merton, the famous Trappist monk, wrote in his book, *ZEN AND THE BIRDS OF APPETITE*, "To define Zen in terms of a religious system or structure is in fact to destroy it—or rather to miss it completely....The real drive of Buddhism is toward an enlightenment which is precisely a breakthrough into what is beyond system, beyond cultural and social structures, and beyond religious rite and belief." In the same context, Merton talks about the impossibility of understanding Christian faith embedded in social and cultural structures. The extinction of the social and cultural self is a breakthrough into a realm of mystical liberty in which the "self" is lost and then reconstituted. Zen is outside all structures and forms. Form is empty, and emptiness is the condition of fullness.

Breaking through not only social and cultural restrictions but also my non-essential religious framework, releases me into a world of freedom that I had not known before. It gets me down to the bare essentials of what Jesus, Buddha and others have taught. I just know from within which way I should go. I see more clearly Buddha's lamp within and Jesus' Kingdom within which are direct, immediate experiences.

What Merton and the "Negative Way" teach remind me of what Eckhart Tolle said, "STILLNESS is the language God speaks, everything else is a bad translation. Be still and know"

(Psalm 46: 10). I took their words seriously and sought the stillness and silence they speak of. I knew that "trying" to get there defeats the purpose. Effort does not work. I found the best way was just to sit, watch and wait.

I see that being still and quiet lead to an emptying of thoughts and concepts. It brings me to the notion that emptiness is the condition of fullness. It is helpful to see that some Buddhists define emptiness as the absence of self-existence, which I see as meaning, "no separate self." If I am not separate, then I am part of a much greater reality. They say emptiness is a conventional truth used to help realize the ultimate which cannot be expressed in words. Emptiness has meaning only in relation to something that is not empty.

Emptiness as a conventional truth is similar to the one which says the earth is stable and solid, meaning it has sufficient stability that we can stand on it and build homes on it. But we know there is a "greater truth" behind these appearances. Deeper knowledge reveals that the earth is not solid, having more empty space than matter, and that it is in constant movement and flux instead of being steadfast.

I realize that no word or concept can define or explain the indescribable reality behind the word or concept. Even the word "God" becomes an enclosure, another way to limit God and my own understanding. Behind these mental gymnastics of identifying with the word or concept lies their perpetrator, the mind. Identifying with the mind is most destructive, but I seldom recognize it. It mostly passes unnoticed because the mind is indispensable for living in the world. And that is the crux of the matter; I have to live in the world. It is not that I want to leave the world, but I and many of us want what is beyond the world.

In all of this I am trying to get away from limitation, from

form in all its aspects, from what is the ordinary way of thinking. The word “Mystical” is a turn-off to some, but one of its key meanings is that it refers to the non-ordinary. The ordinary way frames experience according to presumptions. But here I am exploring the path of direct experience. I am free to pursue the direction of inner life, with the faith to follow what it brings me. I find wonder in all things—a reverence for existence—that connects me with all. I want to be in concert with all things that lead to self-realization. I believe there is a “natural sacredness” of my own inborn power that paves the way for “mystical experiences.” I like to think of mysticism as contemplative communion with reality.

These experiences led to opening and deepening myself, not just intellectually but lovingly. Meditation drained a cesspool of human limitations for me that I had put on myself. I saw that I was a conditioned response that let biases and personal expectations make me intolerant. God permits all, but He wants me to be without prejudice for in His house, there are many mansions. Love isn't simply a mode of behavior we adopt but must flow out of tolerance for the shortcomings of all and allow everyone's point of view. Buddhahood or Christ-consciousness cannot be just in my head but mainly in my compassion. Before all and after all, do I love? It appears to me that although many religions teach different philosophies, they still teach love, toleration, and good will toward our fellow man.

One type of meditation, called in Japanese “shikan taza,” translated into English means “just sitting.” I wrote down the procedure while learning it to facilitate its happening when meditating. It is choiceless awareness. In this method, I become an observer to all that occurs, whether thought, sensation, or feeling. I witness whatever happens with no stopping, no questioning, no judging. I face anything that comes up and do not try to get anywhere. It allows for the expression of present

moment experience.

The title, "just sitting," seemed too anonymous for me, so I like to call it "just watching." Changing the name more accurately specified for me what I'm supposed to be doing. Staying with simple awareness kept the mind away from its busy business of running to thought after thought. Other things then happen inside my makeup while my mind stayed with "just watching." My watchfulness silently grew. One result was that I was less prone to act impulsively and much slower to judgment. Awareness in meditation does not end when rising from sitting.

At times, silence and stillness dominated, so much so that I was glowingly content to stay there. Afterwards, I couldn't help but think it was the same as or paralleled the Buddhist notion of Emptiness.

"Just watching" is where I granted myself the freedom to do whatever I thought was best at the time, carefully observant of what awareness brought to me. If a newscast highlighted a man killing his wife and children, I would send the family, and others suffering, all the compassion I could muster. Another incident took me deeply into my own heart. I'm writing this on February first, and a good and life-long friend has spent a total of eleven days at home since February fourteen of the previous year. For two weeks short of a year he has been in a hospital or recovery clinic for a myriad of serious illnesses and infections. He lost over fifty pounds. He underwent dialysis three days a week and physical therapy every day to learn how to walk again. He could not talk because of a trachea to help him breathe. His wife, also a life-long friend, told me he died three times, but each time the doctors resuscitated him. I learned yesterday that he finally succumbed. If I am deeply in touch with my heart, I can focus my attention and send him and his family compassion and healing love. Healing covers more than just the body. No one

can fathom the power of unconditional love.

I would like to explain further what “just watching” did for me. As a process of concentration and absorption it quieted my mind and brought it to the one-pointedness of pure witnessing. In the early stages, I was tempted to leave the stillness and become something else, to identify with a thought or image. Later, I did not want to identify with anything my mind brought, and in some cases I COULD NOT identify with anything. As non-conceptual, I transcended the dualistic nature of mind, that is, of thought and thinker, paving the way for oneness. It tended toward ego extinction. Mystical experience does not require form or image.

Unexpectedly, love quietly enters the picture. It may come in through different doors. I must be very careful to stay with pure witnessing. Careful means I care, and I can give complete attention only when I care, that is, when I love. Love is often flagrant, but it can also be subtle. Do I care enough to stay with witnessing? I can give my whole attention only when I care enough, that is, when I love enough. Watching means a willingness to take things as they are, which is acceptance, and acceptance is the beginning of love. In doing so, the witness expands into pure intelligence or understanding and manifests its true nature, which is love.

This widens the discussion on awareness and takes me to what I consider a normal problem. Overwhelmingly I am given to thinking; this is the only way I can survive in the world. I have to be engaged in some kind of activity, using my internal resources. Engaging myself is how I find fulfillment and my place in society. The trap happens when I try to use these same faculties and procedures to transcend the world.

It does not work because I cannot watch and think at the same time. Do I care enough and do I have sufficient stick-to-

itiveness to just watch the witness? Caring goes beyond concentration; mindfulness needs the help of the heart, the will. If I can love myself, just be kind to myself, it leads to relaxation. No one said it is easy; that is why we don't have more meditators. Many spiritually minded people say it is harder to forgive (love) themselves than to forgive others. This can happen as a result of an enlarged ego, or it can come from it being harder to objectify myself than to objectify others. I can be distracted from my purpose many, many times, and I have fallen into the trap many, many times. Every time I extricate myself, the rewards keep adding up and I can feel the power growing in me. Persistence pays off.

When my mind falls into stillness and silence, free from fear and judgment, unconditional love emerges. My consciousness did not create the love, for it was always there. But now pure witnessing drops the wants and needs of my solitary self. No longer conditioned, being follows love. Naked consciousness and love come together, and consciousness sees itself as love. Love seeks totality. Love wants to embrace everyone and everything.

One key reason for the effectiveness of this kind of meditation is that energy follows attention. The technique baffles and quiets the mind by its utter simplicity that focuses attention and centers the person. Artless, it causes many to abandon the practice, and some days I tired, yet this willingness to watch reveals the way. Watching eliminates wanting and needing. It stops the thoughts clamoring for attention, thoughts that lead to fixed ideas of reality. Pure watching eliminates thinking, for, as already said, I cannot watch and think at the same time. The quieting and freedom from thinking allows the energy to build for things beyond thought. Not thinking often brings light, and in that light is tranquility. While doing one thing, that is, watching, something else is taking place, that is, light or interior

illumination. Love spawns light, so once more we see the importance of caring enough (loving) to be totally attentive.

There can be a million "so called" distractions. I name them "so called" because every time I catch myself and come back to witnessing, I change the distractions into a million "enlightenments." Watching the witness with kindness leads to stillness of the mind. As desire dies, there is nothing to become and nowhere to go. All is here now, and the separated self disappears. Lovingly watching the witness calms the mind. Such awareness leads to being lifted up. I rise to a different level of consciousness, transcending concepts. The resulting openness and freedom can't be put into words.

I knew attention played the dominant role in the insights I was having, for, as we said, energy follows attention. Our attention, normally directed to physical preservation and psychological survival, could now rest in itself, in the perception of its own make-up. The subject in flow experiences his or her own psychic structure as part of and one with the real structure of the world.

While in Chicago I discussed with Kongo Roshi the nature of zazen. He said, "Zazen is the practice of infinity, conforming to the infinity which is the principle of the universe. Any concept means I have one more step to go. Ours is an infinite life. Life is beyond our control and is never still for a moment. If I think I have arrived, I delude myself." His definition helped me understand the non-conceptual aspect of deep meditation, for all concepts are limiting, and our nature is unlimited.

I then realized that holding a concept indicates that I have another step to go. Infinity is not static, but a quality of consciousness without end. A continuously expanding universe and the constant discovery of ever smaller particles of matter

reflect this limitlessness. Fascination with the universe is as infinite as the universe itself. The practice of zazen stretches the mind to the universe as it is. Meditation works us toward our infinite nature. Infinity would seem to be the growing configuration of the mind with reality. It is truth at once personal and universal, subjective and objective. These thoughts, but especially the experiences that gave birth to them, were exhilarating and gave me a joy I never expected. They also led to a peace I had never experienced.

After months of applying two methods of meditation, following the breath and "just sitting," I finally decided to practice a third form of Zen meditation. It is working with a koan or riddle that I put to myself. A popular version of this form asks, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" The koan I chose was, "What am I?" The result was something I never expected and yet was completely satisfying because it ended my searching.

Concentrating on this question every time I meditated brought glimpses of myself that I had not expected. My whole life and all history loomed before me. I did not want to lose anything, such as Christ and his teachings. Further, I wanted to determine matters, such as the state of my existence. I found, however, that because I work for a future state, I often sacrifice the present.

The realization of these personal truths about myself persuaded me to stick with the question and concentrate, for I was learning things about myself that were true, even though I did not like them, particularly my desire for control. The answers did not come out of my intellect, but were self-evident "revelations" that came from my deeper being. It became apparent to me that I am the process. The meditations allowed the processing to continue consciously.

In one meditation, I could see a large cross on a rocky shore while I was alone in a boat. A beautiful apricot-colored bird flew over the cross, and I was ready to shoot it with a rifle I brought. I proclaimed that the place and the cross were mine and I felt interference from the bird.

A few days later, words in poem-like fashion came to me in meditation as I saw myself again in a boat:

"Arms and hands waving,
The rock doesn't move.
I am the unknown."

And two days after that:

"The sun passed through me,
I passed through the sun.
There is no answer to, 'What am I?'"

It's beyond words and concepts,
realized only in experience."

I was unsatisfied, and wanted an answer in the present. My intellect's domination frustrated me, and I could not escape.

As my meditations continued week after week, some of my deepest insights came. I kept a journal that turned up the volume and clarity of the notes being played. I became aware of the dualism that I couldn't overcome. I kept trying to fit everything into my own mind, while intellectually convinced that I could not do this. I had no experience on the level of Universal Consciousness or the Universal Mind, but I became more convinced that I am what happens to me.

I was undecided about continuing with the koan meditation, when all flashed clear: "THERE IS NO ANSWER, FOR ANSWER WOULD BE DUAL!" If there is no duality, there is

only oneness. Life is one! All is one! There is nothing to pursue! At last I am free! These insights came with a clarity and certainty from beyond my singular mind—I am the question and the answer at the same time. By questioning “What am I,” I was asking something beyond the mind's scope. I knew the realization was personal and for me alone. How could it be otherwise for no one said it to me? It came out of my own depths.

With this realization came an indescribable peace. I saw tightly bound boxes that I discarded falling in the sea, and at greater depth many plants were swaying. The unmistakable message was that of joyous freedom. I chose the riddle, "What am I?" because I thought it had deep implications, and that is exactly how it turned out. The mind lives and thrives on duality, and for me, it ended duality forever.

The koan experience of no duality helped heal the separation I had created between my "experience" of God and my experience of life in the world. When I had the life-changing episode of believing God intervened to reveal his will of wanting me to enter the seminary, it made me put a priority on direct internal experience over what occurs in ordinary daily living. I flew to what was happening in me and drew from it what would be my life's work. Even the sad experiences and rejections I felt from mentors and others paled before the resources I realized I had within me. Research, teaching, and writing became my vocation which I saw stemming from that original beckoning from God to stop what I was doing and take a new path. The downside was that it diminished the value I put on daily living. I did not feel "at home" in the world or with others, if I ever had. Only later did I realize that God also calls me to live in the world; it is "my home" for however long it takes. And so, my job was to reconcile the two. The koan experience of "no duality" helped me do just that.

My experiences in meditation were stunning and mind-blowing in that my horizons were expanding. I could only love what was taking place. Much of this came from the fruitful talks I had with the Buddhist monks. It probably started with their concern that "God-talk" limited the reality in which we live and grow and die if we see God only as a person. Was the problem putting God outside myself? Was I making two out of what was in reality simply one? What they said forced me to look at my Catholic conditioning, both good and bad.

I had to review what I learned and worked it out in the following way. In the Christian tradition, Father, Son, and Spirit of the Bible were later "theologized" into the three Persons of the Godhead. Admittedly, person can be seen as limited, but that occurs when I view it from my understanding of what a human person is and is not. But I knew that the whole purpose of Christian revelation is to show how God cares and comes to man in pure love. My experience of love is how one person can love another person, such as a mother and her child, a father and his son, a man and a woman. Each person is limited, but love is not.

The love between persons can give a partial insight into how God loves me. There is a warmth in true human love, which is also true in God's unconditional love. In his passion (Mark 14: 36), Jesus called God "Abba" (Father), which would be similar to the American expression "Dad" or "Daddy." Such an expression shows that Jesus had an intimate relationship with his Father. The Son knows his Father's love, and he lives securely in that love. And Jesus passes that love onto me. Calling God a Person is meant to convey this love and intimacy and for me to experience what Jesus had. I told myself that any title for God, such as Dad or Mom or Brother or Sister or Spirit, is justified if it conveys the warmth and intimacy and love that these names are intended to convey.

I know from experience that venerating God-without-form is difficult or impossible for many people. They understand only the personal and the incarnate aspects of the Source and Ground of the divinity. Their approach makes sense and often leads to loving and heroic lives. Risks may be present, but they attend any unilateral approach to the Infinite.

The "Via Negativa," what God is not, may appeal to those who see any wording or conception of God as limiting and therefore misleading. They regard that the Reality, God, infinitely surpasses any qualification, even such descriptions as truth, goodness, unity, reason, and prefer dwelling in translucent darkness. All concepts must be dropped. Through the very fact of neither seeing nor knowing Him, they SEE Him who is beyond vision and knowledge. By abandoning all crutches, they worship what is beyond all things, beyond all human comprehension. Negatives come closer to describing absolute truth, they ascertain, than anything positive. I see this approach as a breath of fresh air that blows away some of my own perceptions when I want to convince others of my own understanding of God.

I have to remind myself that words are symbols, and in this context the same may be said of thoughts. Both refer to something of an entirely different order. The Ground of all existence can be said to be THERE, but cannot be defined by any qualities. Because of the nature of our language and our thoughts, our knowledge will always be paradoxical. Direct awareness of THAT can only be had by union, and that can be achieved only by surrendering the ego. What is not possible to describe in word or thought can still be directly realized and loved.

For my own satisfaction, however, I still need to structure in thought and word what the experience brings. Oneness is. It's a

mystery I try to live, for I know we all are One. Sometimes oneness is all the wills in the world seeking expression like my image of plant fronds in the depths of the ocean. Another time I feel Oneness is creative emptiness. Or again, when I effortlessly follow my breath, the luminous light comes, bringing with it tranquility which permeates the rest of the day. Then Oneness appears to be the being of light itself, which is my own consciousness.

I see that I go through stages on the way to Oneness, and one powerful element that helps me is realizing the shortcoming of thinking. Thoughts or conceptualizing freezes me in my tracks. By watching and not thinking there is an emptying of heady matter that weighs me down. On the positive side, it brings me to the childlike simplicity I once enjoyed. There is also a personal break-out from social and cultural conditioning that afflicts me and prevents me from realizing that there is no separate self. In my deeper meditations I find that I own something with no time or place and that is continually expanding. My being becomes greater being. Words and thoughts always fall short of reality, a reality that can be experienced but not explained.

I would like to note what I perceive in such a state. Thoughts and time do not exist. It's as though they evaporated into a boundless openness. I am totally cognizant and vividly aware, knowing nothing except pure love or bliss. I had earlier realized that consciousness is nondual. In this state of nonduality, comprehension is unattainable. It takes two to comprehend, the subject grasping and the object grasped. Here unity is knowing totality. Oneness is Infinity. We leave singularity of all kinds to merge into a whole. Even choice and judgment are out of reach, decision making beyond my ability.

The insights I am mentioning occur in deep meditation

where thinking does not exist. I can enumerate these certain features but only after I emerge from my meditation. I did not try to bring them about; they occurred while I stayed with witnessing. And delightfully, flashes and feelings I had then come back during the day to my great comfort. They bring a quieting to my mind and a calming to any brazen feelings I might have. With the evident absence of normal conscious traits while meditating, I can see how the resulting state can be seen as emptiness. To me it felt like I was being absorbed into something much greater than myself that included me. My own conclusion is that such states without concepts, rare in my own case, move me toward truth and love, in other words, toward THAT which is.

It strikes me that I am getting glimpses of the nature of infinity that Kongo Roshi talked about in my visit with him in Chicago. So much of what happens in or out of meditation is easier to understand and accept when I realize my potential is infinite. It reminds me of one of the teachings of the Upanishads: "I am That, you are That, all this is That," which I see as the principle of Nondual traditions.

When I realized how my concepts imprison me when I try to understand God, it struck me that I do the same with people or circumstances if I do not let my thinking be open-ended to a wider interpretation. I realized that I am hard-wired to basic attitudes underlying my actions. Concepts are so often built upon my own projections of what and how people and things are. It further convinced me that the answer is more in loving my neighbor than in thought.

Infinity is not static but a quality of consciousness without end. Meditation works me toward my infinite nature. As said earlier, infinity would seem to be the growing configuration of the mind with reality. I cannot doctor the truth to fit my faith,

tailor it to what I already believe in. To configure with reality, I must revise my faith to fit the truth, which is the whole of reality. I ask myself, "What is more true than the awe and the trust in what I can become? I let go of fixed ideas to say 'Yes' to a wider vision. Self-assertion pales before the wonder of it all happening; everything can teach me."

To think that I live only in the world, yet not understand that the world lives in me, is a delusion. The need to explore and comprehend the everyday world so immersed my mind that I forgot that consciousness is the source of creation. Comprehend means to grasp or include, but consciousness can rise above the boundaries of its own conceptual thinking and living. As a temporary finite being, I need repeated experiences of infinity to change and heal my accustomed outlook. The experience of infinity—limitless expansion, freedom and power—is the creation of my consciousness.

Those for whom the experience is not ordinary may call it "mystical." Mysticism, or as I like to call it, contemplative communion with reality, is the deep appreciation of mystery. I think the mystic abides there, however, and his sense of mystery does not diminish as he goes step by step into the unknown infinity. I cannot know the mystery of another person; I barely know the mystery of myself.

Transformation is through awareness and love. If God is my destiny, my consciousness must be open to the infinite. To me, the practice of infinity means that God is there and I must get there. I must get to the Oneness of God. God has no beginning or end; neither have I. My human nature yearns to catch up with the reality of truth inexhaustible.

When love beckons, say when I want to draw closer to someone or something because of a personal mishap, or because

of suffering I hear about, I let my heart hold sway and open to the circumstance by reaching out in loving kindness and taking the issue into my own heart, sympathizing and praying for the one or ones concerned.

I had a beautiful demonstration of this happen to me when I asked my Buddhist confreres to remember my wife, Helen, who was about to undergo open heart surgery. I would like to include here their example of loving kindness. I had been meditating with them at their Theravada Buddhist center near Detroit, and this is how one of their monks, a good friend and my meditation teacher, replied to my email:

"It's good to hear from you after a while. I am sorry to hear about your wife's open heart surgery. But I am pretty sure it will be perfect. I and our resident monks will be praying again and again on behalf her.... So, I believe you have a great power now within your heart and mind through meditation that can radiate toward her. Turn it all in the perfect love, and focusing that, let it heal her....May all the spiritual powers and energies that we accumulate and practice at the temple be with your wife on her speedy recovery."

My Buddhist friend continues: "So, I believe that in addition to the accurate treatments, our noble blessings will be a great source of Helen's speedy recovery. Pure love has that power, but only when we are deeply in touch with our hearts. It is an ancient technique of self-healing too. We have not completely understood the real beauty of unconditional loving kindness yet."

Helen and I were overjoyed and uplifted with his response and his community's loving and prayerful concern for her welfare. When I read it to Helen, she got tears in her eyes. My friend then closed his email with a beautiful quotation that I

would like to repeat here in its entirety:

"If you develop love truly great, rid of the desire to hold and possess, that strong, clean love untarnished by lust, that love which does not expect to be repaid, that love which is firm but not grasping, enduring but not tied down, gentle and settled and diamond-handed but unhurting, helpful but not interfering, giving more than taking, dignified but not proud, soft but not weak, that love which leads to enlightenment, that you will be washed of all ill will."

His description of "love truly great" reminded me of Paul's endearing teaching on the same subject in 1 Corinthians 13. It was great to hear that my Buddhist colleagues were so devoted to love. It took me by surprise because previously I had been taken up by a different focus in their meditations which I also practiced under their guidance. If God is love, as many of us believe, I would like to think of God as incarnate in these Buddhist monks.

The way my confreres connect meditation and love made me realize how the two come together. By staying with the witness, I become "witnessing," that is, rooted in deep consciousness. Staying with the witness, not letting the mind run its own course, leads to acceptance, and acceptance is the beginning of love.

Since the ultimate reality is the witness, the seer, and not anything seen, whatever is seen at any time is not that important for it too will pass. Acknowledging who and what I am is what truly matters. Recognizing and remembering that I am witnessing Spirit itself can change my life. The fear intrinsic to a separated-self is gone forever. A new person arises to carve out a destiny in which I am never alone.

I'd like to pause here and reflect on the kind of love that

makes possible this "new person". I may not be sinning but I cannot help but feel lost at times. I find myself when I realize God has chosen to dwell with me by being in me. My becoming is really a homecoming on the part of God and me. I am called to a wonderful transformation that is difficult to imagine but can be experienced day by day because this homecoming always ends in the arms of a welcoming God.

That transformation is intended especially for those who feel lost. The Pharisees and scribes rejected Jesus because he ate with sinners. Without explicitly saying so, Jesus used the occasion to show how his sitting with sinners imitated God's love and mercy seeking out what was lost. In three parables God is the shepherd going out and looking for the one sheep that was lost; God is the woman who lost a coin but lights a lamp and sweeps out the house and searches diligently till she finds it; God is the loving father who welcomes home the prodigal son who squandered his money in a life of debauchery. The story of the wayward son is particularly moving and has tempted some to call it the Parable of the Prodigal Father because he so lavishly bestows his blessing and his riches on the son that was lost. Like this father, God is ever reaching-out, pleading with me to hear Him, to come to Him. The Prodigal Son rejected his father, while the father continued his acceptance throughout. The Parable teaches that God's love for me existed before any rejection was possible and will continue to exist after all rejections are finished. God needs me as much as I need Him. He yearns for my love to be freely given. The omniscient and omnipresent God does not have my love, unless I freely choose to give it to Him.

Long before I ever thought about God or trying to find Him, God, Spirit came to me. God has been looking for me while I have been in hiding. Can I accept that God has a true desire to be with me? Jesus' story of the loving father lavishly welcoming back his lost son shows that God wants me more than I want

Him. He leaves his home and goes out to his son, a forgiving father who gives his all to his son. My mind may find it difficult, but in love I can believe God longs for me more than I for Him. If I see myself as small or unwanted, I will never arrive at who I really am. I will never know the infinite value God has bestowed on me. Fear undermines love. I cannot love God if I fear Him.

Wanting goodness begins inside with the will, for the will determines my true character. I may not feel like doing the right thing, but intending the right thing can overcome feelings. My intention, which some call the home of virtue, is paramount in determining the goodness or badness of my actions. I keep telling myself, "All I need is to be a good person."

But even with the right intentions, the matter is not that simple. It takes a lifetime of learning to know what is the right thing to do. I grow in knowledge and awareness, and in the courage to follow through with conviction. Behind these appearances is God becoming me. Everything about me is God blossoming as me. There is never a moment where all is not one. The Good Spirit/Paraclete manifests as me and my life. I love Jesus becoming me.

God unfolding Himself in me as me is not the end. I would say it is the beginning of an even grander realization. I don't know what that is, and that's why it is important to stay open to the Ever-Greater God, because right now I think I am only in kindergarten.

God does all He can for us, but must stop short of intruding on man's free will. The two, God and I, are brought into play particularly where free will and fear are juxtaposed. God is already doing all He can. I cannot love God if I fear Him. Here is where I am most challenged and where I am called to do all I can. The finality of death and its uncertainties cause trembling in

the most devout souls. Doubts can arise as I encounter death. Death may bring about the supreme testing of my faith. John the Evangelist saw faith as engaging as committing, which trusts through all difficulties. At the time of death I could be comforted if I open myself and move out from my depths, sensing a giving of my heart. No human support goes with me to the grave. I enter alone. Whether the death of a loved one or my own death, it is the moment where I realize all depends on God. In raising Lazarus Jesus culminated his ministry in giving me a sign. The life to which Lazarus was raised is natural life; Jesus meant it to symbolize eternal life, the kind of life that only God possesses and that Jesus as God's Son makes possible for me. The conclusion is that I possess God's life that death cannot touch. At the end, all is One.

If I let such love, friendship, and intimacy occupy my mind and heart, I cannot help but want to be with the divine indwelling. Whether I prefer Jesus or the Father or the Spirit, there is only One God. Yearning can give way to Presence. I want to be with this Presence all the time. The relationship is so keen I definitely feel connected. If I see and believe that all is as it should be, it means that in some way I know and am connected with Ultimate Reality. There's a joining that I give myself to. I have to see through the obvious to what is beyond, as Jesus' disciples did. Then I can say, "Everything is OK!" God always holds me in His Light, waiting for me to enter. Will I join Him?

In our treatment of John under "A Divine Plan," I began with Jesus' prayer that all may be one in God. Many mystics and writers, going back to the ancient Upanishads, have declared that all is one. Some have even said that to consider a second is the beginning of folly. When the Upanishads identify us with God: "I am That, you are That, all this is That," the reverse is also true: "That is I, That is you, That is all this." The hardest part to accept might well be that all this is in some way God. How can God and

the thing, or the person, or the event, be one? Such a statement may have people throw up their hands and stop them in their tracks. Or, it may indicate the potential in all that exists! I will treat this potential later under the heading, "The Potential of Oneness Tests Our Love."

6 SPIRITUALITY IS LOVING

I am sometimes asked, "What is spirituality?" And statements are often made such as, "I don't know whether I'm spiritual or not." I answer by saying, "Spirituality is loving goodness." I have to pause here to say how I arrived at this definition of spirituality. When I decided to write a book that included spirituality, my wife said, "In the books you have published so far, you do so much quoting and tackling of big issues and explaining what others say. Why don't you write a book about what you have to say, about your own spirituality?" Helen is my greatest critic and was indispensable in getting my books publishable. I took her words seriously.

I asked some of my spiritual-minded relatives what they thought spirituality is. One said it is "love, peace and happiness." Another replied, "my spirituality is my conscious connectedness to my source: God...and all beings...and in all things living and non-living...as I open to my experiences of all of this." A good friend and spiritual colleague said it is getting the ego in line with the knowing/loving nature we were born with. Bible lovers seek spiritual inspiration in John's Gospel which has been called

"the most splendid treasury of Christian spirituality ever written."

Without denying the truth of these statements, I began to think that spirituality can mean different things for different people. We are all unique and so different from each other, why can't spirituality follow the way we are made? God, the infinite power of the universe, can embrace all our differences because He is God, and He/She invites us to do the same. In general, I think spirituality is the bravery to look within and to follow one's conscience.

I decided to see what spirituality meant to me personally. And so, after changing the definition and title of the book several times, I arrived at my own definition: "Spirituality is loving goodness." Goodness may be called the engagement of love, and so, spirituality is loving love. To put it simply, I say, "Spirituality is loving."

I see spirituality as a state and as an action. As a state of being, I am already created to love goodness as it is part of my nature. As evidence for this, I cannot do anything without thinking that this action is good for someone or something. No matter what I do, even murder or suicide, I feel that this is good, that this is the way to go: "It is better this way." I can accept or reject what the mind presents for my decision, but I cannot eliminate the preference of "betterment" (love or goodness) implicit in what I do.

All does happen on behalf of love. This is how spirituality is identified with love. We have been told that he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him. Loving cannot be separated from God, even if done for the wrong reasons. Moreover, love reaches its perfection in the abiding in each other that binds God and me. The mutual abiding makes me the perfect

daughter or the perfect son of God.

My state of being is: "Love abides in whatever I do." But what about my actions? Action follows being, or it should. The great challenge in life is to get my activity to follow my inmost essence, the nature I was born with. The ego often gets in the way of becoming all that I can be. My ego frequently distracts me from realizing that all that I want is what I already am.

I like this two-sided aspect of spirituality, as a state and as an action, because it takes in the personal as well as the impersonal, the eternal as well as the temporal aspect of my life. Within the Oneness there is the eternal and the temporal, the absolute and the relative, which I like to call the Unmanifested Absolute and the Absorbed Manifestation. My essence abides when the perishable is gone. My basic nature is already perfect, because I already belong in that Absolute domain.

I am becoming what I already am. My true nature is buried beneath layers of ego and social conditioning. It's more a matter of recognizing, of becoming aware, rather than of searching. I like to say that spirituality is "loving goodness" because it constantly reminds me of the goodness that I already am. If I love I know better who I am. Love gives me wings and a view of the sky, the wild blue yonder. Love is here and now, as well as above and beyond when I get there.

In loving I take the person or thing into myself. Love grows out of the heart, and when I love I take the other into myself. So love is what makes all one. A tree, like love, spreads and blooms and bears fruit, all from inside itself. Love goes even farther, for it labors to plant the seeds of love.

Consciousness is continuous with loving. I KNOW whether or not I am loving because the seer is also part of my inborn nature. God and I are One in this loving goodness, in me, in the

ever-present Witness. No one has ever seen God. I do not and will not see God. God pulls a disappearing act to become me. He still is God, but in me as me. The ultimate reality is not an object out there but the ever-present seer. Love knows only oneness. This is confirmed in higher states of consciousness, so it is important for me to be aware rather than trying to think it through. I find in myself what has been given, and use it to grow further and beyond. I am a single wave that can experience other waves and the ocean as a whole. As a wave I am also water. Since I am water, I don't need to explore the various rivers and lakes and seas of the world. I have already tasted their essence.

Knowledge can lead to love or anything else. I think it is safer to let love lead to knowledge. I can love the mystery of the Unmanifested Absolute and what "IT" will eventually reveal to me. As to the Absorbed Manifestations, there is much to admire if I know how to look and love. Love has all kinds of power if I am deeply connected with my heart.

In one of his most embracing statements, "On Behalf Of Love," Thomas Aquinas offers his opinion which I would like to quote here. I'm excerpting a few lines from the complete version. He gives a concrete example of love in practice, identifying spirituality with love. In Thomas' memorable portrayal, God appears before the Inquisition on behalf of those being tried, on behalf of us, testifying for our heart's desires, to tell the court what spirituality is:

"All acts of beauty are mine, all happens on behalf of love?...As exquisite is your world, most everything in it is spiritually young. Spirituality is love, and love never wars with the minute, the day, one's self and others. Love would rather die than maim a limb, a wing."

"Dear, anything that divides man from man, earth from sky,

light from dark, one religion from another...O, I best keep silent,
I see a child just entered the room."

I love what Thomas says about love not warring with anything. I try to go back to "not warring" the moment I see myself objecting to someone or something. It is what it is and I don't have to judge. Thomas' words remind me how spiritually young I am. How long will it take me to reach my full potential? How long will it take the world and the universe to grow to maturity? Perhaps there is no end at all to our growth. When we consider how old the universe is, is it possible that we may just keep growing forever?

But the assurance that Thomas' words give us is that spirituality or love moves towards total love and acceptance every minute with everyone and everything. Thomas sets the bar exceedingly high. I see it as another example of our movement towards infinity as we explained under meditation in Part 5.

It is a struggle but I have to keep asking myself, "Is the rational part of me sturdy enough to survive living in my heart? Or will my heart's yearnings go unfulfilled under the reign of a domineering ego/intellect?" I have a treasure in me that is a fearless presence. I can let this freeing power replace the kingdom of my ego. When we say peace or joy or love reigns, it means that a certain value has taken over and at the same time frees us. I must let this value affect and muster my disparate energies by power of interior communion.

I can hold a loving attitude no matter what happens outside me. With my mind like a runaway chariot, I am distracted by multiple thoughts and things. I forget that I have to create a loving impetus inside myself. The more I consciously advert to loving, the more those choices will affect my unconscious to move in a loving direction. I am often surprised by a

spontaneous surge to love someone or something that confronts me. God made me what I am with a nature that is a source for love. So I am resourceful, but with free will I have to play my part, which is in confirming and rejoicing in what I have received. This is the only way I can grow and become all that I can be. My initiative is not taken away but challenged. Nothing is enough until I am enough.

7 THE POTENTIAL OF ONENESS TESTS OUR LOVE

The aim of spirituality is to awaken the potential of Oneness. My wife has a favorite saying that she uses when confronted with a difficult situation. She'll say, "It is what it is." Of course, everything is what it is, but unless I look deeply, I don't know all that it is or all that it can be. Everything a person does is seen as good in some way by the doer, so all happens on behalf of love. God has done His part, as we have seen, which includes giving me the power to make things one, to make things God. God loves me too much to do everything for me, for then my reward would be unearned. Sometimes my experience seems to war against oneness. At such times I have to realize that there is my experience AND the REALITY of Oneness. I need to choose to live within the REALITY.

Ultimately there is only God. I believe I am incorporated into Him without losing my identity. I can say, "I am God, not as He is but as I am." There is a transitioning of God and I becoming each other. The ultimate reality is not anything seen, but it is the Seer. There is only Spirit, everywhere all the time. I

do not become Spirit; I recognize the Spirit that I already am.

To better realize the oneness of all reality, I need to broaden the above statement to "All is God, not as He is, but as it is." Can I see God in these words, in this I-pad, in my window glass as I look outside, in the grass and trees and sky? It is God manifesting as each particular thing. Becoming one under the terms of free will includes such drastic elements as murder, suffering, and death. God is in control, but He doesn't micro-manage. The Unmanifested Absolute allows for aberrations. I need to unite the opposites. To do this, I may have to put aside much theology that has been passed down, particularly regarding evolution. I intuitively know the reality of flow, of change, of one thing being transformed into another.

If I accept the foregoing statements, there is a two-fold consequence that follows. First, I don't need to search outside of myself for fulfillment. And following that, it points to the great interior work that needs to be done. If I want to die to my ego and become one with God, I must become the unique individual that I am, transiting identities with One greater than me in whom I am absorbed. I must become God's way of acting in the world, for this is what it is to become One with God.

To better understand the process of becoming one, Meister Eckhart gave me a template. I know people who are greater, or lesser, complete beautiful individuals. I like to read about and think about the world's great mystics who have absorbed Jesus' plan and made it their own, customized to their particular way of life. I want to be clear that someone may have never heard about Christ, yet be closer to God than a monk or nun, as Thomas Aquinas has said. One mystic stands out for me in how he took Jesus' words and applied them to himself. Meister Eckhart knew the God-given power he had and summarized it for those who could understand. In one of the most astounding statements in

Christian spirituality, he said that the highest and innermost part of the soul creates and receives God's Son and becoming-God's-Son in the bosom and heart of the heavenly Father! I wonder, "How could this ever be?" I answer, "If all is to be One, there must be a way of becoming THAT. The sense of it dawned on me only gradually. If I accept that all is potentially one, and that God is all that ultimately exists, there must be ways of bringing this about. Eckhart clearly demonstrates the work and the result of apparently two becoming one. Our soul is God's creation, and Eckhart shows how the soul partners with God in becoming One.

I think Eckhart's template is a sample of what is going on all the time: 1) going out from oneself (creates); 2) accepting the new creation (receives); 3) embracing the new (becomes). This may be an easy or difficult process, depending upon my own adaptability to change. To grow, at some point in life, I have to let go of all dogma, all of what someone else has said, and act completely out of my own conviction. It is an act of faith in myself. I need to give up dogma, paradigms, certainties, and keep changing. Things keep changing and I must never stop changing. I and the world are changing all the time. I must even get beyond words and thoughts if they prevent me from evolving into Oneness. Love is one way to get beyond duality and perhaps the best way. A trap is thinking that I am the same and things keep changing out there. I can allow myself to develop and mature, and be grateful for the change.

Since love plays an irreplaceable role in a truly spiritual life, I need to see how I can make it possible because of the obstacles in its way. Almost everyone has been taught to fear or hate someone or something. The dislike may be directed at spiders, the school bully, the neighbor, the neighboring football team, another's race or religion, foreigners, a native or foreign head of state, etc. The net result of such discrimination is that it puts a condition on my own capacity for loving. Love, then, is no

longer unconditional.

Love concerns not so much what is outside of me but primarily the begetter of love inside me. Not loving draws a shutter over the vast openness that in essence I am. Thwarted is my outward reach, but it is frustrated from within. Even the possibility of acceptance of life's offerings is denied. Can I really love if I reject the possibility of the right for others to exist, let alone the goodness of their very existence? Can I really love if I put judgment ahead of compassion? My restricted awareness prevents love from functioning. If I cannot or do not love, it is because I am not deeply enough in touch with my own heart. I don't always know what may enable me to see the error of my ways. A long-term prisoner of Alcatraz reformed in a startling and sudden manner. He said that when he realized that all he had done was by his own choice, all the hatred went out of him.

When I look at myself and others, negativity means I am not loving. It includes any kind of out-going blame, such as meanness, disliking another, accusing, hate, unforgiving, fear, wanting to get even or to show up someone, etc. These all keep me in the dark regarding the self, away from the light of seeing my actual makeup.

That darkness has its own power; it stops me from advancing. My path is created by every step I take, because the path extends only to where I am now. There is no route to follow except my own. Is there concordance or dissonance in my life regarding my relationships to others, even with those I disagree with and dislike? Where do I go from here? Upward or downward? Do I choose the higher path to let my finer self-prevail?

I don't have to feel love in order to be loving. Loving is a matter of choice, of will. Do I choose the more loving, the more

compassionate, approach? Do I judge in a negative manner? I always have a choice: Judge or Love?

I say to myself, "Choose to love and not to judge!" In choosing the better I know that I am acting out of love. No matter what I profess to be externally, I am close to God or far from Him moment to moment, depending on where my mind and heart are in that moment.

It is not easy to see God in all things and "to have a God who is present," but God is present in our thoughts and actions without our adverting to that fact. "The Kingdom of God is within you." Here is where I have a chance to take the higher road and let my finer-self come out. Every thought I have by every internal decision I make is toward the Kingdom or away from it. Most of us get closer to God and realize his presence only step by step. Love is the divine guideline.

Jesus taught that the Kingdom is within and that individuals are the light of the world. Buddhism teaches that one must have faith or trust in the Buddha and in the teachings. When he was dying and his followers feared they would be lost without him, Buddha reportedly said, "Be a lamp unto yourself." Jesus and Buddha both worked toward the same goal of having guidance or illumination from within. They each sought an inner conversion, which might be called a loving conversation with oneself.

In an important episode in John's Gospel where Jesus is conversing with the Samaritan woman, John uses the symbol of water, showing how naturally and realistically he thought of eternal life: water is necessary to natural life as living water is to eternal life. The living water is not Jesus himself but something spiritual that he offers to the believer who can recognize God's gift. Living water is not eternal life but leads to it: "a fountain of water leaping up into life eternal." In the scope of Johannine

theology, there are two possible interpretations of "living water." It means the revelation which Jesus gives to men, or it means the Spirit which Jesus gives to men. There is reason to believe that both meanings are intended, for Johannine symbolism is often ambivalent, especially where two such closely related concepts as revelation and Spirit are involved. After all, the Spirit of truth is the agent who interprets Jesus' revelation or teaching to men.

8 MY FAILURE TO LOVE

Parcel 1

"I am one playing the game of many." This is what I finally said to the masseuse who kept questioning me during the massage I was having while on vacation. "I know your name, Tom, but who are you really? Who am I? Where do we come from? Where do we go?" After trying several mundane answers, she continued the questioning, "What do you believe? What's the meaning of life?" I then tried to be profound and yet concise, so I said, "I am one playing the game of many," and she stopped questioning me. I thought my answer appealed to her and satisfied her. We spent the rest of the hour in silence until I said good bye on my way out.

When I got back to our room, my wife asked how the massage went. I said the massage was good, but she was the most talkative masseuse I ever had. "What did you talk about?" Helen asked. I said, "She almost badgered me in trying to find out who I was, philosophically, I guess." "She probably read some of your books, and wanted to know the deeper you," Helen explained. After pausing a moment, Helen continued, "What did you say?" "I told her that I was one playing the game of many."

After a longer pause, Helen said, "I don't know what the devil you are talking about!"

Helen's response startled me. I had given that answer to friends when we were in deep discussion, and they accepted it. Helen didn't understand, so I tried to explain it. "I am one, a single unique person having a personal identity. Yet, at the same time, I am a husband, a lover, a researcher, a writer, a tennis player, and many other things. Those are the games I play. The one me dabbles a lot, but that one me continues its uniqueness in all its activities. So I am one playing all these different games."

Helen replied, "I get it now, but I didn't get it from the one bold statement you made to the masseuse. Maybe you should phrase it differently." I thought about it for a while, then said, "How about, 'I am one with everything.' " Helen offered, "That's better."

I thought the masseuse got silent because she understood what I said. Maybe she was just dumbfounded.

Parcel 2

I knew at the time, but especially after talking with Helen, that I was upset over the masseuse's questions she kept firing at me. The setting for the massage was in the open air, but private inside a canvas enclosure. I had expected a relaxing massage with only soft music playing in the background. It lasted only a minute or two until the questions started.

I believe in loving my neighbor, which at times means accommodating people. I knew that I had not done this. I now believed her questions were sincere and revealed a person seeking honest replies. Why was I disturbed? Why could I not stay calm and simply answer her questions? I realized that my expectations set me up for failure. I had expected a quiet, peaceful session and got grilled. My behavior gave broader and painful meaning to the many games I play. Sometimes my game is selfish and as the player I act out of ego. I had failed in something important to me. Love begins inside but cannot remain there. I pride myself on teaching oneness, and here I separated myself from someone who may have been seeking my help. I thought of Jesus' words, "Love your neighbor as your self," and realized how I had failed. Stories do not always have a happy ending. I resolved to try to be attentive to my neighbor the next time. In encountering others, I decided to ask myself, "What am I expecting here?"

It led me to a deeper personal inquiry: "When someone comes into my life, or even when a thought enters my mind, is my reaction acceptance or rejection?" The answer tells me whether I am in a positive or negative mood. If negative, I need to turn the rejection into acceptance. It really boils down to avoidance or allowance. Allowance does not mean approval. It simply means I accept what life brings me and I will handle it, and this is what I really want to do. I want to do this because

avoidance or running away is the beginning of fear, and I want to be rid of all fear in my life. Acceptance means I don't have to be afraid.

I said a brief prayer asking for acceptance the next time, and I closed by sending the masseuse my love and blessings and asked for forgiveness from her in my heart. Oneness means inclusion.

9 AMMENDS

My failure to treat the masseuse with loving kindness while on vacation made me rethink the way I look upon love. The Gospels and Paul repeatedly tell us of the necessity to love, hammering home its importance.

I, in turn, quoted what Scripture said. I have concentrated on John, who does not tell us the nuts and bolts of Jesus' ministry. The great value in having four Gospels and Paul is that they complement each other. What I have not described in particular is the way two Gospel stories moved me and many others to take to heart the fundamental teaching of the Bible: love.

Both stories come from Luke. Sometimes the preacher has to become a poet, and that's what Jesus did on these two occasions. Maybe story-teller is more accurate than poet. Story-telling has from ancient times been a vehicle for teaching and changing the way people regard some subject. I think of the way I and many others read novels for the stories they tell. The first Jesus story occurs in the context of the God's commandment to love announced here by a Jewish lawyer and confirmed by Jesus

(Luke 10: 25-37). The lawyer had asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus, in turn, asked him what is written in the Law. The lawyer said you must love God with your whole heart, soul, strength, and mind, and your neighbor as yourself. Jesus said, "You have answered right; do this and life is yours."

Here, however, is where the lawyer pushed the thought. "But the man was anxious to justify himself and said to Jesus, And who is my neighbor?" Jesus then tells the story of the Good Samaritan, of how robbers attacked a traveler, beat him, stole his goods, and left him half dead. A priest passed by and then a Levite did the same. But a Samaritan came upon him and was moved with compassion when he saw him. He bandaged his wounds, took him to an inn, looked after his wounds, and paid for his care. Jesus then asked the lawyer which of these three proved himself a neighbor. The lawyer replied that it was the one who took pity on him. Jesus said to him, "Go, and do the same yourself."

It must be noted that those of Israel, the Levite and the priest, should have been more sensitive to the needs of charity and done something for the suffering man. On the other hand, a Samaritan, an alien and a heretic, moved by love, steps up to help. For Jesus, neighbor is not the person living next door, but anyone needing help. The story of the Good Samaritan has been told and retold, hoping that it will inspire others to do the same.

The second story is that of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-32). The Pharisees and scribes had complained that Jesus welcomed and ate with sinners. Jesus answers in three parables, spelling out in familiar trappings that show God's love for us: the lost sheep that is found, the lost drachma also recovered, and the father welcoming the lost or Prodigal Son, all highlighting God's mercy in seeking out sinners or those lost. The Prodigal Son demanded his heritage from his father and left for a distant

country where he squandered his money in a life of debauchery. Poor, hungry, and in desperate straits, he decided to return to his father to ask his forgiveness and to be given work as one of his hired servants. The father saw him from a distance across the fields and was moved with pity. He ran to his son, hugged him and kissed him tenderly. The father ordered him clothed royally head to toe and ordered the fattened calf to be killed in preparation for a lavish party to be held in honor of his son's return. He said that his son was dead but now come to life; he was lost and is now found.

The message of both these stories for me is that I cannot be simply enamored with the thought of love. Jesus tells a story to demonstrate the power of love, hoping it will be easier to remember and practiced. He told a story and Luke repeated it for our benefit. Thoughts are always old, derived from the past, and won't do the necessary job, the job at hand now. Love has to be me acting now. I must be the loving father or the Good Samaritan.

With each story Jesus gives me a window into the Kingdom of God. He does it so that I can see in and abide there, with God the Good Samaritan, with God the loving and all-forgiving Father. He makes no comparison between the faithful son and the wayward son. God is naive enough to think that all I would want is to be happy with Him. He rejoices when I come home; He needs me more than I need Him. How little we understand of God! If I have a problem with God in anyway, it means I have another step to go.

I do not understand the power of unconditional love, its ability to change the situation and eventually the world. Pure love has that power, but only when I am deeply in touch with my own heart. It has the power to heal myself as well as others. If I were more in touch with my own heart, I would have been more

sensitive and acted differently toward the masseuse. I have to engage loving kindness, make it a life-time partner, trust it and commit to it. True lovers return to their loving ways. It is more a matter of the heart loving than of the head thinking. I need to be the loving father and the Good Samaritan, for myself and for others.

But making amends raises the bigger question of forgiveness. I found that I could forgive others for what I thought were their offenses, but I could not forgive myself for what I had done. Why? Was my ego so huge that I felt I could do no wrong and didn't need forgiveness? That was a possibility, but something kept gnawing at me to go deeper.

How can I forgive myself? Are there two of us here? I knew the two imagined powers had to be one. Then what is happening? I saw that the mind objectified me according to its singular way of knowing. The mind needs an object to study, and can divide me from myself. But there is a higher way of knowing that transcends duality. Somehow forgiveness and everything else must exist in the Oneness of the universe of which I am a part. If I choose to partner with the whole, then I can make use of whatever is in the whole. I am not alone. Forgiveness is not my prerogative. If I make use of it, I am borrowing what already exists.

This bout with forgiveness made me realize how much conceptualizing I do, which takes me farther away from myself, and away from the experience of infinity as treated in Part 5: Meditation. I am not my thoughts and feelings, but something vastly superior to those. Am I ready to assume that mantle? This realization made it easier for me to watch myself, to see how easy it is to go into thinking. The witness grows stronger if linked with kindness. Kindness towards oneself brings ease to the body and mind. Then it can relax and enjoy the view.

Growth in love is a life-long process, a simple act, a thought here, an intention there. I saw my rivulet become a river until it became clear that I don't have to combat anything in life, myself or anyone else. It doesn't mean I approve, only that I can accept and eventually love what happens to me. I tell myself I don't want to harm anyone or anything in my life. I can love it all and just be content with existence. I can just Be. There's a Hand holding my hand in everything I do, helping me to feel always at home. It's a Fatherly hand that beckons me to be a father to others where I can. I learn all I can from the past, society's history and my own, while boldly venturing forward as the new and unique creation that I am.

10 CREATING AN IMAGE OF GOD

Trinity

There are numerous Biblical images attempting to give us some understanding of God. Some of these semblances are word, wisdom, power, life, light, love. The same can be said for father, mother, son, and spirit. In dealing with New Testament references to Father, Son, and Spirit, later theology came up with three divine persons or the Holy Trinity. Theologians were trying to make God understandable and meaningful, so they adopted the term and notion of person. They wanted to square or establish a correspondence between something we know about life with what we know about God. I do know something about God, but I must always allow more room for what I don't know. Any term applied to God may help but always has limitations. Anything finite cannot explain the Infinite.

I want to understand God and myself and what life is about. I know I need a purpose or an ideal for my life to work, and I need to make it explicit in my own heart and mind. In my attempt to clarify things, my own experience tells me that a most applicable term or designation is "One." God is One and all existence is One. I like to see love as the goal which results in this Oneness. Oneness describes how I and everything else are

intrinsically and inseparably tied to God. That loving Oneness is the exemplar or prototype of earthly life and of all life as we know it, all goodness, beauty, truth and love, and any other good quality we can find in the universe.

We are not talking two here. The inner working or life of God is what is going on in me. The all-pervading presence of Spirit is working or latent in me, depending on whether ego or love dominates. I frequently have to tell myself to look for the good in people and situations. Life is filled with imperfections but also abundant with God's blessings. R. Tagore's observation says it so well. "Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of humanity." God's life is being replicated in the universe. I like to see it as mutual indwelling between God and His creation. Ultimately only God exists as all beings are gradually reabsorbed into His being.

Free will is the crux of the matter, but it can never overcome God's all-sufficiency. Since the life of God is what is working in me, there has to be a springboard as part of my makeup that can make us all One. Here I arrive at what is perhaps the finest image I can have of God: Love. Love is the launching pad that directs me not only to God but towards all existence. Everything is capable of being loved. It carries me through my intellect and into to my heart because it asks for engagement. Am I willing to trust that love will take me to where I need to go? Can I commit to its power to overcome any obstacle?

An underlying reality in all these ramblings is that I am creating my own image of God. Creating my own image is constantly occurring, but now I make it an intentional and personal work. I like to take the example of reading a novel. While reading it, and afterwards, I interact with the data provided and actually make up my own story as I go along. I

create my own images of the characters and events portrayed by the author. I am elevated, depressed, afraid, surprised, delighted, etc. These are realities transforming me in the moment or for longer periods of time. Then if a movie is made from the book and I read it, I often say it is nothing like the original. Why is that? I believe it is because someone else has drawn the images for me and given me their story, and the truth of it is, I do not like someone else's imagery and story replacing my own.

Believing from childhood that God is All-Knowing, All-Powerful. Always-Present, All-Loving, etc., I tried to imagine God in this way. I saw Him as a giant figure, perhaps like a Charles Atlas, the renowned bodybuilder, holding the world on his shoulders and in his hands. These faith-driven portrayals may help, and we can trust the image we make of God if love is its foundation. Love carries us beyond faith to engaging and committing ourselves. Even wisdom must assent to the superiority of love because love knows only oneness, and the oneness that love brings surpasses wisdom.

If I can trust that God is love, and that love is all he is ever extending to me, that makes my life easier. Yet that is exactly what John saw in Jesus and later proclaimed for me, as I paraphrase: "God is love, and you abiding in love are abiding in God, and God is abiding in you," (1 John 4:16). There have been mystics and theologians who have said that this one statement is enough, even if nothing more is said in Scripture or elsewhere.

The Scripture writers, however, wanted to give fuller treatment to what they saw as the linchpin, love, in our spiritual life. Love's preeminence is found in the Old Testament, in St. Paul, and in all three Synoptic writers. John gives it prolong and individualized treatment. More will be said on this later under the heading, "Making Life and Love One." In fact, the authors make love and the divine indwelling a greater intimacy with God

than seeing Him. I see this as a challenge to my imagination, to my own image-making. How can I see God's loving presence as more intimate than actually seeing God? It can happen only if there is a fusion of identities, of one becoming the other so that there are no longer two. Seeing is dualistic, but according to the Scripture writers the relationship of us with God is inseparable.

I never went to a Catholic school but attended catechism classes while in grade school. As mentioned earlier, I memorized a prayer on love which I still know by heart: "O my God, I love You above all things with my whole heart and my whole soul because You alone are all good and worthy of all love. I love my neighbor as myself for love of You. I forgive all who have injured me and beg pardon of all whom I have injured."

In the darkness or in the unknowing that life sometimes presents us, I can make the decision to keep on loving. I judge my actions not by the result but by my intention. I think character resides primarily in the will. In no way is it easy to stay loving. At times love may just be accepting things as they are. Love is in the will, and as the generator of love, the will resides in my deepest core. Activating the will engages me totally. During the summer months I worked in steel mills in the Pittsburgh area. White-hot steel, strong and hard, rolling on slabs, always entranced me. I could not get close to it because of the intense heat. I connected steel-making with the will and what the will can do when it sets its course. I admired it and at the same time it fascinated me because of what man can do, both in steel-making and in exerting his will. I am willing to surrender my will to a Will that is All-Loving, and that means I surrender to BECOME ALL-LOVING. There is a bond between the will and the object chosen as the will takes its activator inside the object to become one with it.

When the will stays its course, sometimes it expands

infinitesimally as in watching the witness. "Minded" things disappear replaced by acute insight into the nature of itself, the activator. I see a resemblance to a lucid dream. In lucid dreaming the sleeper knows she or he is dreaming. Here the will is aware of itself being rooted in consciousness. It cannot help but be conscious or aware. It is not aware of this or that, but of the ecstasy of ultimate consciousness. What comes is a sense of wholeness, of intimacy or inseparability. I am being opened to the infinite. Some would call it God or nirvana. They are certainly aspects of oneness. I have to remind myself that oneness as a concept is only a pointer; I have to live oneness.

Light

As mentioned dealing with meditation in Part 5, another frequent experience in meditation is vivid awareness of light. Sometimes it engulfs me, other times it intensifies as I stay with it, and still other times it's similar to a light bulb in the distance that captures my attention like a deer caught in the beam of a car's headlights. Whatever the kind, the light brings peace and joy.

The very mysteriousness of light transfixes me. By focusing on the breath the light comes, putting to rest the ramblings of the mind which brings deep rest and relaxation. It surrounds and penetrates my entire being. Whenever it appears it brings tranquility. Jesus said "I am the light of the world." It is so beautiful and endearing and warm, and yet I don't know what light is or how it is. Since light is formless and all-pervasive, it carries me to what is beyond all form and singularity. Having no form or mass makes it awesome and sets me to wonder. Is the light of my consciousness of the same reality as the light of the world? It's the possibility for oneness of a different dimension. All of this makes light for me a powerful image of God, at once known and unknown.

In dealing with the light I have made some discoveries that were remarkable to me. Light has no limits, and it seemed to me that consciousness is the same in that it has no boundaries. It struck me that light was moving me away from finite concerns and toward the Infinite. I felt that as an individual and as a society we frontier on the Infinite. As each horizon is crested, another looms before us. If God, the Infinite, is becoming me, I need to pay attention to my own becoming. Prayerful meditation has always served me well. When I advert to Father, Son, or Spirit, the light comes. I'll say, "Father, I enjoy watching your glory and love unfold and blossom as my personal experience."

Or, "I glory in my good Spirit, the Paraclete, manifesting as me and my life." Or, "I love Jesus becoming me. Come Lord Jesus!" I dwell in the forthcoming light which is so comforting and charges me with energy.

Sometimes the light is so intense that I have to end the meditation.

For a fuller treatment of light see **THE HEART OF CHRISTIANITY** on the website findingoneness.com under free books.

11 INNER GUIDANCE GETS PRACTICAL

My guidance often comes from inner images or spectacles that I experience. I credit that to the fact that I am a strongly visual learner. It doesn't matter to me whether it's divine intervention or my own active imagination. I don't have to solve that problem; what is important to me is that I learn from it. Some experiences can be visual or audial or tactile inspired. Others that give absolute certainty cannot be so traced, although their meaning is indisputable.

I saw a shrouded figure standing on my wool meditation blanket waiting for me to catch up, waiting for me to put the other (person, pet, action) first instead of myself. It's tempting to believe the figure was Jesus, and I believe it was. Looking back, I'm also sure it was me, or the better part of me, waiting for the rest of me to catch up. In my life's quest for oneness, it was confirmation that God and I are one. I also saw Jesus once sitting at the Last Supper. So now I say to myself, "Defer. Let the Spirit rule. Put the other person or car first."

A dominating experience occurred when light engulfed me in meditation. I saw Jesus with his right arm extended

heavenwards to bring His Father's light down, which he offered to me below with his left hand reaching out. Something told me to sit up too and replicate the gesture of Jesus. In imitating his stance, the full figure of Jesus was imprinted all over me. He came into me and I into him. He was the heavenly link to my earthly life, and my link to heaven. I told myself that He is asking me to put love for the other in everything I do. To make it my own, it made me want to live in Loveland, to stay there in every encounter I have. As explained above, I don't think such sightings are anything special. The only importance I put upon them is to make sure that I am better, more loving, because of them.

Some light was shed on my imagery when I recalled a scene from the trial of Joan of Arc. Joan was an auditory mystic, and the bishop questioned her regarding the source of her audial communications. Joan tried to explain the voices she heard. The bishop said that it was all in her head. I may not be precise, but Joan's response has relevance here. She said, "Yes, your excellency, where else could it be?" Internal transformation and not what another says determines the value of spiritual experiences.

Perfect love casts out fear because it allows and accepts all. Acceptance is huge. It is like a divining rod in the spiritual life, pointing in the direction of the treasure I seek. Acceptance requires trust, not only in the object sought, but also in myself that by my choice I am doing the right thing. It can work for me if I can engage acceptance and commit to it, which in reality, is tantamount to loving. Am I able to see good beyond any evil or apparent evil? To see beyond the temporality of evil requires acceptance of reality as it is. "As it is" does not mean that it is good or that I do not want change. It simply means that I have to start by accepting what is.

Avoidance or running away is the beginning of fear, and acceptance is the bulwark that prevents fear from entering my life. Acceptance is appreciation or understanding the importance of what's there without determining whether it suits me or not. What often stops or impedes my development is wanting it my way, wanting God to do my will.

I can tell whether my love is true or not, and actually measure it, by seeing how much I trust love. How certain am I that love is the answer to everything? The greater I trust love, which is trusting God, the more my inherent power is activated. This means I am seeing more eye to eye with God, and my understanding of God's ways is increased, as they say, exponentially. I am loving if I sincerely seek and work for the good of all, putting others before my selfish concerns.

12 WHAT CAPTIVATES ME?

It is helpful to know and to take advantage of what captivates me. What inspires me and gives me life? If something really matters to me, that in itself is fulfilling. Is it Music? Poetry? Art? Beauty? Mathematics? Science? Love? Nature? Animals? Pets? Could it be wonder itself? Awe or wonder have been called the source of wisdom. Don't we all want to be wise? Moreover, what captures my interest can fill me with joy.

I have been told that music soothes the savage soul. There's little dispute on how music can change us, marshal our strength, warm our hearts, bring us to tears, make us happy, etc. I was recently taken, actually captivated, by a song I heard, "I'll Be Seeing You." It's a song I heard in my childhood, but now it came back with a force that surprised me. I think it was because I saw so much more in the song now than I saw then. I'd like to give the words here and comment afterwards.

"I'll be seeing you in all the old familiar places
That this heart of mine embraces all day through,
In that small cafe, the park across the way,
The children's carousel, the chestnut tree, the wishing well.

I'll be seeing you in every lovely summer's day,
In everything that's light and gay,
I'll always think of you that way.

I'll see you in the morning sun and when the night is new,
I'll be looking at the moon, but I'll be seeing you."

I think what captured me is that the "seer" sees what is before him now, some concrete object or scene, but also sees the beloved in and beyond that thing. To the song writer as well as to me now listening, the melody comes from somewhere beyond the voice and instruments. Isn't it a mystery how we can be carried away and reborn by melodious sound and fitting words? Musicians often call the lyrics a metaphor, signs pointing to some other reality. Musicians also note the importance of silence and the pauses between the notes, saying that what they do is provide a framework for silence. It is only in silence that music is presented for our enjoyment.

Music and silence possess me so that in some way I become them. Music alerts me to the rhapsody going on deep within myself. It connects me with something beyond my ordinary state, beyond present reality. That is why it can even be called sacred. It can induce a form of meditation, a deep state of wonder or awe. It can even lead me into a state of listening to the silence and stillness.

Many things beyond music can inspire me with awe or wonder. I remember my first view of the Grand Canyon from the edge of the south rim. I was paralyzed with delight! I didn't move but just looked and looked! I couldn't believe all that was before me which I could take in: the mile deep gorges, the river looking like a silver ribbon far below, the many layered bands of red rock, cliffs towering up to the blue sky, its overall scale so vast I couldn't see an end to it. My wife had to nudge me after a

while. Helen said, "You've been perfectly still and gazing for twenty minutes!"

Different things appeal to my different moods. At another time I rejoice in the sweet scent of fresh lilacs on a spring morning as I walk from the parking lot to the fitness club; or the iridescent glow of a beautiful humming bird tapping the nectar of the salvia my wife plants on our deck to attract them; or it may be hundreds of red ants scurrying over mounds of sand entering and exiting the small hole in the center of each; or it may be fireflies at twilight winging all around me and close to me, sparks of illumination; or it may be other luminaries from millions of miles away twinkling in the night sky; or it may be the jet stream of a plane across a blue sky reminding me of man's ingenuity; or it may be the healing of a cut finger or of an incision a surgeon makes. The wonderment is in the healing as healing.

A sense of wonder proclaims it is beautiful to live in this glorious mystery so enchanting and soul-raising. As things are is how we see God. There is only the Now. The present is the only thing that never ends. To glory in a pansy, with its smiling face waving in the wind, raises me, but I am lifted to the heavens when I recognize that God is that pansy. A sense of wonder traps me. The great wonder-miracle of Spirit is God becoming me and I becoming God, a mystery that never stops unfolding. Wonder results in gratitude.

It has been said that God cannot be thought but He can be loved. To know God I would have to be equal to God in some way, that is, I would have to become God, which is the destiny of all of us. It is love that will get us there.

13 HOW GREAT IS THE I?

There is a longing of the heart which mystics have made explicit in their lives. I recognize the same impulse in me as I want everyone and everything to be God because everyone and everything is God. The mystic in me, which I think is in everyone, reaches out to include the universe as its own. Known mystics like Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart have preceded us; they both said that the soul is not in the body but the body is in the soul. I like to consider the body in the soul, the soul in the whole, and the whole in God. I am in God, you are in God, all is in God. I belong to a much larger domain which I am already inhabiting. I am made of the same stuff that makes up this world, yet the desire for more, for expansion and exaltation, carries me above and beyond the known and the now. Something within me completes me, yet that same something is totally beyond me. Wholly within me and wholly beyond me; a mystery that grows within and outside myself! It's a wonder, an awesomeness that is staggering! Mysticism, that is, contemplative communion with reality, is the deep appreciation of mystery.

It has been said that for all psychology there is only one main issue: "What am I?" It could also be phrased, "Where am I?" Either way, the question asks where does "me" begin and where does the "me" end, if "me" does indeed end? The discovery of the unconscious indicates that unconscious sources may extend far beyond anything I can call my own. Psychology and now science also recognize the danger in setting limits to the psyche. The cut between self and the universe is arbitrary. Some still want to make the cut at the level of the skin, but many recognize the uncertainty and danger in making any cut at all. Some analysts have said that the greater part of the soul lies outside the body, and that the human soul is in the soul of the world. The human psyche is the size of the earth. And mystics go farther and say the soul is universal and coexisting with God. Common experiences like thoughts, emotions, meanings, soul, spirit, heart, love carry us beyond the level of our physical makeup. Some of the world's leading physicists agree that consciousness does not occur in or as a result of physics or chemistry or quantum mechanics. They sum it up by saying consciousness is beyond physics.

If I can let some of the truth of these statements seep into my awareness, I will be the wiser for it. In talking about creation spirituality, many spiritual writers have said that awe is the beginning of wisdom, and others add that there can be no compromise on this truth. The quest for the infinite is one of the greatest propellants toward having and enjoying wonder in our life. I developed the desire for the infinite in Part 5, Meditation. Thomas Aquinas cites three ways of the authentic infinite, which I like to break down into head, heart, and hands. First, the human mind can know all things. There is nothing that pure knowing cannot reach. If we check ourselves, we know that we can never learn too much, and that shows our capacity for the infinite. Secondly, there is no limit on how much or on how deeply the

human heart can love. The secret is to not restrict our capacity in arbitrary decisions. And thirdly, we are infinite in the number of things that human hands can create. Spawned by the imagination, no two objects are ever exactly the same.

No one has ever seen God, but these directional beams toward the infinite inform me about God and ourselves. God is often called Infinity Itself. I must "see" Him in whatever life gives me. God is glorified by what happens in me. This is part of revelation that continues, and my glorification results. So it is of prime importance to have an interior impulse that motivates me toward love and goodness, which have no limits.

Since I am talking about how great is the "I," I also need to look at what prevents me from becoming all that I can be. Admittedly, some of us have been scarred by earlier experiences that keep us from reaching all that we can be. If not scarred, we at least have been shaped by childhood emotional experiences. In my case, I was brought up in the Pittsburgh area loving the Steelers. My dad was a friend of Art Rooney, the owner of the Steelers, and we frequently had tickets to the Steeler games. Even now, I follow the team religiously and pay extra to get all their games on television. I have lived in the Detroit area for almost fifty years, compared to only twenty-one in Pittsburgh, and cannot identify with the Detroit Lions the way I have with the Steelers. Even when I want, I cannot shake what shaped me early in life.

Some of the students I counseled told me later that I tended too much to put people on their own instead of seeking ways with them to facilitate their expansion. As mentioned earlier under "A Personal Response to the Loving Plan," certain attitudes inhibited my own growth. I had the thought that since key people in my life put me on my own, I needed to do the same for others.

My first mistake was thinking that others should be like me. Wanting to change someone is not the way to go. Thinking they should be different from the way they are stems from my desire for control. I had always admired people of power who did what they wanted. The answer for me is that in a temporal world of becoming, people and things are perfect as they are at this moment.

My second mistake was letting myself be conditioned by my thoughts. Thinking breeds duality. Comprehension involves the thinker and the object thought, and it goes on from there to a habitual mode of behavior centering on duality. Thought is born out of past memories and is always old, whereas loving, like living, is always present and active.

What I needed was more love and warmth in dealing with others. I now know that thoughts will not and cannot cultivate love. Love comes out of a different part of my makeup, the will, while thoughts are spawned by the intellect. I set up a kind of scheme for myself to handle my "wayward thinking syndrome." If I look to the past of myself or of others, I need to extend FORGIVENESS. If I look to the future, WELCOMING must be in the forefront. Acceptance covers both of these and is the beginning of love.

I say that love is the primary attribute of God in his dealings with us. This unity is vital and organic, as explained in "A Loving Plan." To stretch the point, the loving blood that flowed in the veins of God the Father He gave to his Son, and Father and Jesus passed that on to me. That living loving blood now in my veins points the way to be all-embracing and all-inclusive, within me and outside me, past and future, temporal and eternal.

14 BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD

Following the instruction of a famous passage has helped many in their search for peace: "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46: 10). I constantly work with this prayer to make it my own so that I can benefit from it. I hear God telling me to stop activity and look to Him for help. Know that He is God, meaning that I am aware that He is all-knowing, present everywhere, all-powerful, infinite, good and loving.

The harder part may be the stillness required. Eckhart Tolle has said, "Stillness is the language God speaks, everything else is a bad translation." Out of my stillness God comes. His thoughts become mine. I say to myself, "Not my way is OK, all of it shall be lit." If I quiet my mind by watching my breath or my thoughts, the stillness comes. There's a bigger and grander reality than I am capable of. Will I let my higher wisdom rule? Do I incarnate God as a God-Son would? Am I loving kindness? Or are my ways dark and self-centered? Only the whole is the truth, so God includes all of us and all our pronouncements as imperfect as they might be. A God-Son accepts all.

A second way of playing with this prayer is to see it as a drama of two acts. In the first act, as above, God speaks to me. In the second act, I make them my words that I say to myself, "Be still and know that I am God." I'm telling myself to be quiet because I know that in some way I am already God and growing more into Him every day. In the stillness God's transforming presence takes place: two voices, two beings becoming One.

We can take the prayer and gradually reduce its import for serious consideration of its parts. "Be still and know that I am God" becomes "Be still and know that I am," which then becomes "Be still and know," followed by "Be still," and lastly, "Be."

The practice of stillness enriches me in a way I did not expect. When I have put aside all the clamoring of the mind, there is silence. In that silence comes contact with existence without anything in between. There is no intermediary between me and all that is. I "hear" the silence, and when I hear it I have immediate understanding. Silence opens the door to understanding. It carries me beyond ordinary cognition to what seems like perception of non-perceiving. I just know that silence is the requirement for ultimate truth, for understanding God. It is a door to the divine, a gate to God.

The point of perfect stillness I like to call still point. When I reach it, I am aware of perpetual peace. I have tried to explain it to myself, for silence is an opening to something totally transcendent. It is a deep knowing rooted in love. That peace returns later in the day when I recall the still point I have experienced. I'm aware of peace like an enclosure surrounding individual persons and things.

I have taken more freedom with the prayer and added what I believe are pertinent ultimate truths. "Be still and know that I am

God. Be still my will, and know no doubt, that God is becoming myself. Myself is becoming all things. All things are mine as they merge in me. My Me is God, nor do I recognize any other Me except my God Himself." I recognize that the final sentence is a quote from St. Catherine of Genoa, but it seemed fitting to end with that.

When I try to achieve silence it does not work. My own effort dooms me to fail, for I'm trying to impose silence from without. It has to arrive from within, from an egoless, mindless, consciousness. It does not happen without a loving surrender, a trusting that goes beyond my own capability. When I realize that I have been trying to reach silence, I say to myself, "Be still."

15 THE KNOWING SPIRIT

I can understand my "Godness" better if I see the truth of spirit, and how spirit carries me beyond my ordinary daily experiences to awesome levels. It is said that in the Middle Ages, men discussed how many angels could dance on the head of a pin. The answer is an infinite number because angels do not take up space. Spirit does not have the limits of space, time, and matter.

For a personal spirituality or "mysticism," it helps me when I use my own words in explaining what God means to me. Thus, God is the ultimate reality or the supporting force that grounds all being and activity. Starting with the Father, He is my creator, the doer behind all that I do and aspire to do. He becomes me and I become Him as His glory unfolds and blossoms as my personal experience. The Father becomes me so as to continue fathering through me. The Spirit manifests as me and my life and still remains everywhere all the time. Spirit means I have no limits to what I can know, how much I can love, or all that I can do. The Son is me corporeally and He continues making sons all over the world. The Son is the effect of the Father; all that the

Father has is in me as me as a son. In sum, I am the composite deposit in which the divine lineage propagates. The whole process continues in me as I say to myself: "All of it shall be lit, not my way is O.K."

I have this life to live, and so life of the spirit, or the spiritual life, must be lived in connection with all that surrounds me, with the world in all its aspects. I "spiritualize" my life and my surroundings by seeing God in them. Many things will pass away, but not their spiritualized essence which abides in me and in you. Only what lasts forever is real.

I keep making two out of what is really one, differentiating this from that, me from you. At my deepest level consciousness is undifferentiated, which I keep leaving as it is necessary to deal with life in the world. And so I leave unitary consciousness, but I can return to it any time I want. The ground of my being includes all. Wholeness consists in uniting the opposites.

To recover their unity, some will take the company of no one but God, seeking to identify God with the whole of life. There is no place or nothing where God is not. I know God and I do not know Him. The same is true of me; I know myself and I don't know me. Going from the known to the unknown, in God and in me, leads to personal experience which may only be a thought at first, but can lead to a point where God and I are eventually indistinguishable.

There's an exercise I like to perform that reminds me of my ultimate Oneness. I talk to myself in the following way. "I am Tom Stanks...I am Tom...I am...I...Now take away the 'I'...That's who I am. No questions. No answers. Questions and answers make two. Any second leads me astray."

God desperately wants to join me in any endeavor I choose because its unfolding and completion is how the world will be

transformed and reborn in OUR image and likeness. Life is giving, receiving, becoming, moving into a greater Oneness of the I AM. Instead of being about something, I am something. God is Tom acting in the world.

16 NATURE THE TEACHER

An article and a television show revealed to me recently patterns or replicas of the life I have chosen. The article tells how trees care for each other. Two soaring beech trees are friends: their thick branches point away from each other so they don't block their buddy's light. Pairs can be so interconnected at the roots that when one tree dies, the other one dies too. Other trees keep alive for centuries ancient stumps of long-felled companions by feeding them a sugar solution through their roots. Trees can also warn each other of danger by sending electrical signals across a fungal network known as the "wood wide web."

A stronger comparison of mutual caring occurs when animals are involved. I was raised with a dog or two always in the family, and when I was old enough I had to care for them. My parents taught me that in adopting a pet I enter a relationship with it. It intensified in my marriage since my wife and I always have a cat and preferably two. Every cat has its own personality. The ones we've had so far would run to the other end of the house when the doorbell rang.

Our latest feline addition is different. Charmer loves people.

When the doorbell rings, she runs to the door to welcome the visitor. Any time Helen or I am sick or recovering from surgery, Charmer knows it and lies on her or my lap. A physical therapist came to our home recently to work with Helen after hip replacement. When he opened his bag to take out his blood pressure monitor, Charmer jumped in. At the end of his last visit, he offered to buy Charmer. I said, "OK, one million dollars." He laughed, as I did, and he walked away. I don't think I need to say, empty handed.

Charmer, gray and white, has a very thick and soft fur coat. I love to give her long gentle strokes from head to the tip of her tail. This furry little creature keeps me in touch with loving.

Today I saw a bumper sticker that tells a big and beautiful story. The sticker had the imprint of a cat's paw showing the four pads up front and the heel behind. The inscription in the middle of the paw read, "Who rescued who?"

My relations with animals drove home for me in a television show about dogs. They stay healthy and happy by interacting with humans. In fact, dogs have been known to get angry and destroy what is around them if they are deprived of human contact too long. Without us they are lost, and my wife and I might suffer the same fate without them. We remember how we cried and felt forlorn when we had to put down any of our pets. Many stories are told how a dog or cat saved the life of a person or warned of an impending danger.

Many spiritual writers have said that awe or wonder is the beginning of wisdom. It reminds me of an anonymous saying about our fellow creatures: "To wonder at an animal is to begin to understand God."

Trees extend a "natural goodness" toward each other and pets do the same with us. Nature gives me an example and

reminds me of what nature has planted in me. Somewhat like trees and pets, I see myself interacting with my surroundings all the time. God may not make "a personal appearance" but just be "in" what I am doing. How I handle the present situation determines what the next step will be. "Can I just be a good man?" Being good and wanting good come from love. I cannot love at all if I didn't have love in me in the first place. Maybe animals will stop killing each other when we humans learn to do the same.

17 A GREAT MYSTERY TO BE LIVED

The mystery: How does God, waiting to give me his infinity, eternity, and everlasting love, make Himself appealing to me? I live at the narrow end of a funnel, seemingly trapped in its narrow confines of life, suffering and death. But I can look upwards and move up to the other end that is so wide it covers infinity and eternity, where I can live without suffering and death. The degree of my rising is hinged upon my capacity to love. That is why love is God's one commandment. I am aware that if I have any fear of God, I cannot love Him. And any fear at all diminishes my capacity to love. That is why He waits for love to consume me. If I am absorbed by love, I have nothing to fear. I tell myself, "Just love, forget about all else." Perfect love casts out all fear and makes anything possible.

But loving like this can be difficult when suffering. As I focus on loving God through the pains of my own life, and on sending love to my wife in the hospital, I gradually become someone or something very strong and powerful. It is exhilarating and scary. Behind the pain, I wish for everyone and

everything to become God because everyone and everything is God.

Someone else's understanding of God is not mine. I can adopt another's but it must become my own. Any understanding of God must be made my realization of God. To get an experience of God is not something outside of myself. So, to experience God, I must get an experience of myself. I am God, not as He is but as I am. In one of my meditations, God was a huge silhouette with all the world's events happening inside it. When I am ready, God superimposes that whole figure onto me. And when I am ready, I superimpose myself onto God. All takes place in God and in me. I know the image is in my imagination, and how it got there doesn't matter to me. I look to see whether the experience enhances me or distracts me from my purpose. Does it broaden me or narrow me? Does it give me greater understanding? A sense of wonder or awe? Life is a journey and I have to figure it out. Every experience is an opportunity to discover who I really am. There are pointers or guides for the right way of doing something. Love is always a guide for me. So I try to determine whether the experience makes me more loving or not.

I must let existence (God) have its way in me which is God becoming me and I becoming God. Sometimes this is very hard, very trying, even excruciating. I think of all the people in the world who cannot escape the situation they are in. Can I share that with God which He wants to share with me? At such a time I say the prayer, "Be still and know that I am God." The power of God transplants itself into my personal experience resulting in a single endeavor, the Two Becoming One. The joyous outcome is precious beyond description: pure bliss.

In my quieter moments of reflection, I am aware of emptiness becoming fullness that is both familiar and unfamiliar.

It appears to me that the Unmanifested Absolute and the Absorbed Manifestation are simultaneously present. The insoluble mystery becomes a sounded experience. I was hesitant to write about this because people might think I am way out of line. But to be honestly "My Story," I had to do it.

It boils down to interior realization. The scriptures and other writings and even God Himself say what God is, but God wants to hear what I say God is! God chooses to unfold as me. God can be me or a stone or anything and still be God. Every tree in the world is unique, yet each is a replica of God. So too, with each of us. There are no dividing lines, no boundaries, between what is God and what is not God. There is nothing that is not God; all is God. That doesn't mean there are many Gods, only that He/She has infinite profiles. As me, He gives me untold possibility of knowing and loving God. I need to trust the nature God has given me.

I think the statement, "I am God, not as He is but as I am," gets to the underlying truth of God in creation. There is what I call the public God, which is everything anyone has ever said about God or what God is. Then there is the private God, what He/She is in each manifestation. It dawned on me that I am God writing, or reading, or looking at the clouds, not as He is in Himself but as He is in me right now. My cat, Charmer, is God napping on my lap, God as Charmer. God lets each thing be supreme in its own way. I think this is the consequence of the nondual schools which says there is only God, there is only Spirit, there is only the Infinite, in all its glorious wonder.

It took me a great while to accept then use the statement, "I am God." Then I realized that it could not be otherwise for two principle reasons. First, ultimately there is only God or Spirit or the Infinite. Secondly, no one has ever seen God, as Scripture says; we shall not "see" God for that puts us right back into

duality. We become God; God becomes us. The greatest thing I can say is that, "I am God." The use of, and meditation on, the statement, "I am God, not as He is but as I am," brought a blending within me between God on my mind and earthly concerns on my mind. Soon it wasn't just in my mind but in me. I am Father to some, Spirit to others, a Son of God all the time. I think what brought about the change was constantly sending out love and receiving love that I felt coming to me.

I kept sending out love to my wife as she was recuperating from many surgeries, and then to any others who were suffering for any reason. My wife, Helen, said she could feel the love and I could feel love coming back to me. Her words were that the love was very tangible. I became aware as never before that being and loving are one. Actually, awareness, loving, and being, were all one. As developed in Part 5, "Meditation," being follows love. I also became aware that if I am deeply in touch with my own heart, no one can take love away from me. I can lose it if I refuse to be loving to a certain person or in a given situation. Then the great loss is mine to endure.

There is a twofold commitment required, and I feel this is a good time to bring the two together. The Evangelist John spent much time expounding the meaning of faith in the life of a truly spiritual person. It is necessary to point out a surprising little known fact regarding the word for faith in John's Gospel. The Greek word for faith is PISTIS, which never appears in John's Gospel! Not once! Compared to PISTIS the noun never appearing, the verb PISTEUEIN appears 98 times in his writings. It says immediately that John does not see faith as a passive internal disposition, but rather as an engagement in which I commit oneself to another, fully trusting and bonding myself in a relationship. John is faithful to Jesus in appealing not just to my mind but more to my heart. Living faith is committing, a connection that grows and never ends, but it must

come from my depths. As indicated earlier when we considered death, it is opening of myself, a going out, a giving of my heart. I actually feel it at times in my chest; others sense a warm glow in the middle of their body which they call their heart center.

To illustrate this bond, the type of faith asked for, Jesus uses the example of a little child completely giving himself over to the one who knows better. Jesus says we must become as little children to enter the kingdom of heaven. We know the simplicity of a child turning himself over and trusting his elders when confronted with matters beyond his ability to comprehend and handle at this point in his life. One who becomes as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. I can look back to my own childhood and remember times when my own helplessness compelled me to seek relief in some way. Sometimes the help was there, but more often not. Now I know someone is always there.

There is a second commitment required. I like to think of the first, just described, as the front page of a newspaper leading with the divine plan spelled out at the beginning of this book and using faith/love as the vessel to transport us. The second commitment is to the life we undertake, the back page of the newspaper, if you will. It is extremely important that we be devoted to some project or work in our life, bringing to it all the passion we can muster. Accomplishing a task that musters our internal powers can be fulfilling. This is necessary because we must bring the two together, the human and the divine, the earthly and the heavenly. I think the ideal person has his feet solidly established on the earth while his head is up in the wild blue yonder, although the upper may be clouded over at times. The heart is in between and brings the two together. Ultimately there is only One. The front page and the back page are printed on one and the same piece of paper. I wrote a poem some time

ago that I would like to reprint here for it illustrates what I've been trying to say.

Searcher or Lover?

The diamonds of knowledge deceive,
searching drains and enfeebles.

Its effort depresses,
while finding lifts with joy.

Discovery comes from love's permit
that ends the hunter's fear.

Being is blessed,
asking our amen.

Its needs embraced
to reclaim our innocence.

A lover takes the world to himself
letting it act through him.

Everything is his own,
everyone is himself.

Allowing surrenders himself
becoming divine.

His sacred "I am"
is for us to behold our glory.

When love is multifaceted as life,
we discover we are diamonds.

My intention in the poem is to show how the divine and the human work together to bring us to Oneness. I cannot become God unless God becomes me. For it all to work out, God waits

for my free will to cooperate. I must constantly remember there is only one of us here. My core essence is divine. It is my life-long task to see how I am God and to see God in everything. The great mystery to be lived is God becoming man so that man may become God.

I would like to expand the reality of engaging, trusting, committing which is implicit in faith. I want to go beyond an intellectual notion to a practical application. As a mental tool for remembering it, I like to use the acronym "etc." for engaging, trusting, committing. But practically, I apply it two ways. The first is when I am praying or meditating and I use these qualities to enrapture my heart with God's. The second way is when I apply it to daily life. I try to be engaging, trusting and committing with whatever happens to me. And I find this to be an immense task. I know I don't have to love these incidents and I don't try to. But I have to set a goal for dealing with life's circumstances, and I know that setting a goal makes me vulnerable. When the goal is too high it is easy to get sideswiped by an unexpected intrusion. I need to make the goal attainable, a little bit at a time, one step at a time. If at least once a day I can accept this person or this incident without judgment or resistance, then I enter a trusting mentality. Or if I can release the reign of accusation I hold against another, I move toward greater freedom. I don't have to have complete success all the time. But if all is God or all is Spirit, I need to trust that what crosses my path is not an accident. It is meant for my edification.

I name the game acceptance. This is how I step into God, not as He is but as I am. So how I am and how things are, are how all is God in some way. I can and do create God in me because God's nature is to become me and for me to realize that fact. I shall never see God because that would amount to two of us. Duality separates. What God offers us is far greater than ever seeing Him. God becoming you and me gives us an intimacy

with Him than I could ever imagine. When I have trouble accepting these possibilities it is because of the concept or idea I have of God. And all concepts of God fall short of the reality that He is.

My consciousness can go beyond conceptual thinking to something beyond perception, to a kind of pure spaciousness or openness. It is at once a not-knowing from the intellect's standpoint, but a knowing from deeper intuition. Without mental structures locking me in, the transcendence I experience ushers me into a world of radical freedom. It tells me I am meant for something beyond anything the mind can give.

There is a voice that keeps calling from deep within, beckoning me to a place without boundaries where I become who I always was. It is an unborn presence always there, always a part of me, which I often do not remember. It is unformed awaiting my shaping. It is not a dream but a greater gift untouched by circumstances and convention. When I am there, all earthly securities vanish as unnecessary. It is all-powerful, and can make me feel invincible at times. Yet it is fragile because I can take my inner eye off it and lose it to my ego at any time. It is not so much a discovering but rather an uncovering of the treasure of my own divine nature. God's presence in me and outside me is face to face with the present moment which never ends. It is elusive and beyond description because nothing created can touch the uncreated.

Admittedly, there are difficulties and problems to be solved in this approach. A huge one is the existence of evil in the world. A possible solution is that only what is real lasts forever. I like to accept that. It means that evil has a temporary existence. It is a part of the world we live in. But it will pass when enough of good is marshaled against it.

God does not punish us no matter what we do; we punish ourselves as a result of what we do. And that continues until we can change and save ourselves with His help. If God becomes me and I become God, God has to suffer with me and I with Him. God needs each one of us to experience His glory as personally his or her own, whether in joy or in suffering. Our life is the glory of the Father, sometimes to a great extent, other times to a less degree, depending on us.

Acceptance of life is the key to spiritual health, and loving is the greatest affirmation I can give to existence. It is at once the transcendent and immanent YES to reality. I need the spiritual path I choose to answer to me, not always the big answers like why am I here, but the smaller ones like, "I don't need the answer to why I'm hurting; it's OK to hurt. I just need to get on with my life." We like to live at the top of our hierarchy of values, but the whole of life is to be lived, even the less favorable parts.

I entered the priesthood and chose the teaching of theology because I wanted to learn all I could about God. I wanted to share my experiences. Little did I know that the path I chose would inspire so much discovery, not only of what I could learn from others, but also and especially about myself as a growing and expanding human being. I have found a gold mine buried deep inside me, and I suspect that I will keep mining the treasure trove forever.

18 MAKING LIFE AND LOVE ONE

Parcel 1

As I have come to realize, life and love must come together or I get lost. If I love all of life, all that living brings me, then I am vitally alive and truly living. The great requirement is living to love. It's easier to trust love and easier to trust life if I put the two together, as I think they were meant to be. Then I love life and live love. Can I keep loving moment to moment? No matter what comes up? True lovers are relentless in their loving. Such enduring persistent love may be a supreme test of my spirituality. Life carries me to where faith/engagement is pointing—everlasting love.

I am talking here about bringing together two fundamental realities, probably the two most basic concerns I can have: life and love. If I can join them in my daily living, I am taking a giant step toward realizing oneness. I continue an assembling process. I already dealt with the twofold commitment to a divine plan coupled with a serious earthly endeavor.

Another great challenge facing me continually in our world is the reality of sorrow and suffering, particularly wars and the

anguish of the innocent. Perhaps it is the major stumbling block to my spiritual development, the greatest challenge to how I understand life and God. I've known people to throw up their hands, frustrated and dejected, suffering themselves, and give up. Suffering highlights my helplessness and inadequacy, craving an explanation. I think a possible way of handling this mystery is to couple suffering with mystery itself. This does not mean solving the mystery but accepting suffering as a mystery that I am not solving. I can have reasons to be anxious, yet feel peaceful in an unfamiliar way.

I look at some possible explanations such as karma, which is another way of saying that a person reaps what he sows. It is an attempt at saying that suffering is deserved punishment for what the person brought on him or herself. It could have been a past life that merited such anguish. Without denying the possible truth of such an assertion, I have to admit it is beyond me to verify that claim. And so I am right back to mystery.

To compound the mystery, it just might be that in the Oneness of God and me, I chose the life I am living. Some mystics have surmised that free will joined to one's desire for spiritual evolvment resulted in such a choice. Again, without denying the possible truth of such a claim, it is difficult to substantiate; and so we again are right back to mystery.

An answer I have found is that I would not be here unless God allowed me to be here. If that is so, I must have the wherewithal to endure whatever happens. God cannot be thought or put into words, but He/She can be loved. And I have the scriptural assurance that if I abide in love I abide in God because God is love. To hold and live such an assertion requires an engagement drawn from my innermost being. Love to me is like the magnetic North Pole; it's always there for me to use. God is that love, that North Pole. My engaging God and love as such

means I trust and commit myself to a reality greater than I can comprehend, but One that I can love.

Love accepts human failure in myself and in others. The world is perfectly imperfect. It would appear that wars, sins, selfishness, imperfections, shortcomings, etc., make it a very imperfect world. But they are the very things I am to handle and grow out of. The world offers me the perfect place where I can do that. It has been said that God created the world without us, but He will not save the world without us. We brought them on ourselves, and so, we have to find a way to overcome them.

Another helpful coupling process brings together watching and loving. It is impossible to watch and think at the same time. Real witnessing is such an absorbing mental process that it commands full attention and leaves behind lesser intellectual functions. In witnessing I just watch whatever presents itself. Closing the eyes can aid the focusing. There is no judgment about what one "sees," about what to do next, or about sorrow for anything past. It is simply bare attention.

The lesson my mother taught me as a child comes to mind for meditating in this way. I had to cross many streets walking from my home to grade school. My mother instructed me, "Every time you come to a street, Stop, Look, and Listen." I feel that is what I do in witnessing, but while doing one thing, something vastly different is taking place. In focusing, my mind is left behind and deeper awareness transpires. My soul comes alive, and I feel myself being elevated.

This in itself is a calming and expanding exercise. In my own meditation I noticed that love for what appeared seemed to naturally surface from time to time. I saw no difficulty in watching myself loving what was happening. I believe that undiluted consciousness, consciousness freed from individual

needs and wants, is pure love. I'm very comfortable in what is happening, and it is ecstatic when loving consciousness takes over. Sometimes, when it does not happen by itself, I deliberately bring love into the picture. The witnessing and the loving go well together, and afterwards I find it to be a very fruitful meditation.

My identity and oneness with God means that all power is mine coming from within. I can be that power. Jesus and Buddha don't matter because I have replaced them. It may be truer to say they have replaced me. My role, however, is to give birth to God's son within me so that I can become his son throughout my life. This can happen only if love is superior which happens when I am deeply in touch with my heart. Unconditional love comes out of this deep connection with my heart.

I am reminded how the Old Testament made love a commandment. Then in the New Testament, Matthew says love is superior to any holocaust or sacrifice. Mark states love is greater than the Law and the Prophets. Luke claims love is the source of eternal life. Paul says it is the greatest gift, superior to faith and hope. Lastly, John says God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

I was struck by a Buddhist response to my request for a prayerful intervention for my wife, Helen, who was about to undergo open heart surgery. As I mentioned earlier I had been meditating with the monks at the Great Lakes Buddhist Vihara (Monastery) just outside Detroit, and I sent an email to the community asking for their prayers on her behalf. My teacher friend wrote back saying all the spiritual powers and energies that they accumulate and practice at the temple will be with my wife on her speedy recovery. He then said I had great power now within my heart and mind through meditation that can radiate toward her. He added, "Turn it all in perfect love, and focusing

that, let it heal her." I was greatly moved by this gesture of the Buddhist monks, first by their compassion for my wife, and then by the power they entrust in love to heal. The healing works in ways beyond the physical. In giving myself to this love in meditation, I "saw" a pair of legs "running and giving" to take care of what is needed. After the massacre that killed forty-nine people in Orlando, Florida, in June, 2016, the Dalai Llama said we should teach love and compassion in our schools. What is needed, he says, is "warm-heartedness." I could feel the loving warmth of the Buddhist community reaching out to Helen and me, and it brought tears to my wife's eyes when I told her.

Parcel 2

I think that a group of men to which I belong is an excellent example of life and love coming together for my friends but especially for me. We have been meeting every Tuesday for twenty-three years, starting with a nucleus of six or so and expanding now to between twenty to twenty-five. Attendance is purely voluntary, and over the years it has evolved in several ways. We began meeting for breakfast in a restaurant at 9:00 A.M., and at times would go to 2:00 or 3:00 P.M. With only four or six present, each one could talk as long as he wanted, and at times there were deeply personal issues to discuss. Problems could be about marriage, children, sex, work, health, education, relatives, etc. Guys kept coming later and later, and soon we were meeting at 11:30-12:00 o'clock, which, of course turned it into a luncheon gathering. Members brought friends, others heard about it, the numbers increased. We pass a spoon and the holder has the floor. With so many attending, the contribution of each got briefer. Each can say whatever he pleases. If one is having a problem, he can take longer and ask for input.

Any man can come, and we welcome newcomers as some have died, others have moved, and ill-health and age have made it difficult for some to attend. We are proud of our diversity. We are made up primarily of older and retired men, but a few are in their thirties and forties. We have, or have had, one or more of the following: salesmen, teachers, engineers, one of whom has patents in his name, musicians, two Catholic priests, two ex-Catholic priests, one of whom was a Trappist monk, Protestant ministers, agnostics, perhaps an atheist, medical doctors, writers, lawyers, a sitting judge, a pilot, a psychiatrist, counselors, artists. We are Caucasian, Black, Hispanic, Chaldean.

Some comments may show the value and importance we have placed upon these gatherings. One who has a doctor's

degree said that it was here that he was formed. Another who returned after being absent for years felt he had an enlightenment his first day back. He thanked us for keeping the meetings going and said that he told his staff to clear his calendar every Tuesday so that he could always attend. A priest said that for him this is church. When I objected saying that God is not explicitly brought in, the priest said God is here in everyone and in what they are saying. His comment made me think and forced me to expand my horizon. I have to take a deeper look at what is happening and see how it may fit into a larger scheme of things, for the individual and for the group.

What I once wrote about surrender came back to me. Surrender is not submission; surrender is letting my finer self-rule. Sometimes it means the abandonment of a personal opinion for a broader view of things. It really isn't self-abandonment, only leaving what the ego wanted, abandoning my comfort zone, not myself. My higher self can extend a loving embrace to others as they share their experiences. We surrender not out of desperation, but for our ultimate freedom. It dawned on me how much we can do for ourselves and for others when we put our differences aside and let each other be. Life and love have to come together.

I would like to close this section of coupling by mentioning an episode where I failed to bring together two subjects, one that was most important to me, and the other of far less value. The one is understanding and loving God, and the other is the study of languages. When I wanted to enter the seminary, I was told that I first had to be proficient in Latin because the courses and tests were in that language. I spent an entire year in the minor seminary studying, reading and translating Latin. Later I was told that I should know Greek because the New Testament was written in Greek. So I learned that language, at least the fundamentals of it. Next, I could not get graduate degrees in

theology unless I took Hebrew because it was a required course for the degrees. So I learned to read from right to left as the Hebrew script reads.

In addition, I spent a summer at the University of Quebec learning French because I would be sent to the University of Louvain, Belgium, where the courses were taught in French or Latin. During my three years at Louvain, I spent another summer studying German at the University of Vienna. My doctoral thesis was "The Suffering Servant of God in John 1: 29, 36." That meant I had to be familiar with anything written on that subject no matter what language it was written in, and the most likely for that was German, French, and English.

To continue the saga, after my degrees in theology, it was mentioned that I should learn Aramaic, because it was the language that Jesus spoke. Finally, mostly out of desperation because I do not like languages, I said to myself, "This is ridiculous; I do not have to become a Roman, a Greek, a Jew, in order to understand and love God." So I drew the line there and refused to learn any more languages. To sum up, I failed to couple or bring together love for God and love for languages. I don't doubt that learning foreign languages has enriched many lives including my own in making it possible for me to live and travel abroad and to do serious research in theology. I just did not see where it was any great help in achieving my life's primary purpose.

None the less, I do appreciate the Aramaic language, and I prefer Biblical texts translated into English from the Aramaic rather than from the Greek, such as the "Our Father."

19 MY DEAREST FRIEND AND CO-WORKER

I cannot thank my wife, Helen, enough for how much she made possible for me. We do have a great marriage of forty-five years, with love and respect holding first place. Beyond that I consider her my closest friend and fellow worker who has helped me in many ways. First, there's the mystery of the Internet, which seemed impregnable to me. She solved it, first by establishing my website: findingoneness.com. Then there's the vast mystery of how to get my books published on the Internet. She unscrambled that puzzle so that my books are available free on my website or at cost at amazon.com. Helen says I'm technologically challenged and I agree with her. My comeback is that she was a gifted teacher with a doctorate in education--credentials far beyond my capability. Anyway, our abilities complement each other and together we've become a formidable team.

I had two manuscripts, *OCEAN IN A DROP* and *HONORING GOD WITHIN*, which I wrote years ago. She put each into a PDF (portable document format) file for publication

on my website. I had been working on two more books, FINDING ONENESS: THE POWER OF LOVING AWARENESS and THE HEART OF CHRISTIANITY, which she also published on the website. Searching my archives of previously written material I found other writings as well as poems which she used to help populate the website. Helen worked with me every step of the writer's way, not just in regard to the Internet, but also with reading the manuscripts and making suggestions. She began the process for the publication of books and now they are a reality. She takes great care in the creation of the books and often demonstrates her pride at my accomplishments by recommending a book to an acquaintance who seems to be searching for some direction in a particular area of life.

Helen has had many physical problems with their accompanying surgeries and their accompanying mental challenges. While I mention a few—bowel resection, open heart surgery, gall bladder surgery, bowel obstruction with infection, cardio versions, heart ablation surgery, hip replacement—none of them have gotten her down. As I navigate her difficulties with her, I have evolved into a more loving person with greater regard for the suffering of others, particularly her suffering. It wasn't difficult for me because I regarded supporting her with love as what I was supposed to do at the time.

The upstart of it all is that I am so grateful for the love God has showered on me in the person of my wife. It convinces me further that we are the way God operates in the world. There is much to do, and in regard to our egos, so much to overcome. The expression, "God is Cosmic Beloved," tells me that God loves all that He has created, not just totally but individually; and that all will return to God through love, when each of us has awakened.

I see Helen as someone who has tapped into a deep vein that

was running through my life. To become more is embedded in each of us. There is a stream or river in each that can take him or her to the ocean. It may be a tiny rivulet or it may be a watercourse as great as the Amazon that courses through our veins. That current in us can transport us if only it can be tapped.

The course running through me as a raging torrent was a love for the ideal and for the courageous heroes who accomplished their missions. So I read to understand the great heroes in my life, particularly outstanding athletes, scientists, philosophers, theologians, saints, and mystics. Teaching, but especially research and writing, became my occupation.

The truth is we may have more than one course inside. In my own case, doing things for others is a small weak stream in my life. I think that is so because in my childhood and adolescence I sought the help of others which in many cases was promised by my mother, my teacher, my girlfriend, and my employer, and in almost all cases was not forthcoming, resulting in some very painful experiences. With others not coming to my aid as arranged and expected, I developed the attitude of putting myself and others on their own. To sum up my stance: "I don't need others; why should they need me?" But that changed once Helen came into my life.

Meeting the woman I loved and married, I found that the original damned up rivulet got a rush of new and living water. I cared for Helen in a way that I had not experienced before. The love I had expended in career work now took on a personal dimension. I know she loved me, and the reciprocal outpouring and trusting made up for what was lacking previously in my life. The hard-core edge was crumbling; I didn't need to set a boundary between myself and others.

Our song is "Softly as I leave you." It reflects the many

times we had to leave each other early in our relationship. But once we married and were together, our love and gentle caring for each other brought out the best in each of us, the softness that is in our hearts for love.

20 CLOSURE

To close this book, I would like to talk about two personal experiences that changed my life. The first was explained in Part 1 in making my decision to enter the seminary. What that event taught me is that my life was irreversibly linked to a higher power. I knew something wonderful had happened to my understanding of reality, and my will was only too happy to pursue the dream. An indomitable force had come to me so that now I could direct my life from strength within. The goal was given, and now I had to set my own path. I no longer was alone. Even though I attributed the event to an entity outside myself, I knew that it was up to me to control my life from then on. I could not explain it except that God had spoken.

The second vivid experience occurred in meditation while I was pondering the question, "What am I?" This event was explained in Part 5: the solution to the riddle being that "THERE IS NO ANSWER, FOR ANSWER WOULD BE DUAL!" The significance was in the overwhelming peace and joy brought home by this truth realized in me. From then on I had no doubt about the reality of existence: all is one! The true nature of I is

that I am one with everything. Since that is so, then I am all that I know, all that is in my consciousness. The constant question thereafter is, "Do I have room to hold all of it? Is my intellect sturdy enough and my heart large enough to embrace all of reality?" That is what God is and the experience teaches me that there are not two here. "Can I allow myself to be the valley holding all the tears of the world?"

Grief is not a weakness for it can lead to compassion. It is a mourning for my own sins as well as the sins of the world. Grief awakens and trains my own heart. I can even grieve for my own weakness of not being able to reach out and forgive. And if I do forgive, I cannot let my heart remain resentful.

The model that comes to me in this as well as in other circumstances is the loving father in the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-32). Although the son left his father to live a life of debauchery, the father sorely grieved but never separated himself from his son. His love would not and could not allow disunion to happen. When the son decided to return home, while he was still a long way off, the father saw him across the fields and was moved with pity. He ran and hugged him and kissed him tenderly. The father ordered new clothes for him, sandals for his feet, a ring for his hand, and a feast to be prepared in celebration of his return.

The deeper implication of my two experiences is that I must turn from being a follower to being a father. I see that I am not only to be a father to myself but to father compassion in the world. My experiences were personal and meant for my own edification. But I could not have had them if I did not have a history of teachers and influences preparing me. Certain sayings of Jesus had always inspired me. I can mention two that I have always admired and used in my meditation/prayer life. I see one as the eternal speaking: "Before Abraham even came into

existence, I AM." The other I see as time speaking for my benefit: "I am the light of the world."

In the second instance, Jesus' proclaiming to be the light before healing the man born blind, I see a close parallel between the blind man's coming to faith and love for Jesus and my own progression in this matter. In a series of questions by the Pharisees over a period of time, the man born blind with his sight now restored answers first that it was Jesus who cured him. Later, questioned again, he acknowledges and tells the Pharisees that Jesus is a prophet. After more badgering, he comes to realize and proclaims to his inquisitors that Jesus had to come from God, because if he had not come from God he could not have healed him. At that, the Pharisees threw him out of the synagogue. Later, when Jesus heard of the man's expulsion, he sought him out. The new convert, now "seeing," told Jesus that he believes in him and bowed down to worship him.

I see four stages in the man born blind coming to faith and love: 1) recognizing Jesus, 2) acknowledging him to be a prophet, 3) knowing he's from God, 4) believing and worshipping Jesus. In my own case it boils down to searching, finding, committing, and remaining in that commitment. Just before curing the man of his blindness, Jesus had proclaimed, "I am the light of the world." By and large, for most of us in this world, God is a hidden God. Jesus knows this and while we are here he wants to give us a light to guide us.

The unknown dark side of God, that ancient and ever-present Mystery, points to the need for a Jesus and the need for men and women to reveal the hidden God. This is the part of revelation that continues and further demonstrates our Oneness with God. The Creator needs man to show what God is. The world keeps changing and needs new applications of the Mystery of God. As I write and edit and re-edit my work, I am more

convinced than ever that this is true. There is disorder and chaos in me and, I believe, in most of us, which must be disentangled and set right.

I have different levels of consciousness reflecting my different levels of being. I can be whole again because my deepest level is eternal, which always was, is now, and will always be. The light that is Jesus is hidden in every one of us. The world is changing more rapidly every day. By allowing things to happen and letting go of myself, I become more at home in my surroundings. In voluntarily yielding, I can feel myself become free. It is allowing things to happen not only outside me but within me as well. Acceptance = Love. I cannot avoid all disappointments. Whatever my demons are I must face them and accept them, which is a way of bringing love to bear in my present situation. If I love deeply enough, I look life in the eye and take hold of it with both hands. Religion or spirituality can be an escape for me or a source for my transformation.

It may happen in a flash of sudden inspiration, but I have had to work it out for the whole of my life and still am doing so. It is a process for things unfold gradually as I live one day at a time. That inner discord is balanced by the creative power, or light as Jesus puts it, that I have within myself. I am to reflect God as I am made in His image and likeness.

Jesus' whole life shows how I am to live; with his miracle of restoring sight and his proclamation of being the light he leaves no doubt. Jesus takes the Invisible Divine Spirit into his own hand and applies the paste to the blind man's eyes. The story tells how a man sunk in darkness comes into the light, not only physically but spiritually, all by the hands of "the one who was sent." Like the man born blind, I realize I have to go through testing before sight really comes. I think I had been prepared for sight coming to me in many small ways of daily living but

primarily in the two major experiences that turned my life around.

I am a visual learner and it helps me if I "see" what the life of Jesus was like when I make it into a story about him. The Christmas scene is a good beginning: I see the baby Jesus lying in a crib of hay after Mary gave birth to him because there was no room in the inn. Joseph stands guard protecting his family. The shepherds come as well as wise men from the east and pay him homage.

I visualize Jesus' growing and becoming familiar with carpentry the vocation of his father. He lives in Nazareth under the guidance of his mother and father. At twelve years of age he befuddles the doctors of the law in the temple with his questions and wisdom. He told his parents he had to be about his Father's business. We are told that he grew in age and wisdom, in favor with God and men.

I need not repeat further what the New Testament has given us of the life and death of Jesus, but I think it's helpful here to point out salient features of his life because he grew and was tested like us in every way but without sin. The Letter to the Hebrews is clear about his character and that Jesus is capable of feeling our weaknesses with us.

I am particularly moved that so often Jesus had no place to stay. Journeying with his disciples they were refused hospitality. Not only did Herod try to kill him but so did his own townspeople. I know he suffered on the cross and cried out to God in agony, but I often forget how he was mocked by the crowd, by the chief priests, and even by criminals.

My "staying in the commitment" means something special to me. How I define God leads to how I refine Him in my life. I believe each one of us is a refinery of God. Since I am God, not

as He is but as I am, I make Him over into my own image and likeness. I see God as all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving. He shares his knowledge and power with me, but especially his love. I see God as Cosmic-Beloved, all that comes from Him is love, and all will return to Him in love. This is the model God provides, and with my free will He still remains my carrier and the carrier of us all. He gives me the freedom to explore and do as I see fit. When I question what I'm to do in a situation, and other sources or people can't help, I commit to a good that I know God would want, and that is the most loving thing I can do. In many cases it is just a felt sense, which I like to see as soul intuition.

The refinery is the Unmanifested Absolute becoming Absorbed Manifestation. We humans have created much of the suffering in the world, and so we are also the ones to correct the problem. Seeing how the world is along with my own limitations, it may seem that to become God is an impossible dream. For many it may seem too frightening. Both the fear and the impossibility are true if I stay within the confines of my humanness. A part of me says it is impossible to write about something so beyond human comprehension.

The "how" of the transformation may be beyond how I normally think, but there are certain facts that allow me to go beyond. There is a knowing/willing reality within me whose origin and existence cannot be totally explained but can be loved. So also God cannot be adequately known but can be loved. Both are concealed by the now and here. I like to see God as having a nature that exists not only inside me but also outside and beyond us all. The Absolute Manifests and remains God throughout, but I have to know how to look. My "sight" was helped when I read a Sufi Teaching:

God sleeps in the rock,
dreams in the plant,
stirs in the animal,
and awakens in man.

I can say that nothing in life is a miracle, or that all of life is a miracle. I choose to dream big and let my sojourn take on a "miraculous" aspect. When I consider who God is and what He has done, it is not a miracle but "natural" for my Godness to be a reality. My rambling becomes a discovery when I take seriously what Jesus said. I know myself as Jesus knows himself: in direct and ecstatic awareness. It is an interior realization that I know to be true. Honoring myself IS honoring God. My final and total "I AM" is in God as I become One with Him.

In Jesus' claim to the Pharisees, "Before Abraham even came into existence, I AM," he is proclaiming the divine nature not only of himself but of each of us. In his earlier teachings he had already said that we are gods and that we will do greater things than even he has done. Jesus sought to create a new form of life that dissolved the religious and political norms of his day. He was killed because he saw human equality in God and the holiness of every individual. It is a daily task for me to try to be worthy of the mantle God has placed upon me. Being a compassionate father bestows divinity upon the bearer.

The only control I really have is over myself. I believe I was meant to draw out of myself the substance of this and other writings no matter how the matter got to be in me in the first place. The interaction continues as the play moves on. The writing has been great for me. I only hope it is the same for anyone who cares to read these stories.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom grew up in the Pittsburgh area attending strict public schools that had a mix of colors, religions and cultures. After high school, at the prodding of an older brother and a widowed mother, he entered the University of Pittsburgh to major in writing. Feeling lost and wondering what his own "purpose" was, he left after his junior year to enter the Catholic seminary. There he majored in philosophy, finding peace and order, and immersing himself in the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and the mystics. He was ordained a priest and joined the Sulpician Society (S.S.) whose sole purpose is the training of young men for the priesthood. After three lesser degrees he was sent to the renowned University of Louvain, Belgium, to get his doctorate in theology.

Having successfully completed his degree work, he taught theology and counseled seminarians for thirteen years in Kenmore, WA, Baltimore, MD, Plymouth, MI, Burlington, VT, and Washington, D.C.

Inspired by Pope John XXIII on a visit to Rome, and by the radical decrees on non-Christian religions the Pope fostered at Vatican II, Tom left the priesthood to mine the riches he felt lying in other pastures which he studied. He married, became a general manager in a business venture, and counseled in a private clinic. Happily married to Helen over forty years, he lives in Dearborn, MI with their cat, Charmer. As co-worker and true friend, his wife recently

set up a website for Tom to continue his work:

www.findingoneness.com.

Tom's purpose is giving to others the riches he found in the world's mystical traditions in the pursuit of the Oneness of everything. His other books are SUPERSEED, OCEAN IN A DROP, HONORING GOD WITHIN, FINDING ONENESS, The Power of Loving Awareness, and THE HEART OF CHRISTIANITY.

