

THE SPIRIT OF
UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

A Handbook

JEANNE MARIE SANNER

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DEDICATION

To Laura,
God's greatest gift to me.

For:

From:

I sincerely pray that this book will make a positive
contribution to your spiritual journey.

With love,

Jeanne Marie

I would like to give special thanks to Ralph Durbin whose angelic generosity God and I will appreciate forever and to Michael A. Shoop for his wonderful insights, suggestions, patience, and his superb sense of humor.

DANDELION SEEDS

One day, after reading one of the lessons in the workbook section of *A Course in Miracles*, I went for my usual walk around the creek to contemplate the daily message.

It was a glorious spring day; nature was celebrating; baby rabbits were nibbling grass near the sidewalk; birds were singing praises to the morning; and the creek was bubbling merrily over the rocks creating a miniature waterfall for the ducks to play in.

I was feeling more bliss and peace and spiritual strength than I had ever felt before. I was feeling invulnerable, even spiritually invincible.

Suddenly, I envisioned a memory from my childhood of many fluffy dandelion seeds floating playfully through the air right toward me. In my mind, I saw them bumping up against me and then falling away. Some clung to my clothes for a moment, but a mere puff of air sent them back into the breeze.

I sensed how completely harmless they were; they did not pierce me or take root. They simply gently tapped me and floated away.

I began to see all the “slings and arrows” of life in the same way. They seemed small and harmless, merely little dandelion seeds bumping into me without an impact and then drifting away on the winds of time.

I will never forget the magnificence of that feeling, that oneness with God and that realization of my true invulnerable essence. Now whenever the inevitable “slings and arrows” of life come my way, I remember the vision of the dandelion seeds and find peace and strength and joy.

So I wish for you that all of your trials and tribulations on earth are seen by your soul’s eye as merely little dandelion seeds floating by with no ability to harm you or to take root in your life.

THE SPIRIT OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

A Handbook

**We are unconditional love.
We are peace.
We are joy.**

Our spiritual journeys are not linear or vertical or horizontal or external or internal or circular or spiral; our spiritual journeys do not move us in any direction; they simply unveil the truth of who we are—eternal threads of **unconditional love** woven together by God.

What is Unconditional Love?

Unconditional love is
emotion that is without fear,
fused with thought that is without condemnation,
founded on faith that is without doubt.

Jeanne Marie

With open arms, mind, heart, and soul, you are embraced by Unconditional Love.

THE Spirit of Unconditional Love (**THE S.O.U.L.**) is everywhere and embraces everyone.

**EVERYONE IS BORN WITH ALL SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE.
EVERYONE CAN TOUCH GOD DIRECTLY—THERE IS NO SEPARATION.**

The only thing each of us needs to do is to seek—seek ways to discover, understand, live, and “be” **unconditional love** in our everyday lives.

The pursuit of discovering, understanding, living, and coming to “be” **unconditional love** can spring from any river of spirituality.

Unconditional love is boundless, eternal, infinite, and all encompassing.

Unconditional love is free from doctrine.

THE Spirit of Unconditional Love speaks to everyone; we need only listen.

If you are, or desire to be, a seeker, please join in this journey to THE S.O.U.L.

Jeanne Marie

INTRODUCTION

The intent of this book is to stimulate personal reflection, interpersonal discussion, and group study, so the “basic message” of each of the ten sections employs a numerical-outline to enhance easy reading and easy reference for discussions. There are also “Personal Perspectives” in each section; these items are written in paragraph form. I hope the reader finds this approach interesting and helpful.

How to Evaluate the Spiritual Value of This Handbook

The key question to ask when reading any work of religious philosophy is **“Does this material help me create and solidify an indestructible bond of unconditional love with THE Spirit of Unconditional Love (THE S.O.U.L.) and with *every* person on earth?”** If the answer is yes, then it is of God.

If the material you are reading suggests anything that would create a separation from God and/or a separation from any human being on earth, then the material is not of God.

I pray that you will ask the above question throughout the reading of this handbook and decide, with God, if this handbook is to be a vital part of your life.

The Spirit of Unconditional Love: A Handbook is founded on the following postulates:

1. There is a god, a single life force known by many different names.
2. The full essence of God is THE Spirit of Unconditional Love—**THE S.O.U.L.**
3. We are all made in God's image—THE Spirit of Unconditional Love.
4. Our purpose in life is to awaken fully to our oneness with God and one another.

The basic assumption underlying the gospel of **unconditional love** is that our fears, our egos, and our attachments temporarily blind us to our *awareness* of our true essence.

Our Spiritual Purpose in Life Is Fourfold:

1. To discover or rediscover or uncover—**unconditional love**
2. To understand **unconditional love**
3. To live **unconditional love**
4. To “be” our true essence, which is **unconditional love**

The steps above will fully awaken us to our oneness with God—**THE S.O.U.L.**—and will fully unite us with one another.

This purpose can be, and will be, fulfilled by every soul!

I sincerely hope you enjoy the spiritual journey this book is intended to engender.

Section One

*What Is the Gospel of Unconditional Love?
Twelve Tenets of Faith*

Personal Perspective 1:

Is God Real? How Can We Know?

SECTION ONE

What Is The Gospel of Unconditional Love?

1.0 The following twelve tenets of faith are the culmination of my lifetime of seeking. These tenets may be a little different from the “jewels” you will find in your search, but I believe that we all ultimately will share in the same treasure. Each tenet is examined in more depth in Sections 9 and 10, but I want to begin the book by sharing, in general, where my journey has taken me, and then have you follow the steps that brought me here.

**These tenets of faith are what I have come to call
THE GOSPEL OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE.**

- 1.1.** God is THE Spirit of Unconditional Love (THE S.O.U.L.)
- 1.2.** Unconditional love is
emotion that is without fear,
fused with thought that is without condemnation,
founded on faith that is without doubt.
- 1.3** Unconditional love is understanding, patient, kind, gentle, humble, strong, hopeful, faithful, wise, compassionate, infinite, and eternal.
- 1.4** Unconditional love lifts people up, seeks only itself in all things, and creates everlasting peace and joy.

- 1.5** Unconditional love is free from condemnation, doubt, fear, needs, grievances, pain, vengefulness, attack, and attachment.
- 1.6** Each person is a child of THE S.O.U.L. and is, thus, created spiritually in THE S.O.U.L.'s image.
- 1.7** THE S.O.U.L. is the only spiritual source.
- 1.8** People of all faiths, beliefs, and philosophies can discover, understand, live, and "be" unconditional love.
- 1.9** Any person who seeks THE S.O.U.L. will find THE S.O.U.L.
- 1.10** Every person will achieve awareness of his/her oneness with THE S.O.U.L.
- 1.11** We all are always exactly where we need to be to achieve full enlightenment.
- 1.12** All things work together for our spiritual well-being as we seek THE S.O.U.L.

Personal Perspective No. 1

Is God Real?

Is God real? Oh my. What a question! It's like asking if love is real. These questions generate more questions than answers. What is "real"? How do you define God? What is love? Is what is real for one person also necessarily real for another? Is God real because we believe in Him, or do we believe in God because He is real? Is there one truth for everyone, or is truth relative?

Let me begin with love. I believe that there is only one real love; all real love is unconditional. As beautiful as all other relationships may be, I believe, if there can be a threat to the endurance of the relationship, then the bond is not "love"; it is a valuable, caring, and strong connection. **Unconditional love** is spiritual; other "loves" are emotional, psychological, and/or physical.

My definition of *unconditional love* is "emotion that is without fear, fused with thought that is without condemnation, founded on faith that is without doubt."

What is the definition of *God*? There are many names for God: Higher Power, Allah, Jehovah, etc.—with each name carrying different nuances, identities, and meanings.

My definition of *God* is THE Spirit of Unconditional Love (**THE S.O.U.L.**). God is spirit, God is love, God's love is unconditional.

Is God Real? If So, How Do I Prove It?

Reality has to be defined differently for the different "worlds" we live in. Reality in the physical world is one thing, reality in the mental world is another thing, reality in the emotional world is another thing, and reality in the spiritual world is another.

I believe that *spirit* is our true essence. I believe there is a real world of the spirit, and I believe the reality of the world of the spirit is the same for everyone for all of eternity to infinity.

Spiritual reality is an indestructible bond of unconditional love for THE S.O.U.L. and for one another.

It is vital to apply the correct means to find and examine spiritual evidence. In the physical world, people measure evidence with a variety of universally accepted instruments.

Currently, we have no reliable “instruments” to measure spiritual truths. **So what are the best ways to determine if God is real?**

I personally know God (**THE S.O.U.L.**) is real from five distinct perspectives in my life:

1. I know **THE S.O.U.L.** is real by the power of logic.
2. I know **THE S.O.U.L.** is real by the power of faith.
3. I know **THE S.O.U.L.** is real by the power of prayer.
4. I know **THE S.O.U.L.** is real by the power of meditation.
5. I know **THE S.O.U.L.** is real by power of personal experience.

The Power of Logic

The paradox of spiritual proof is that faith must come first and proof follows.

It is like needing a microscope first, in the physical world, before finding the proof that atoms exist. I could try to tell you in a thousand different ways that atoms exist, but you would not have the evidence of that truth without relying on the microscope to see it. In the spiritual world, seeing God requires the microscope of faith.

How important is faith? Imagine that a person has never seen light produced by electricity and you take this person to a home at night and tell him that if he were to flick this little piece of plastic on the wall, the whole room would light up as brightly as if the sun were shining through every window. The person can choose to call you crazy and walk away; or he can take a “leap of faith,” flick the switch, and see the “light” of the unseen force that lies within the walls.

We can choose to “flick the switch” and see the “light,” or we can choose to walk away from the proof. **I have chosen to flick the switch, and oh, what a glorious sight to see!**

The Power of the Mind

Belief alone can give God life and power. **A belief in something**, even though “that something” does not exist, *can* create a reality.

For example, if ghosts exist, they can cause goose bumps, sweat, and even heart attacks for people who fear them and actually encounter them.

However, if ghosts do not exist but a person **believes** that they do and that ghosts are something to fear and then **perceives** having encountered a ghost, he could experience goose bumps, sweat, and even a heart attack.

Our beliefs can and do impact and/or create physical reality (events that can be measured with reliable instruments), whether those beliefs are well founded or not. (See section 4.4 $P + B = E = A$.)

If God does not exist, but one’s belief in God creates events that could and would occur if God were real (events which could not or would not occur if the belief in God were absent), then the belief in God becomes the same as God; therefore, God exists for that person.

For example, because I believe there is a god and that god wants us to forgive ourselves and others, I choose to relinquish grievances and condemnation; I choose to embrace **unconditional love** instead. It is very likely that I would not make that choice without first believing in a god that asks that such a challenging choice be made by me.

I experience great joy and peace and love because my belief in **THE S.O.U.L.** has fostered the knowledge that I am joy, I am peace, I am love; and so I experience that which I think I am. **I think, therefore I am (Descartes).** **Therefore, I am what I think (the accumulation of all of my thoughts); and/or, therefore, I am what I think I am (Jeanne Marie).**

Syllogism

Perceptions + Beliefs create reality.
THE S.O.U.L. is a perception and a belief.
Therefore, THE S.O.U.L. is a reality.

The same concept can be applied to the idea of Satan as well, though I believe “Satan” is merely the personification of our ego.

The Importance of Scientific Inquiry

Some say that since you cannot see, smell, taste, feel, or hear God within the confines of all the rules of scientific inquiry, God does not exist.

I would begin my response to that line of thinking by asking, “Do you have a mind (not a brain, a mind)?” If they say yes, then I would simply say, “Prove it.”

The Power of Faith

Faith begins as belief without evidence and becomes a knowing without doubt.

Faith is a choice. Once we choose to don the glasses of faith, we see clearly all the evidence needed to justify our choice and to know that **THE S.O.U.L.** is real.

I have faith that THE Spirit of Unconditional Love is real, and my faith provides evidence of that spirit every day. When I seek: I find peace instead of chaos; I find forgiveness instead of hate; I find joy instead of sorrow; I find truth instead of fate; I find power instead of frailty, I find humility instead of pride, I find love instead of fear whenever I look inside; I find soul instead of ego; and in everyone I meet, I find perfection instead of sin, and victory not defeat. I need no greater evidence than this to prove that God is.

The Power of Prayer

The best way to get to know someone is to talk with him often about his beliefs.

The best way to come to trust someone is to share things about yourself that you would probably not tell anyone else and then see how she handles the information.

The best way to come to love someone is to trust him or her.

Prayer is **sharing** with **THE S.O.U.L.**; and prayer is an essential part of the path to discovering, understanding, living, and “being” **unconditional love**.

I honestly pray often, in that I involve **THE S.O.U.L.** in my thoughts and actions to the best of my ability, every day; and this communication, just like communicating with a friend, has convinced me that **THE S.O.U.L.** is real and is a living force of love in my life.

The Power of Meditation

The best way to get to know someone is to *listen* to what he has to say.

The best way to come to trust someone is to test what he/she says and discover that it is true.

The best way to come to love someone is to trust that you are totally safe in their arms regardless of what you do or say or think.

Meditation is *dedicated, focused listening* to the wisdom of **THE S.O.U.L.**

I meditate daily, listening intently to **THE S.O.U.L.** The messages I have been given have convinced me that **THE S.O.U.L.** is real and is a living force of love in my life.

I also strongly believe, through prayer and meditation, **THE S.O.U.L.** can become a real and loving force in everyone's life.

The Power of Personal Experiences

Following are two of the most important spiritual experiences in my life: the experience when I was four playing in my back yard, and the experience in my late twenties in my apartment. Also see Anecdote 6, "Personal Struggle" in Section Seven for the spiritual insights I gained when I was fourteen.

My Personal Experiences

The Cross

When I was around four years old, I would often sit outside in the sand in our back yard and draw, and my favorite thing to draw was a cross with long stemmed flowers growing up around it. I just loved drawing three (always three for some reason) long stems climbing up the cross with a flower at the top of each one.

The cross was not a menacing symbol; it was not a sad symbol, nor was it a symbol of death to me as a child. The Methodist church in which I was raised did not focus on Jesus dying on the cross; it focused on his having risen. The cross never had His body hanging on it; it was something in His life that He

had overcome. So, the empty cross was not frightening to me; in my childlike innocence, it was a happy thing.

One morning, I was doing just that, drawing crosses with three long stemmed flowers crawling up it, when, from behind, a warm light shone down on me, and I “felt” someone smiling at me. I turned thinking Mom had come outside, but no one was there, just a light that seemed to be smiling at me.

Then I thought, “This must be Jesus, and He has come to play with me.” I was really happy to have His company. I could tell that He was very pleased with what I was drawing in the sand, so I turned back to finish my masterpiece. He stayed for a little while, and then I “felt” him gently slip away. I figured He was going to play with another child He loved.

When I went inside, Mom was doing breakfast dishes at the sink, and as I passed by to go to my room, I said, “Jesus is a very nice man, isn’t he Mom?” and she didn’t even hesitate, she simply said, “Yes He is, Jeanne.”

I kept Jesus as my best friend since that day when I was four.

The Light

By the time I was in my late twenties, I had graduated from college, been challenged by some difficult events, was living on my own, and was working diligently on healing emotionally by doing what I loved professionally (teaching high school), what I loved for fun (community theatre), and what I loved deeply (seeking spiritual wisdom and truth). I was moving rather slowly, but I was moving along the road to well-being.

I was living in a high rise, which perched itself snugly on top of a hill, and I was in an apartment on the fifteenth floor with a beautiful vista overlooking a small town below.

I went out on the balcony one enticing summer night and leaned against the railing to soak in the view. I had been reading Kahlil Gibran’s *The Prophet* once again (I never tire of its wisdom, truth, and love) and was feeling content; the lights in the little homes below were twinkling like reflections of the glistening stars above, and the warm, quiet, comforting night air was gently stirring.

There was peace in the evening breeze, and love. As I looked down over the little cluster of houses, I was overcome with a desire, an intense, powerful longing, an aching to just reach down and touch every single person in every single home and assure them all that they are loved with a love greater than they probably had ever known. But as much as I longed to do that, I knew I couldn't.

It was a desire Jesus would have had were He standing here. Strangely, as I thought about what He might see and feel, I became acutely aware of His pain; His greatest pain. I stood there stunned to suddenly realize that the greatest pain in Jesus' life was not what He had suffered on the cross. His greatest pain was, instead, the pain of knowing that, in His limited time on earth, He would not be able to reach down, or out, or into every person's heart with the love He and God felt for them. He ached with an ache beyond human experience.

I began to feel that pain, that agony, that desperate sense of despair. How great His pain must have been if someone like I, who cannot love as He loved (and loves yet today), could feel this tremendous heartache. I began to cry for Him and for His pain. I knew what He had really wanted, and I knew He knew that He could not have it. I wept; no I sobbed alone on the balcony.

When I finally achieved some semblance of self-control, I decided to go back inside. I was empty and sad; I didn't know how to comfort the one who always comforted me though I knew His days of sorrow had ended. I came in, turned around, closed the door to the balcony, and turned back to enter my living room.

I took only five or six steps when I looked up and stopped. I stared; I blinked. I found myself gazing at a brilliant, warm, beautiful, golden light, glowing in the corner of the room directly across from where I was standing. I had no fear; in fact, I was drawn toward it naturally, instinctively, and the light grew rapidly in size and in strength blanketing the room as I approached.

Then we merged, and I found myself engulfed in the most magnificent, powerful, unconditional love that I had ever known. I was overwhelmed; all I could do was fall to my knees and cry, but this time I cried with joy; I was sobbing again, but free from pain and sorrow; I was filled only with light and love. I felt the glow pull me in and cradle me in its bosom; I *felt* a gentle voice comforting me, and I knew, I *knew* that I was loved unconditionally,

completely, totally, eternally, and infinitely. The physical world disappeared; there was only God holding me in His arms.

When I finally emerged into a conscious awareness of the physical world again, drained and yet invigorated, I knew two things without doubt:

We cannot abide for long the full power of God's love in these fragile vessels. It is more than one's body can bear; it is greater than one's mind can fathom; it is deeper than one's heart can feel; it is the expansive essence of THE S.O.U.L.

And, I also knew that a love far greater than ourselves is always there to cradle us and give us peace.

This was, and has remained, the most sacred moment in my life.

I know by the power of logic, the power of faith, the power of prayer, the power of meditation, and the power of personal experience that THE S.O.U.L. is real.

Section Two

Preparing the Mind for the Spiritual Journey

What Is a Seeker's Mind-Set?

Parable 1: "A Cup of Tea"

Anecdote 1: "The Microscope"

Anecdote 2: "Divining Spiritual Truths"

What Are the Seven Steps to Spiritual Enlightenment?

Personal Perspective 2:

Question and Answer about the Movie *The Mission*

SECTION TWO

Preparing Your Mind for the Spiritual Journey

2.0 We always think we are right or we would not think what we are thinking.

I want to repeat that.

**We all, always, think we are right,
or we would not continue to think what we are thinking.**

- 2.1** Successful searching begins with the realization that just because we think we are right, does not mean we are, and that includes me!
- 2.2** Seekers of truth begin their search by relinquishing attachment to their current beliefs—even if, at the beginning of their search, they believe that they “know” the “truth” and that they “know” what is “right.”
- 2.3** This book provides materials from many sources of spiritual insight and wisdom and does not promote any one particular philosophy.
- 2.4** I am a Christian who embraces **all** pathways to **unconditional love**.

2.5 Parable 1: “A Cup of Tea” (Reps)

Nan-in, a Japanese master during the Meiji era (1868-1912), received a university professor who came to inquire about Zen.

Nan-in served tea. He poured his visitor’s cup full, and then kept on pouring.

The professor watched the overflow until he no longer could restrain himself. “It is overfull. No more will go in!”

“Like this cup,” Nan-in said, “you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?”

Please take a moment to reread this parable and think about it before continuing. Note, Nan-in did not ask the guest to throw the cup away but just to empty it. We are not to become mindless—we are to become open minded.

How to Approach Sacred Texts

Anecdote 1: “The Microscope”

2.6 The Microscope

2.6.1 When I took my first science class in high school, I learned how to use a microscope. It did not take me long to learn how it worked, and I quickly discovered that it is a very powerful tool. When I used it properly, it opened my eyes to many truths about the world that I otherwise would not have been able to see or experience.

2.6.2 One of the most important elements of the microscope itself was the knob that moved the tube that held the lens. Turning the knob adjusted the focus of the lens to suit my eyesight. Of course, the adjustment did not change anything on the slide that I was examining; in fact, it did just the opposite. The adjustment ensured that I would see the contents of the slide very clearly.

- 2.6.3** I was particularly grateful for that mechanism since the person with whom I shared the microscope had very poor vision. When it came my turn to examine a slide after she did, if I had had to keep the adjustment where she put it, I would have seen nothing but fuzzy images; and the same was true for her when using the microscope after I did.
- 2.6.4** The microscope is a valuable tool, and when used properly, it can reveal many truths about the physical world that would otherwise remain a mystery. I view the **Bible**, the **Koran**, the **Talmud**, the **Bhagavad Gita**, the **Upanishads**, and other sacred writings as microscopes designed to help us peer into the heart of God.
- 2.6.5** Just as in science class we learned how to use the microscope in a very short time and spent the majority of each class looking at slides, I believe that it is important to spend more time looking at the slides of life rather than debating over the nuts and bolts of the “microscopes.”
- 2.6.6** I believe that, just as our physical vision differs from person to person, our spiritual vision varies as well. It is important for us to be able to see the slides of **unconditional love** and God and our relationships and our behaviors and other elements of life clearly, without the fuzzy vision that results from rigidity—we must adjust the microscopes to see the truth on the slides.
- 2.7** This handbook is designed to encourage people to examine their beliefs and to assist people in connecting with THE Spirit of Unconditional Love (**THE S.O.U.L.**) in their own unique ways; it is a “dialogue” about how we can live fully the **unconditional love** that we are.
- 2.8** After “emptying your cup,” (see section 2.5) there are seven steps to follow to become a successful seeker of spiritual enlightenment. All spiritual knowledge lies within us, but external events often awaken our internal awareness, too. We are all born with all spiritual knowledge, and, if we seek it, we will find it. What is the best way for you to seek?
- 2.8.1** Step one: Decide specifically what it is that you are seeking. What are your goals?

My Personal Goals

- 2.8.1.1 Seek to discover **THE S.O.U.L.**
- 2.8.1.2 Seek to discover THE Spirit of Unconditional Love within me.
- 2.8.1.3 Seek to discover THE Spirit of Unconditional Love in others.
- 2.8.1.4 Seek to understand **THE S.O.U.L.**
- 2.8.1.5 Seek to understand THE Spirit of Unconditional Love within me.
- 2.8.1.6 Seek to understand THE Spirit of Unconditional Love in others.
- 2.8.1.7 Seek to live **THE S.O.U.L.** every day.
- 2.8.2. Step two: Decide to be committed to the search. Searching is a “participatory sport.” We are all born with all the skills we need to be star seekers of **THE S.O.U.L.!**
- 2.8.3 The third step to successful seeking is to develop good thinking skills, and the first step to good thinking is asking quality questions in a scholarly way.
 - 2.8.3.1 A person can ask questions as a *cynic*, a *skeptic*, or a *scholar*.
 - 2.8.3.2 A *cynic*, according to *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary: Eleventh Edition*, is “a faultfinding captious critic, *especially*, one who believes that human conduct is motivated wholly by self-interest.”
 - 2.8.3.2.1 *Captious*, according to the same source is “marked by an ill-natured inclination to stress faults and raise objections; calculated to confuse, entrap, or entangle in argument.”
 - 2.8.3.2.2 **Cynics question in order to create conflict rather than resolve it.**

2.8.3.3 A *skeptic*, according to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary: Eleventh Edition*, is “an adherent or advocate of skepticism.”

2.8.3.3.1 *Skepticism*, according to the same source is “an attitude of doubt or a disposition to incredulity either in general or toward a particular object.”

2.8.3.3.2 **Skeptics question from a foundation of doubt rather than a foundation of open-minded curiosity.**

2.8.3.4 A *scholar*, according to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary: Eleventh Edition*, is “a person who studies.”

2.8.3.4.1 Scholars question in order to understand.

2.8.3.4.2 Scholars question with an open mind.

2.8.3.4.3 Scholars question from pure curiosity, a desire to know.

2.8.3.4.4 Scholars have only one agenda: find the truth—with no fear of who or what takes them there, with no fear of the obstacles that stand in their way, with no fear of the personal consequences they may face, and with no fear of where they ultimately find the object of their quest.

2.8.3.4.5 Scholars know it is truth that will set them free.

2.8.3.5 A good question is any question asked with sincerity.

2.8.3.6 An excellent question is one that reaches beyond the “facts.” Some examples of excellent questions are “Is there a god?” “How do I know?” “Why is a certain belief considered truth?” “How can I recognize truth and/or wisdom when I see it?” “How can this truth make me a better/wiser person?” “How can I be certain this information is of God?”

- 2.8.3.7** Question your current beliefs. Why do I have them? Where did they come from? What assumptions am I making about those beliefs? What is the foundation for those assumptions? How am I defining terms like *religion, spirituality, God, faith, Christian, Buddhist, Islam, Jew, Hindu, Taoist*, etc.? How did I come to those definitions? Would someone else define them differently? Why? Why not?
- 2.8.3.8** What are my **perceptions** of God, faith, spirit, and reincarnation as well as other concepts in the world of religion? What are my **beliefs** about God, faith, spirit, and reincarnation as well as other terms and concepts in the world of religion?
- 2.8.3.9** What are my **expectations**? What are my **assumptions**? What do I expect and assume of God, of my faith, of myself, and of others?
- 2.8.3.10** What are my **fears**? Do I fear change? Do I fear being wrong? Do I fear damnation? Do I fear other faiths? Do I fear rejection? Do I fear being judged? Do I fear loving? Do I fear being loved?
- 2.8.3.11** Just because someone you love and trust believes something, does that make it true? Just because someone believes that the **Holy Bible** has no errors, does that make it true? Just because someone believes the **Holy Bible** has errors, does that make it true? How can you find out the truth? Are there things in the **Koran**, the **Bhagavad Gita**, the **Torah**, and the **New Testament** that seem to be contradictory? How do you know what to believe? How do you know what sources of spiritual insight are of value or true or valid?
- 2.8.3.12** How do you know whom to believe? Does passion equate with truth? Does someone's passion make him right? Has God stopped talking to all of us? Would God use only one source to communicate with all of us and hope that everyone would find it? Why? Why not? How do you know who speaks the truth? How do you know what the truth is?

- 2.8.4** Step four: Establish the criteria you will use to determine the quality and the truth of the answers you discover to the spiritual questions you ask.

Anecdote 2: “Divining Spiritual Truths”

- 2.8.4.1** When I was fifteen, I asked in prayer for help in finding the best way to determine spiritual truth from falsehood. The answer God gave me is the basis of all my decisions about spiritual truth today.
- 2.8.4.2** The answer was this: all information I hear or read that brings me closer to the indestructible, **unconditional love** of God and of my fellow man is spiritual truth; all information I hear or read that suggests anything that creates a separation from my **unconditional love** of God and of my fellow man is not spiritual truth.
- 2.8.4.3** I have never doubted the credibility or validity of the advice I was given, and consequently, I am not afraid to read or listen to anyone or anything; I have total faith that this approach is of **THE S.O.U.L.** and is to lead me to **THE S.O.U.L.** without fail.
- 2.8.4.4** What criteria will *you* use?
- 2.8.5** Step five: Decide **where** and **how** to seek.

Externally

- 2.8.5.1** Some people enjoy listening.
- 2.8.5.2** Some people enjoy reading.
- 2.8.5.3** Some people enjoy discussing.
- 2.8.5.4** Some people enjoy watching.
- 2.8.5.5** Some people enjoy doing.

Internally

- 2.8.5.6 Some people enjoy analyzing.
- 2.8.5.7 Some people enjoy contemplating.
- 2.8.5.8 Some people enjoy praying.
- 2.8.5.9 Some people enjoy meditating.
- 2.8.6 Step six: We all find success more readily, and more easily, by combining two or more of these activities **while focusing on a specific goal in mind!**
- 2.8.7 Step seven: Take specific, deliberate, and enjoyable action! For example,
 - 2.8.7.1 Listen to music that is inspirational like (for me) *Yanni Live at the Acropolis* or CDs of hymns or operas, musicals, classical music, or concerts of someone who spiritually inspires you.
 - 2.8.7.2 Read stimulating spiritually oriented books. I strongly recommend reading *If Grace Is True: Why God Will Save Every Person* by Philip Gulley and James Mulholland; *The World's Religions* by Huston Smith; *The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions* (a wonderful companion to Huston Smith's book) by Philip Novak; *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda; *The Other Bible* by Willis Barnstone; *A Course in Miracles*, published by the Foundation for Inner Peace; and *Tao Te Ching* by Lao-tzu, translated by Stephen Mitchell *in addition to the sacred works of your own personal faith*. These books alone can open huge new worlds of thought and inspiration.
 - 2.8.7.3 Discuss with someone who is interested in being a spiritual seeker some material you both have read—perhaps this handbook. Find people you respect who have very different points of view and discuss or listen to their stories as to how they came to believe what

they believe. **Seek to understand, not to undermine.** Become truly interested in their spiritual journey, and you will enhance your own.

- 2.8.7.4** Watch an inspirational movie, like *Gandhi*, with lessons of spiritual courage. Go to a lecture on the spiritual topic that interests you most or the one about which you know the least. Seek out speakers with different beliefs than your own and **seek to understand how they came to their conclusions.**
- 2.8.7.5** Do something you consider spiritual that you usually do not do; maybe have a conversation with **THE S.O.U.L.** about your day, review how it went and how you would like it to be more in line with THE Spirit of Unconditional Love, or share how well you did today spiritually, and pat yourself on your “spiritual back.”
- 2.8.7.6** Analyze something you have believed all of your life. Ask yourself questions like the following: Why do I believe this? How does this belief impact my life? How does it impact my relationships? Could it be an incorrect belief? What if it is incorrect? What if it is correct? What if I had been born to a different family? Is this belief one I could still embrace? Why? Why not? Does this belief create distance between God and me or someone else? Is that what God would want? Is that what I want?
- 2.8.7.7** Contemplate a flower, the moon, or a symbol such as a cross or the Star of David. Ask questions, such as “What does this mean to me?” “What connection does it have to **THE S.O.U.L.**?” “What difference does it make in my life? Someone said, “We are not humans with a soul, we are souls having a human experience.” Does it make a difference? Which is true? Why? Why not?”
- 2.8.7.8** **Praying is a form of talking** in which you share your thoughts and feelings with **THE S.O.U.L.** I pray constantly in that I have a running conversation with **THE S.O.U.L.** from expressing gratitude for all of the blessings in my life to requesting guidance to help me

stay loving throughout. I joyfully invite **THE S.O.U.L.** into every part of my day.

2.8.7.9 Meditating is a form of listening for and to the thoughts and feelings of **THE S.O.U.L.** Yoga is a wonderful form of meditation, taking a quiet stroll around the creek, or sitting under a tree or on a bench can provide a wonderful opportunity to listen to the voice deep in your soul. I love to listen to **THE S.O.U.L.; it brings me peace and joy.**

2.9 Consciously choosing your spiritual goal, and the specific ways to reach that goal, will make your seeking exciting, interesting, rewarding, and successful.

2.10 Remember, all spiritual truth lies within each of us; our soul is where we need to “rest” when we want to awaken to those truths.

Personal Perspective No. 2

A Summary of the Movie *The Mission*

Following is an example of how a movie, such as *The Mission*, can serve as the catalyst for a good discussion of spiritual concepts and beliefs. No one has to be right or wrong; it is the seeking, questioning, and examining process that is of most value.

In order to understand the question posed and the answer given below regarding the movie *The Mission*, it is important to read the following summary.

The film is based on actual events, which occurred in the mid-1700s in the jungles of South America. The plot revolves around a remote Jesuit mission, independent of the Spanish State, built to teach Christianity to Guarani natives.

There are two main characters. Father Gabriel is the loving nonviolent Jesuit priest who builds the mission from the ground up with the help of the converted natives. Mendoza is a Portuguese militant mercenary who, in the beginning of the film, captures the Guarani natives and sells them into slavery. It becomes evident in an early scene of the movie that the two characters know each other well, even though their missions are so blatantly in conflict.

Mendoza, after discovering that the woman he loves is in love with his own brother instead, kills his brother in a sword fight. Afterward, he experiences extreme regret and seeks retreat in a Catholic monastery. The priest in charge of the monastery solicits Father Gabriel to help Mendoza heal from his emotional wounds.

Mendoza ultimately decides to ease his guilt by helping Father Gabriel at his mission. The spiritually burdened Mendoza takes it upon himself, as penance, to carry all of his heavy military armor and his sword with him in a net up the treacherous trail to the mission. The bundle of armor becomes symbolic of his guilt. After many difficult trials and tribulations, he finally succeeds in getting his heavy load to the top of the slippery slope, only to have a native cut the cord which attached the bundle to Mendoza's back; he watches his "treasure of guilt" fall to the bottom of the mountain. Father Gabriel wonders if Mendoza's stubborn need for self-punishment will force him down the hill once more. The answer comes—instead of pursuing the bundle again, Mendoza laughs and cries with joy over the sudden and final freedom from his burden.

Mendoza ultimately decides that he would like to become a priest. After instruction, Mendoza is also given a strong reminder that he is to be obedient and follow Father Gabriel's requests without wavering. This dictate is a difficult one, but he agrees, and he is ordained.

Political events then interfere with the continuation of the mission. Through the Treaty of Madrid, the land falls into the hands of the Portuguese. The Portuguese government insists that the natives go back to the jungle and that the mission be destroyed.

The Vatican sends an emissary to review the situation. Father Gabriel believes, after the emissary personally views the mission, he will most certainly help preserve it. The emissary is remarkably impressed with the beauty of the structure they have built but is moved most by the natives themselves. They are "civilized," happy, productive and sincere Christians. They have been taught how to make flutes and violins out of the wood in the forest; they have learned how to play and sing hymns, chants and other beautiful religious music. The scene is truly miraculous.

However, for political reasons, the emissary decides that the natives must return to the jungle and that the mission must be abandoned. The priests are ordered to leave immediately.

Both Father Gabriel and Mendoza decide to stay instead. With that decision, a combined Spanish and Portuguese fighting force is assigned to destroy the mission and to kill anyone who has chosen to remain.

Now the foundation of the theme of the movie becomes evident. Father Gabriel refuses to resist the army; Mendoza decides to take up his sword (which was retrieved by a young native boy) and fight the injustice in the best way he knows how.

Father Gabriel attempts to dissuade Mendoza, stating that violence contradicts everything that he and the mission stand for, but Father Gabriel is unsuccessful in his attempts. While Mendoza successfully recruits the native men at the mission to fight, Father Gabriel is gathering all of the women and children together to face the army head-on without violence.

When the army arrives, they meet a totally unexpected scene. Father Gabriel is leading women and children right into the army's line of fire; they are carrying no weapons; they are merely walking together toward the troops.

Some of the soldiers look at their commander with questioning eyes that ask, “Are we really to shoot these women and children?” They are given the command to do so, and so they do.

In the meantime, Mendoza and the men and boys of the mission are being killed in hand-to-hand combat. The final scene is of Mendoza lying on the ground, fatally wounded, and he watches Father Gabriel receive a fatal wound while leading the women and children into the line of fire. It is, indeed, a brutal and tragic ending for all. It is hard to believe this really happened.

The Mission: Question and Answer

I was asked by a Christian friend to see the movie *The Mission* and respond to the following question and comments. Thinking about these kinds of questions is vital to being a good seeker.

Question Asked to Me in an E-mail by a Christian Friend

“If you and I were to agree that Mendoza had truly converted to a real, deep, sincere relationship with Christ and that it was really in his heart to serve his God and no longer himself when he chose to use what could appear to be the gifts the Lord had developed in him for many years (fighting skills) to defend the young defenseless native Christian children from being killed (not himself), was Christ pleased or displeased with his actions as they were so dramatically juxtaposed with the young priest carrying the cross and doing nothing to defend his young flock? I find *no* fault (not that I am supposed to) in the young priest choosing to give up his own life for his faith rather than taking another’s. I also find *no* fault (not that I am judge) in Mendoza choosing to defend the helpless. I am not a fatalist that believes children should just be allowed to be slaughtered because no one could or should do anything about it.”

My Response

I sincerely hope that none of my statements below comes across as contentious; I am not trying to convince anyone of my position; I am merely explaining my point of view. I have provided the things that Jesus said that are applicable to this situation since both the questioner and I are Christians.

Unfortunately, I cannot accept the assumption that Mendoza had truly converted to a real, deep, sincere relationship with Christ. *I believe he sincerely*

wanted to; but he came to Jesus out of guilt, not love, and seemed to seek only redemption rather than a relationship. He never really came to understand the depth of what Jesus gave us and expects of us.

Jesus did not give us a philosophy of convenience; He gave us a philosophy of conviction. It is not a philosophy to be abandoned when it becomes too difficult to understand, trust, or die for.

Mendoza could not put away his childish things (his sword) for the adult decision to live in faith.

He could not justify why he should accept, without question, the injustices that were occurring. He doubted God; he doubted Jesus; I believe he felt abandoned by them, and he could not live by what he did not believe. He stayed true to himself.

Both characters stayed true to themselves; Father Gabriel stayed true to himself by disobeying the Vatican's emissary, but only one stayed true to Jesus in the process—Father Gabriel.

I can only answer your question with Jesus's words; I will not try to speak for Him.

Mathew 5:43-45, "Ye hath heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbors, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; *That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.*"

Jesus says specifically in Mathew 5:38-39 "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye *resist not evil.*" We energize that which we resist. We are not to energize evil by resisting it. We only magnify its devastation.

Look at the consequences of Mendoza's decision. Many of the soldiers also got killed. They were probably merely following orders or they may have thought they were fighting a "righteous war" (which is an oxymoron to me).

The moments when the soldiers arrived at the mission and heard the natives singing were poignant; several of the soldiers questioned whether they should be doing what they were about to do, but they were given a command, and

so they obeyed. Their mothers surely mourned their sons' deaths with much pain and sorrow, too.

With the philosophy of Father Gabriel, only the natives would have died—though that is far too much as it is and it is certainly unjust, it is still far less devastation than that which occurred. It would have been ideal if it had not happened at all.

And what if Mendoza survived? Could he really then be a missionary spreading Jesus's word when he could not live it when it was challenged? No. Father Gabriel was right when he said that everything that the mission stood for would be lost if resistance became the choice.

Jesus said we cannot serve two masters for if we do, we will come to love the one and hate the other. We cannot serve justice if serving God requires us to take the path of love instead of the path of resistance. There are many times when justice and Christianity seem to be at odds. Jesus himself chose not to resist evil; He chose not to fight or flee.

I do not try to determine the ultimate result of an incident. I can only live being true to the requests that Jesus asked of us, and they are often very challenging—I know from personal experience.

In my belief system, will either character be condemned by God or by Jesus? No. Will one have followed the dictates of Jesus and of the other not? Yes. Will Jesus be pleased with both? Yes, because His love is unconditional. Will Jesus continue to work to help Mendoza, even after death, come closer to the philosophy that Jesus knows is the path to peace? Yes, because Mendoza never found peace, and peace is the ultimate spiritual victory.

I would also not assume that Mendoza's choice to develop skills of war is a gift from God. They are merely skills Mendoza thought would be of benefit to him. If he really understood that no one needs weapons since attempting to defend our body is ultimately a futile and irrelevant endeavor, he would never have mastered them. We are not to be concerned with our bodies. We are not even to be concerned with feeding them or clothing them based on Jesus's analogies with the flowers of the fields.

I do not worry about the children who died. Death has no sting. Their souls rest joyfully in the arms of God; they are at peace. Hopefully, their deaths will lead those of us who are living to a way of life that is without war.

I do not fight against injustice; I stand for what is just—I would do exactly what Father Gabriel did, who understood the difficult request Jesus made of all of us so that we would come to realize that it is God whom we should serve, not our own need for safety or justice.

Either we have faith, or we do not. There are no levels or degrees of faith, which is why Jesus chose one of the smallest seeds on earth to describe how much faith it takes to move mountains. If we have faith that *all* things work together for the good, we can stand in peace against any “enemy” and never waiver by choosing to resist; we can stand in peace knowing that the end is in God’s hands, not ours.

PS

The *Bhagavad-Gita* examines a similar spiritual dilemma to the one reflected in the question asked by my friend. I would sincerely recommend exploring this masterpiece to anyone who seeks wisdom and understanding regarding the relationship between war and God. The *Bhagavad-Gita* was Mahatma Gandhi’s guiding light. One sentence near the end sets us all free from conflict. Stephen Mitchell’s translation is outstanding and is the one I would recommend.

Section Three

More Than One World

How Many Worlds Do We Live In?

What Are These Worlds?

Why Is It Important to Delineate These Worlds?

What Effect Does the Law of Cause and Effect Have in Our Lives?

How Can We Minimize the Negative Effects of the Law of Cause and Effect in Our Lives?

Parable 2: “Is That So?”

Personal Perspective 3:

Comments on the Parable “Is that So?”

SECTION THREE

More Than One World

3.0 More Than One World

3.0.1 All of us are constantly, and simultaneously, “living” in many different worlds, each with its own purpose and each with its own set of laws. For this discussion, I will pick just four major worlds: the physical (which includes social, familial, political, global, etc.), the mental, the emotional, and the spiritual.

3.0.2 The Physical World

3.0.2.1 Our primary purpose in the physical world is to survive (secondarily, it is to survive “well” by staying healthy).

3.0.2.2 The physical world has its own laws, such as the laws of gravity, motion, electricity, sound, light, physiology, cause or effect, etc.

3.0.2.3 The more we understand and live within all of these laws, the greater the chance we have to fulfill both our primary and secondary purposes of living and living well.

3.0.2.4 I believe the physical world is an illusion created and molded by our egos, our desires, and our attachments.

3.0.3 The Mental World

- 3.0.3.1 Our primary purpose in the mental world is to learn how to establish and maintain order in our lives (each of us defines *order* for ourselves) by increasing our understanding, solving problems, avoiding difficulties, etc.
- 3.0.3.2 The mental world has its own laws of logic and reason, which are best identified in syllogisms and fallacies. The more we follow these laws, the greater the chance that we will fulfill our purpose of understanding.
- 3.0.3.3 Our mind is a part of our “inheritance” as a child of **THE S.O.U.L.**
- 3.0.3.4 We have the freedom to use our minds to design the illusion of separation from **THE S.O.U.L.**

3.0.4 The Emotional World

- 3.0.4.1 Our primary purpose in the emotional world is to be happy. The emotional world runs the gamut of emotions from apathy to zestfulness and from fear to love.
- 3.0.4.2 The emotional world appears to be the least consistent, measurable, or predictable of all the worlds; however, when you “experience” the activity, “ $P + B = E = A$ ” (see section 4.8), you will discover that the emotional world is a lot more malleable than one might initially think.
- 3.0.4.3 In truth, **unconditional love** is the only emotion that is real; it is the truth of our essence since we are the children of **THE S.O.U.L.**
- 3.0.4.4 All emotions, other than **unconditional love**, are merely the result of the masking of our essence.

3.0.5 The Spiritual World

- 3.0.5.1 I believe the Spiritual World permeates all of our other worlds. The spiritual world in our lives has its own laws and rules; and these laws and rules are more reliable, consistent, measurable, and predictable than the laws of physics.
- 3.0.5.2 I believe our soul is of God; created by God; and “genetically,” the same as God. Each person is a child of God.
- 3.0.5.3 Our souls are pure, they are indestructible, they are eternal, they are infinite, they are **unconditional love** in its purest form. It is who all of us really are!
- 3.0.5.4 Our spiritual journeys are a unique combination of individual endeavors and intertwined steps with others toward discovering, understanding, living, and “being” **unconditional love**.
- 3.0.5.5 Our journey is individual in that we make individual choices every day that either bring us closer to our spiritual destiny or take us further away.
- 3.0.5.6 Our journey is intertwined with others since it is others, as well as ourselves, that we are to love unconditionally.

3.1 The Law of Cause and Effect: What Happens When We Break the Laws?

3.1.1 Physical World

- 3.1.1.1 If you stick your finger in an electric socket, you will get shocked.
- 3.1.1.2 *The socket does not shock you in order to punish you.*
- 3.1.1.3 The shock is a **natural consequence** of the law of electricity.

3.1.2 Mental World

3.1.2.1 If you do not follow the proper syllogistic “formulas,” you will not create a logical conclusion.

3.1.2.2 *The flawed syllogism does not provide a flawed conclusion in order to punish you.*

3.1.2.3 The flawed conclusion is a **natural consequence** of the rules of logic.

3.1.3 Emotional World

3.1.3.1 Lack of faith creates fear.

3.1.3.2 *Lack of faith does not create fear in order to punish you.*

3.1.3.3 Fear is the **natural consequence** of the lack of faith.

3.1.3.3.1 Faith in this context has a larger definition than that of religious connotations only.

3.1.3.3.2 God is not the only person or thing in which someone can have faith.

3.1.4 Spiritual World

3.1.4.1 You reap what you sow.

3.1.4.2 *What you reap is not a punishment for what you have sown.*

3.1.4.3 What you reap is a **natural consequence** of what you have sown.

3.2 How Can We Avoid the Sting of the Consequences of These Laws?

3.2.1 Physical World

3.2.1.1 **Be grounded** in appropriate attire, and you will be safe from the negative effects of the shock.

3.2.1.2 Being grounded in the physical world does not mean the shock will not occur; it means you will not be harmed by the shock.

3.2.2 Mental World

3.2.2.1 Be grounded in facts and the rules of logic, and you will create valid conclusions.

3.2.2.2 Being grounded in the mental world does not mean that all the conclusions will be pleasant or true; it means they will be logical.

3.2.3 Emotional World

3.2.3.1 Be grounded in **unconditional love**, and you will experience joy.

3.2.3.2 Being grounded in **unconditional love** does not mean that sad things will not happen; it means that you will be able to overcome the sadness with joy.

3.2.4 Spiritual World

3.2.4.1 Be grounded in faith (an unwavering trust, a “knowing” without the possibility of doubt) in a god who is **unconditional love**, in faith that everyone is of the essence of that god, and in faith that all things work together for our spiritual well-being, and you will know the peace of God that “passeth all understanding.”

3.2.4.2 Being grounded in faith does not mean that all things will be just; it means that you will see beyond injustice to the peace of God.

3.2.4.3 In other words, in the spiritual world, we will still experience the positive and negative consequences of our actions. But with faith, we will not experience the sting of the negative events; the events will flow through us with an awareness of their purpose, not their pain.

3.2.4.4 Karma does not punish; it purifies.

3.2.4.5 Parable 2: “Is That So?” (Reps)

(I have used “Ah so” within the parable instead of “Is that so?” The expression “Ah so” captures more effectively the intended tone. “Is that so?” in today’s jargon often carries a sarcastic tone; “Ah so” carries a tone of reflection, understanding, and acceptance.)

The Zen Master Hakuin was praised by his neighbors as one living a pure life.

A beautiful Japanese girl whose parents owned a food store, lived near him. Suddenly without any warning, her parents discovered she was with child.

This made her parents angry. She would not confess who the man was, but after much harassment at last named Hakuin.

In great anger the parents went to the master. “Ah so” was all he would say.

After the child was born it was brought to Hakuin. By this time he had lost his reputation, which did not trouble him, but he took very good care of the child. He obtained milk from his neighbors and everything else the little one needed.

A year later the girl-mother could stand it no longer. She told her parents the truth—that the real father of the child was a young man who worked in the fishmarket.

The mother and the father of the girl at once went to Hakuin to ask his forgiveness, to apologize at length, and to get the child back again.

Hakuin was willing. In yielding the child, all he said was: “Ah so.”

- 3.2** Please take time to read this parable again and understand the power of the parable. What would you do in Hakuin's shoes? Was Hakuin a spiritually wise monk or a coward? Was what happened to Hakuin fair? Was Hakuin fazed by the injustices? What does "Ah so" really mean? Is it apathy or peace? Is it acquiescence or acceptance? Is it weak or strong?
- 3.3** If we choose to make it so, the spiritual world will permeate all our other worlds, and it can become the only world in which we aspire to live permanently. It is the world in which we can live free from pain and suffering even as we continue to function well in all the other worlds. It is the world of the non-dream.
- 3.4** Understanding these different worlds is essential to experiencing the most important step to discovering and living **unconditional love: forgiveness**. (See section 7.)

Personal Perspective No. 3

It is not only our dreams we should place in God's hands; it is our peace.

Jeanne Marie

Comments on the Parable "Is that So?"

Parables are wonderful ways to communicate. Well-written parables can touch nearly everyone in some way, and sometimes they can touch many people on several levels at once. Well-written parables reach deep into our souls and touch the truth. If we let them, they can tear down walls built over many years from many fears and attachments.

The parable "**Is That So?**" demolished such a wall for me. I will repeat the parable here.

The Zen Master Hakuin was praised by his neighbors as one living a pure life.

A beautiful Japanese girl whose parents owned a food store, lived near him. Suddenly without any warning, her parents discovered she was with child.

This made her parents angry. She would not confess who the man was, but after much harassment at last named Hakuin.

In great anger the parents went to the master. "Ah so" was all he would say.

After the child was born it was brought to Hakuin. By this time he had lost his reputation, which did not trouble him, but he took very good care of the child. He obtained milk from his neighbors and everything else the little one needed.

A year later the girl-mother could stand it no longer. She told her parents the truth—that the real father of the child was a young man who worked in the fishmarket.

The mother and the father of the girl at once went to Hakuin to ask his forgiveness, to apologize at length, and to get the child back again.

Hakuin was willing. In yielding the child, all he said was: “Ah so.”

I used to experience anger and frustration over perceived injustices (and I still do at times—change is not always easy). Things that I saw as unfair riled my “rebel-self” and stirred my emotions into action with undaunted determination to “fix” the inequity.

I do not believe that it is morally wrong to be outraged by injustice; however, I believe I was spiritually unaware or naïve about my options. The parable “**Is That So?**” showed me a much more loving, peaceful, spiritually-sound option to injustice: nonattachment.

Nonattachment is not the same as *detachment*. Let me repeat that: Nonattachment is not the same as detachment. In fact, spiritually, I would consider them complete opposites.

Detachment means deliberate separation, a desire to be apart from rather than a part of.

Nonattachment means: love without demands; dedication without desire; caring without constraints; involvement without expectations. In other words, it means a positive interaction without strings that tie the relationship into knots.

Nonattachment teaches how to care and not care at the same time. It means caring about the process but not the results. It means caring deeply about the now and not the “not-now.” It means living without fear, living joyfully with what life brings without concern about the consequences.

In the parable “**Is That So?**” the Zen Buddhist master beautifully demonstrates nonattachment. He exemplifies nonattachment to his reputation; to the need for truth; to the need for justice; and most importantly, his nonattachment to the child, which is the essence of the lesson I learned.

My first reaction to this parable was outrage. The injustice of it all! His reputation is lost. People choose to believe a pregnant young girl over the years of evidence of his “pure life.” He is given the responsibility of raising a child whom he did not father, and then . . . and then . . . and then he is expected to just give the baby back regardless of his “attachment” to the child. No! No! No!

Shortly before I read this parable for the first time, I was studying the Workbook in *A Course in Miracles*. I came upon lesson 23, “I can escape from

the world I see by giving up attack thoughts.” To study this lesson and make it relevant to me personally, I made a list of the things I tended to attack at the time, and “injustice” topped the list.

(The rest of the list included at the time: stupidity, abuse, competition, resistance, self, and selfishness, in that order. I have since learned to relinquish my attacks on all but stupidity. I have no trouble with ignorance—lack of knowledge, but I still struggle with frustrations over stupidity, but I’m working on it!)

The lesson was teaching me that I should relinquish attack, but it did not teach me how. That’s what reading **“Is That So?”** did; it showed me what nonattack looks like through the eyes of nonattachment.

Hakuin did not attack or fight the grandparents of the child when they came to him; he knew his words would mean nothing to the enraged grandparents who believed their daughter was telling the truth.

He accepted without regret, resistance, or retaliation the circumstances the turbulent stream of life washed upon his shore. His nonattachment to the “meaning-less” slings and arrows of life, as he saw them to be, allowed him to move on in peace and joy to the “meaning-full” mission now facing him—caring for the child.

The part of the story in which I became most enraged was when the grandparents figured that their apology would be enough to heal the wounds of a damaged reputation. And then . . . and then . . . and then . . . expect that it was perfectly okay to just take the child away without regard to Hakuin’s probable “attachment” to the child and the child’s attachment to Hakuin. I fumed over this story for days until . . . I realized that my outrage would not be at all constructive.

Had I been in Hakuin’s place, my rage would have caused me to attack, which would have only exacerbated the problems. It would have created resentment, separation, fear, frustration, and unloving acts of retaliation.

I also realized that Hakuin could accept the request for forgiveness without difficulty since he had not judged or condemned them; without condemnation, forgiveness is not necessary. Let me repeat that. Without condemnation, forgiveness is not necessary.

Through nonattachment, there was no need to attack. The injustices were irrelevant. Hakuin was impervious to the worldly consequences and lived in the moment of spiritual truth. A baby was in need of care and unconditional love, and so he joyfully provided those comforts to the child who had been unexpectedly laid at his feet.

Then he peacefully participated in the reunion of the child and its family. He never made any element of the circumstance about himself; he had come to know that nothing outside of himself could disturb his inner peace. “Ah so” embodies the peace that passeth all understanding.

I admired and respected the master’s ability to accept the circumstance without a ripple of dread. He demonstrated the beauty of nonattachment and its natural extension, nonattack.

Nonattachment is a pathway to peace. Nonattachment to the concerns of the physical world is the truth and the life and the way of the Christ consciousness within each of us, we need only seek to bring it to the surface of our own stream of consciousness.

I have cherished this parable ever since for the life-changing message it gave to me.

Section Four

A Foundation for Personal Exploration

Parable 3: “The Gates of Paradise”

Three Lessons Learned

Activity: The Formula— $P + B = E = A$

SECTION FOUR

A Foundation for Personal Exploration

4.0 “The Gates of Paradise” (A Parable)

4.1 The parable is taken from *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings* compiled by Paul Reps (Anchor Books, Doubleday, New York, 1989).

4.1.1 Parable 3: “The Gates of Paradise”

A soldier named Nobushige came to Hakuin, and asked, “Is there really a paradise and a hell?”

“Who are you?” inquired Hakuin.

“I am a samurai,” the warrior replied.

“You, a soldier!” exclaimed Hakuin. “What kind of ruler would have you as his guard? Your face looks like that of a beggar.”

Nobushige became so angry that he began to draw his sword, but Hakuin continued: “So you have a sword! Your weapon is probably much too dull to cut off my head.”

As Nobushige drew his sword Hakuin remarked: “Here open the gates of hell!”

At these words the samurai, perceiving the master's discipline, sheathed his sword and bowed.

“Here open the gates of paradise,” said Hakuin.

- 4.1.2** One possible message of this parable is that heaven and hell are states of mind we have created for ourselves with our chosen perceptions and beliefs.

Lessons Learned

- 4.2** I have been a teacher for over thirty years; during that time, I learned a lot. Following are three of the most important lessons I learned.

4.2.1 Much to my ego's chagrin, I learned that I could not teach anyone anything! I realized **a person must choose to learn!** So my first job as a teacher came to be to find ways to make the subject matter interesting and relevant in hopes that the students would choose to learn.

4.2.2 **Disappointment comes from unfulfilled expectations!** I did not want to disappoint my students, so my second job each day was to make sure I presented the goals and objectives clearly and specifically so that each student could understand what he/she was going to know and understand and/or to be able to do by the end of the class.

4.2.3 **If there has been no change, there has been no learning!** I wanted my students to learn, so my personal goal became to ensure that each student (and I) left the classroom each day a different person than the one we were when we entered it.

- 4.3** If we want to accomplish new spiritual growth, we must change.

- 4.4** If we decide we want to change, the question then becomes, “How can we change?” Following is an activity, which I believe helps answer that question.

- 4.5** The following activity answers these questions:

4.5.1 Why do we feel what we feel?

4.5.2 Why do we do what we do?

4.5.3 How can we change if we want to?

The following fun activity takes about thirty minutes—it is even more fun when three or more people participate together!

4.6 Activity Background

4.6.1 For seven years, I owned my own acting studio. While coaching acting, I created what proved to be a very effective workshop for the actors.

4.6.2 I wanted to design a tool to assist the actors in achieving believable performances. I wanted to help them understand why people feel what they feel and do what they do. I did not want them to merely imitate an emotion their characters were experiencing; I wanted the actors to recreate the emotions for the audience by actually experiencing what the characters were feeling. So I designed a workshop.

4.6.3 There are two primary parts to the workshop, and each part has three scenarios. The results of the workshop are much more effective when a person actually participates, so I hope you—the reader—will “play” along as I describe the steps of the workshop. Give it a try! Have some fun!

4.7 You need the following for the activity:

4.7.1 Paper and pencil

4.7.2 An active imagination

4.7.3 A desire to be outrageous and have some fun

4.8 Activity: The Formula— $P + B = E = A$

4.8.1 First, I ask that you pretend with me. The success of this activity is totally dependent upon your ability to pretend. Are you ready?

4.8.2 PART 1: Scenario 1 Let's begin

4.8.2.1 Imagine that there is a huge pile of dirty black dust balls over by the door. In a minute, the door will open; and all those dust balls will be blown all over the floor, around your feet and all over the room. But when you open your eyes and look down, you do not see dust balls; you will see something else.

4.8.2.1 On the count of three, you are to look down, and I will tell you what you see. I want you to react to what I say that you see and do exactly what you would do, if indeed you were to see what I say you see.

4.8.3 Are you ready? Okay, one, two three . . . You see . . .

4.8.4 TARANTULAS!

4.8.4.1 Tarantulas are everywhere in the room. They are crawling over your shoes, on the furniture, and all over the floor. Are you doing what you would really be doing if you saw tarantulas everywhere?

4.8.4.2 Now write down the following information:

Reactions to Part 1: Scenario 1

4.8.4.3 Write down the emotions you felt while you thought tarantulas were everywhere. Example, "I felt really scared."

4.8.4.4 Next, write down what actions you took. For example, "I lifted my feet off the floor, and I screamed."

4.8.5 PART 1: Scenario 2

- 4.8.5.1** Okay, scenario 2 has the same setup: There is a great big pile of dirty black dust balls by the door. The door will open, and the wind will blow; and you will look down and see tarantulas, but there is a very big difference.
- 4.8.5.2** First, for this scenario to work, it is very important that you forget about anything and everything you have ever thought, believed, or felt about tarantulas (unless you really know the truth about them). In other words, “empty your cup.” (Remember the parable “A Cup of Tea”? See section 2.5.)
- 4.8.5.3** It is very important that you “adopt” the beliefs that I am about to tell you. It is important that you pretend that this set of beliefs is true in order to benefit the most from this exercise.
- 4.8.5.4** Pretend you learned about tarantulas from your great-grandmother and your grandmother and your mother and your best friend, whom you trust with your life and who never lies, or from the Internet or some other source you trust; the important thing is that you believe the following “facts” about tarantulas.
- 4.8.5.5** What you *now know* is that tarantulas are not harmful, they are not poisonous, many people actually have them as pets, and some schools have them in classrooms to prove to students how non-threatening they really are! (All of this information is actually true for nearly all tarantulas! Look up tarantulas on the Internet to become reassured if you have questions about these facts.)
- 4.8.5.6** What I also want you to believe now is that tarantulas are special “gifts from God” and that they have very special powers.

4.8.5.7 Their special powers are the following:

4.8.5.7.1 If you are ever fortunate enough to come across a tarantula (which is really rare) and you can encourage it (remember, it is really harmless and actually makes a very good pet) to crawl up your left arm and sit on your shoulder for at least thirty seconds, then you will have **thirty consecutive days of blessedness!**

4.8.5.7.2 Meaning, any lottery ticket you buy, you win; any job you desire, you can have; any talent or ability you want, you can possess, and so on.

4.8.5.8 Now are you ready to play this part of the game? Can you accept these ideas as truths? If so, then envision the dust balls by the door. The door is now opening; the wind is blowing. You look down and see all of those wonderful “gifts from God” with special powers, gently and slowly moving around the room, waiting for someone to be their friend so that they can bless them. Give yourself plenty of time to react and have fun!

Reactions to Part 1: Scenario 2

4.8.5.9 Write down the emotions you felt while you thought tarantulas were everywhere. For example, “I felt really excited and hopeful.”

4.8.5.10 Next, write down what actions you took. For example, “I put my hand down on the floor to entice the tarantula up.”

(If you reacted with fear and/or disgust in scenario 1 and in scenario 2 and if you behaved or reacted physically the same in scenario 2 as you did in scenario 1, that's okay—it just means that you were not able to successfully pretend. The results of the exercise for you will not be as evident, but if you are doing this with others and they are able to pretend successfully, you can still get the message from seeing what happens to them.)

4.8.5.11 Many of the actors I coached, who were able to pretend effectively, got down on the floor and worked hard (and humorously) to entice these little furry gifts from God to climb up their arms and sit on their shoulders; they definitely wanted all of the blessings they could get!

4.8.6 PART 1: Scenario 3 After you settle back down from that scenario (we're almost there), this is the third and final scenario.

4.8.6.1 Now starting with the beliefs from the last scenario (but without the experience of having run into a tarantula), you need to pretend that you take a vacation to Mexico to visit a good friend.

4.8.6.2 You decide to inquire about these beliefs about tarantulas, and you ask your friend if he/she has known anyone who actually experienced the blessings of the tarantulas.

4.8.6.3 You find out that, yes, it is true that you will have thirty consecutive days of blessedness if you are fortunate enough to run into a tarantula and are able to entice it to climb up your left arm and sit on your left shoulder for thirty seconds or more! **However . . .**

(Don't you know there is always a catch?)

4.8.6.4 **If, in the process of climbing up your left arm and sitting on your left shoulder, the tarantula touches any part of your skin, you will have nightmares every night for the rest of your life! Oh my!**

- 4.8.6.5** So now the door opens, and you look down and see tarantulas gently and slowly walking all around the room.

Reactions to Part 1: Scenario 3

- 4.8.6.6** Write down the emotions you felt while you thought tarantulas were everywhere. For example, “I felt apprehensive. I felt torn.”

- 4.8.6.7** Next, write down what actions you took. For example, “I moved away from the tarantulas.”

Whew! This part is over.

- 4.8.7** For this last scenario, some of the actors I coached would pull down their shirtsleeves and cover up the skin on their hands and arms and neck, and then they would get on the floor to entice the fuzzy critters up to their shoulders so they could get all of the blessings without any of the nightmares!
- 4.8.8** Some of the actors decided to avoid the tarantulas completely after deciding it was not worth the risk, and some would not care about the nightmares (they figured they could make enough money to hire a private psychiatrist to deal with the nightmares—“that’s no biggie” is what they told me).

4.9 The Point of the Activity: PART 1

- 4.9.1** Did you FEEL something different in each situation? If you were able to pretend and play along with the activity, you probably did feel something different in each of the scenarios.

- 4.9.2** Sometimes, we can feel fear and do one thing; and another time, in the exact same situation, we can feel joy and do something different. It depends on what has changed within us between the first and second situations.
- 4.9.3** Most people feel fear or some kind of emotional discomfort in scenario 1; they generally feel excited and hopeful in scenario 2. They feel cautious momentarily before making a decision, and then they feel relief or feel anxious optimism depending on whether or not they choose to take a chance regarding the nightmares.
- 4.9.4** Did you DO something different each time? Again, if you were able to play along, you did something different for each scenario. You may have lifted your feet and screamed during scenario 1. You may have gotten on the floor trying to entice the tarantulas to climb up your arm in scenario 2. You may have hesitated then covered your skin and tried to entice the tarantulas up your arm in scenario 3.
- 4.9.5** Sometimes, we can do one thing; and another time, in the exact same situation, we can do something different. It depends on what has changed within us between the first and second situations.

Now truly take a minute to think.

- 4.9.5.1** What stayed the same in each of the three scenarios?
- 4.9.5.2** What is the only thing that changed from scenario to scenario?
- 4.9.6** Hopefully, you discovered that the only thing that changed from scenario to scenario was your *beliefs* about tarantulas. Everything else stayed the same.
- 4.9.7** It is very important to take note of the fact that the feelings and emotions changed while maintaining the same *misperception*. You were reacting to tarantulas even though they were really merely dust balls.

4.10 Our perceptions are our realities in life!

4.10.1 An example in daily life would be when we are waiting for someone. Let's say you have made plans to meet a friend, Carol, at the local mall. Carol is five feet five, has red hair, weighs about 130 pounds, and walks with a bounce. You arrive a little early and are looking around. Then you see (perceive) "Carol" walking across the parking lot, and you believe it is Carol. So you stand up and start to wave to let her know where you are, only to discover that it is not Carol after all.

4.10.2 The emotions you felt (joy) and the actions you did (standing and waving) when you thought you saw Carol and believed it was Carol changed when you realized your perceptions and beliefs were wrong (it was not Carol). You felt embarrassed, and you stopped waving.

4.10.3 In other words, we feel what we feel and do what we do because of our **perceptions and beliefs**.

Thus, P (perceptions) + B (beliefs) = Emotions = Action

4.11 PART 2 of the Activity

4.11.1 Have you ever been apathetic? Yes or no.

4.11.2 If yes, what did you do when you were apathetic?

4.11.2.1 Most people answer that question with, "Nothing."

4.11.2.2 *Apathy* is a lack of emotion and/or care, and the reason you do not do anything when you feel apathetic is that you do not have the fuel to do anything; no emotion is present to fuel an action.

4.11.3 Part 2 of the workshop is designed to enhance the understanding of why people feel what they feel and do what they do.

4.11.4 As acting coach

4.11.4.1 I assigned someone the role of a man who perceives that his wife has been cheating on him.

4.11.4.2 I assign someone to play his wife.

4.11.4.3 I have the wife sitting in a chair. The husband comes in the front door and says the line, “I have had it with you!” He then throws a chair out the window. (Not really, of course, but very nearly so! I do have the actor pick up a chair and “fling” it in a safe direction).

4.11.4.4 I ask the actors to write down why the husband threw the chair out the window.

4.11.5 You may want to write down your answer now if you want to get the most out of this exercise.

Your Answer: _____

4.11.6 Then we repeat the scene, only this time, instead of throwing the chair out the window, the husband pulls a chair up right in front of his wife’s face. He is very calm on the outside; he points his finger right in her face; and he says the line, almost in a whisper, but, with his jaw “locked”, nostrils flaring, eyes staring into hers, and with great intensity, “I have had it with you!”

4.11.7 I ask, “Why did he pull the chair up, point his finger in her face, lock his jaw, and speak those words that way?”

Your answer: _____

4.11.8 Then I repeat the scene one last time. The husband comes in, walks over to his wife, leans right up in her face, and screams as loudly as he can, “I’ve had it with you!” (I always pick an emotionally strong person to play the role of the wife because these scenes are quite intense.)

4.11.9 I ask the actors why the husband screamed the way he did.

Your answer: _____

4.12 I have found that nearly every actor responds to each of the three scenarios in the same way, saying that the husband did what he did because of his

emotions, that his anger and/or his frustration caused him to do what he did, and that he feels a need to control and dominate his wife.

4.13 I agree that the husband felt the same emotions in each scenario (fear, anger, and frustration), and I agree that the husband needs to control and dominate in each scenario. The **intention** in each scenario is the same: to dominate. **However** . . .

4.14 I strongly disagree that the husband's emotions are the reasons for his actions in any of the scenarios. Let me explain why I disagree.

4.14.1 Each of those characters (the three "different" husbands) *did what he did because of who he is, not because of what he felt.*

4.14.2 Each time, the husband felt the same thing—anger, fear, frustration, etc.—but did something different.

4.14.3 Each time, the husband had the same intent—to intimidate and to control. The first husband attempts to intimidate through a display of physical violence, the second by psychological control, and the third by "out-emoting" his wife.

4.14.4 Have you have ever been angry? Yes or no.

4.14.5 Have you have ever thrown a chair out the window?

4.14.6 If your answer to **4.14.5** is no, then we must conclude that the emotions of **anger or frustration** do not dictate the action; otherwise, all of us would have thrown a chair out the window when we were angry.

4.15 **Emotions do *not* design our actions; emotions merely fuel the action.** Just as the gasoline in your car does not dictate in what direction you go or how fast you go or how far you go (until you run out of gas, of course), the gasoline merely fuels the car. You determine, dictate, design, and create everything else.

4.16 We do not do what we do because of what we feel; we do what we do because of who we are. Emotions do not dictate, determine, design, or create our actions; they merely fuel the action.

4.17 So, if what we do is a result of who we are, the question becomes “Who are we?” The answer is surprisingly simple:

4.17.1 We are the total accumulation of all of our thoughts.

I want to repeat that.

4.17.2 We are the total accumulation of all of our thoughts.

4.18 Action is a result of what a person perceives and what the person believes about his perceptions. **Perceptions and beliefs dictate, design, and determine our actions.**

4.18.1 The husband perceives that his wife is cheating on him. She may not be cheating on him in reality, but that does not matter—it is his perception that is his reality.

4.18.2 Then it is his beliefs about infidelity, his beliefs about women, his beliefs about marriage, his beliefs about himself, etc., that all play a part in designing his reaction to his perception.

4.18.3 The character who throws the chair out the window probably believes that he can successfully intimidate his wife on a physical level, but he may also believe that he is not a “man” if he hits a woman, so he throws the chair instead of hitting her.

4.18.4 The second scene presents a man who believes he can intimidate his wife psychologically and the third by out-emoting his wife.

4.19 The point is we do not do anything because of what we feel; we do what we do because of our perceptions and beliefs.

4.20 If we constantly think negatively, we will behave negatively; if we constantly think positively, we will behave positively; if we constantly think lovingly, we will behave lovingly. Whatever we perceive and believe about ourselves, our world, our fellow human beings, our God, our purpose in life, the quality of our lives, etc., that is what will become our reality.

4.21 There is one final demonstration I perform in the workshop to hammer in the point. I present a variety of other potential reactions to the situation of infidelity.

4.21.1 I present one husband saying, “If you cheat on me, I’ll cheat on you!”

4.21.2 Another is, “If you cheat on me, I’m taking the house, the dog, and the white picket fence.”

4.21.3 And another is, “You cheat on me, and I want to know why because I really love you and I want our marriage to work. Maybe we can fix this if I understand why it happened! Do you want to make this work? I still do. I truly believe if we both want this marriage to work, it can.”

4.21.4 The last husband sees infidelity as a *symptom* of a problem, not the problem in and of itself. It is that belief that allows him to react to his perception of his wife’s infidelity without retaliation or condemnation but with love and commitment and forgiveness.

4.22 **The formula $P + B = E = A$ means Perceptions + Beliefs = Emotion = Action.**

4.23 So why does the formula have two equal signs?

4.23.1 The answer is that emotions are a direct result of perceptions and beliefs, that actions are a direct result of perceptions and beliefs, and that emotions must happen first in order to fuel the action.

4.23.2 **No one can make us angry**, no one can make us happy, no one can make us feel or do anything that we do not choose.

4.23.3 If I am angry, it is not because of what someone has done or said—it is because of my perceptions and beliefs about what they have said or done. If I look upon their words and actions differently, then I will have a different reaction.

4.23.4 That concept is often a hard lesson for some of us to learn at first because it places full responsibility on ourselves for all our feelings and actions, but the irony is that when we do learn this lesson, we feel more freedom and peace than we ever felt before. Recognizing that we can be at total peace when all around us is chaotic is very freeing in deed!

- 4.23.5** This lesson teaches us that we are not subject to someone else's behavior of their thoughts or their words; no one can define who we are but ourselves unless we let them.
- 4.24** *If we want to change how we feel and/or change our behavior, then we need to begin by changing our perceptions and our beliefs.*
- 4.24.1** Sometimes, we try to control our feelings and behaviors by focusing on the feeling or the behavior itself. That approach will work only temporarily *at best*.
- 4.24.2** Have you known someone with an anger problem, and he/she works really hard to control the anger? What ultimately happens? They explode! That is because they are focusing on controlling the emotion and the action instead of going to the source of the emotion and the action.
- 4.24.3** It is their perceptions and beliefs they need to examine and change; then the feelings and actions must change. The feelings and actions must change because they are the direct result of perceptions and beliefs.
- 4.25** How do we change our perceptions and beliefs? We can all choose to empty our cups and adopt some different philosophies. (See section 6 for some helpful philosophies.)

Section Five

Obstacles to Changing Perceptions and Beliefs

What Are Five Major Obstacles to Changing Our Perceptions and Beliefs?

Parable 4: “Muddy Road”

Comments on the Parable “Muddy Road”

What Does the Parable Say about Laws?

What Does the Parable Say about Expectations?

What Does the Parable Say about Assumptions?

What Types of Assumptions Are There?

Are Assumptions a “Bad” Thing?

Anecdote 3: “Drivers”

Anecdote 4: “A Popular Question Answered”

Personal Perspective 4:

The Garden of Eden Revisited

SECTION FIVE

Obstacles to Changing Our Perceptions and Beliefs

5.0 There is really only one obstacle to our spiritual growth and our ability to change: **attachment**. However, there are many things to which we can find ourselves attached; the following are five of the most difficult to relinquish (other than the people and animals we cherish), and these five often create our greatest obstacles to change.

5.0.1 Laws, rules, “shoulds,” “should nots,” “musts,” “must nots,” etc.

5.0.2 Expectations

5.0.3 Assumptions

5.04 Fears

5.05 The need to be right

5.1 “Muddy Road”

5.1.1 Below is a parable and an analysis that demonstrates how the concepts above can become obstacles to our ability to change our perceptions and our beliefs.

- 5.1.2** The following parable comes from a book called *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings*, compiled by Paul Reps.

Parable 4: “Muddy Road”

Tanzan and Ekido were once traveling together down a muddy road. A heavy rain was still falling.

Coming around a bend, they met a lovely girl in a silk kimono and sash, unable to cross the intersection.

“Come on, girl,” said Tanzan at once. Lifting her in his arms, he carried her over the mud.

Ekido did not speak again until that night when they reached a lodging temple. Then he no longer could restrain himself. “We monks don’t go near females,” he told Tanzan, “especially not young and lovely ones. It is dangerous. Why did you do that?”

“I left the girl there,” said Tanzan. “Are you still carrying her?”

5.2 Comments on “Muddy Road”

- 5.2.1** How does this parable demonstrate the effect of the obstacles listed above on our ability to change our perceptions and beliefs? The obstacles are laws, expectations, assumptions, fears, and the need to be right.

- 5.2.1.1** What does this parable say about *laws* and “*shoulds*” as possible obstacles to our ability to change our perceptions and beliefs?

- 5.2.1.1.1** The parable points out the conflict between following the letter of the law or following the spirit of the law. This parable demonstrates how choosing to follow the spirit of the law brings about a more positive response and more positive results; following the spirit of the law is more beneficial to everyone involved in this story.

- 5.2.1.1.2** The two main characters are monks; and there is a law, or understanding, that monks are to avoid contact with beautiful young women because of the potential conflicts any interest in a woman might create for a monk. The law is a reasonable one.
- 5.2.1.1.3** Tanzan broke the letter of the law by first paying attention to the young woman in distress and then by picking her up and carrying her across the muddy road.
- 5.2.1.1.4** In the last sentence of the parable, Tanzan's response to Ekido's concerns indicate that Tanzan recognizes that he broke the letter of the law by carrying a distraught woman across the muddy road, but he also makes it clear that he put her down on the other side and *left* her there. He did not carry her in his heart or his mind thereafter. He did not dwell on her or have second thoughts.
- 5.2.1.1.5** Tanzan followed the spirit of the law by not becoming obsessed, disturbed, or distracted by the young lady; yet he provided assistance to a fellow human being in need, which is also one of the expectations of a monk.
- 5.2.1.1.6** On the other hand, though Ekido did not physically carry the young lady across the muddy road, she possessed his thoughts and his emotions for the rest of the day and into the night. Thus, Ekido, who was more distracted and disturbed by the young lady than Tanzan, followed the letter of the law but broke the spirit of the law; the result of his thinking would also have left a stranded young lady by the side of a muddy road.

5.2.1.1.7 Thus, the monk who followed the spirit of law provided the greatest service with the least amount of personal conflict.

5.2.1.1.8 This parable reminds me to stop and examine my own choices. Am I more like Ekido or Tanzan? Do I follow the letter of the law? Do I find myself getting frustrated with those who do not? What bothers me about someone else's behavior? Am I expecting them to act a certain way? And when they don't, do I get stuck on the "shoulds"? How many "shoulds" do I put on myself? Are they justified? Why? Why not? Am I judging the heart, mind, and soul of another person based on my own "shoulds"? Do I have the courage to break the letter of the law when it is in conflict with the spirit of the law? Can I easily render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's?

5.2.1.2 What does this parable say about *expectations* as possible obstacles to our ability to change our perceptions and beliefs?

5.2.1.2.1 Both monks understood the expectation to be pure in spirit and pure in their relationships with others.

5.2.1.2.2 Tanzan, however, also understood the expectations of love and respect for his "fellow man." Monks are expected to help others and to demonstrate the humanity that their beliefs espouse. "Rescuing the damsel in distress" was certainly a reflection of that element of human kindness.

5.2.1.2.3 Ekido judged Tanzan very harshly because of his own expectations of Tanzan. It

turned out that his judgment was not only wrong, it consumed him throughout the day, which generated animosity, fear, and anger—those feelings are very destructive, not constructive.

5.2.1.2.4 Tanzan did not seem to have any expectations of Ekido; thus, Tanzan was not consumed by any negative feelings nor did he experience disappointment with Ekido's choices. (Disappointment comes from unfulfilled expectations.)

5.2.1.2.5 This parable also reminds me to examine my expectations. Are my expectations more like Tanzan's or Ekido's. Do I lack appropriate expectations of myself? Do I have expectations of others that are inappropriate? Am I expecting others to act one way, and when they don't, do I become judgmental? Am I judging the heart, mind, and soul of another based on my own expectations? Do I have the courage to meet the spiritual expectations of **THE S.O.U.L.** regardless of the consequences?

5.2.1.3 **What does this parable say about *assumptions* as possible obstacles to our ability to change our perceptions and beliefs?**

5.2.1.3.1 Many people are familiar with a cute saying about the word *assume*. The saying goes, "When you assume, you make an ass out of 'u' and 'me.'"

5.2.1.3.2 I do think the saying is cute and clever, and it can be somewhat helpful in encouraging someone to avoid making assumptions. The problem is, however, that we *must* make assumptions in order to maintain a semblance of sanity!

5.2.1.3.3 I assume in the morning that my car will start (or not start, whichever is the norm). I assume the building where I work will still be there, that my boss will be as “pleasant” as always, that someone will have made the coffee, that the elevator will work, and so on. We usually create our daily schedules around the assumption that the day will be rather normal, that people will be on time or late, that the traffic will be good or bad, that we will stay safe, and that the dog will greet us at the door when we get home.

5.2.1.3.4 In other words, it is often a very good and necessary thing to make assumptions. It is not *assumptions* in and of themselves that are the problem; it is the *types* of assumptions we make that can create a problem.

5.2.1.4 There are three basic types of assumptions:

5.2.1.4.1 Valid/justifiable: These are based on multiple, personal past experiences. Rose will be late. The sun will rise today. I will get interrupted at work at least five times this morning.

5.2.1.4.2 Invalid/unjustifiable: He’s single, so he must be gay. She has tattoos, so she must be in a gang. He is only being kind in order to get attention. The last example deals with assuming that you know the deepest motives someone has for his behavior, and that is a very dangerous assumption.

5.2.1.4.3 Logical but unsubstantiated: He looks Hispanic, so he probably does not speak English. She is very big in the belly, so she must be pregnant. She is wearing a bandana on her head, so she must be going through chemotherapy. These assumptions are logical, but if you ask the woman with

the big belly when the baby is due and she is *not* pregnant, you may experience an embarrassing moment!

5.2.1.5 It is important to examine our assumptions carefully.

5.2.1.5.1 Is my assumption valid/justifiable?

5.2.1.5.2 Is my assumption loving and nonjudgmental?

5.2.1.5.3 What assumptions am I making about others and their intentions? That's what Ekido did to Tanzan. Ekido assumed that, because Tanzan picked the young lady up, he could not "put her down." It appears he was wrong.

5.2.1.5.4 Do I do that to others? Do I do that to myself? If so, how can I change it?

5.2.1.6 Fear is one of our greatest obstacles to our ability to change.

5.2.1.6.1 Fear of rejection, physical pain, retaliation, emotional pain, mental anguish, punishment, and of many other events in life can prohibit us from changing what we think, what we believe, what we do, and what we feel.

5.2.1.6.2 However, the more we focus on being safe, the more frightened we will become. Let me repeat that: The more we focus on being safe, the more frightened we will become.

5.2.1.6.3 There are no guarantees in the physical, mental, or emotional worlds.

5.2.1.6.4 The truth of our spiritual essence and identity is the only guaranteed source of safety.

5.2.1.6.4.1 Knowing that our true essence is a pure, eternal, infinite, indestructible,

completely fulfilled, unconditionally loved and loving spirit is the only source of “peace that passeth all understanding.”

5.2.1.6.4.2 Knowing that our spirit is made in the image of God and is endowed with all of the attributes of God is the only source of safety that we will ever be able to be certain of.

5.2.1.6.5 It is the spiritual truth mentioned above that sets us free from fear of any kind and which gives us the freedom to be true to ourselves regardless of the consequences.

5.3 The need to be right is a powerful obstacle to our ability to change.

5.3.1 When we have a strong need to be right, we often interpret information based on what we already believe, and do not take into consideration information that tends to contradict what we already believe.

5.3.2 It is vital to remember that we frequently have so much information coming at us that our brain automatically filters what we receive and how we process it.

5.3.3 Becoming a seeker of truth rather than a seeker of “rightness” becomes a major asset to processing information accurately and objectively.

5.4 Anecdote 3: “Drivers”

5.4.1 When presenting workshops that cover some of these concepts, I often use a **very politically incorrect** example to demonstrate the point.

5.4.2 I prepare the class that I will be using a politically sensitive subject—that it is not my personal belief, but it is a belief that is prominent in the Southern California area in the early twenty-first century and one with which most people in the room will be familiar.

- 5.4.3** I then ask to have a show of hands of those people who have **heard my next statement**. (I stress, no one who perhaps believes this statement or one who perhaps has made this statement need raise his/her hand but merely those who have **heard** this statement to ensure that no one be embarrassed in any way).
- 5.4.4** Once I have completely prepared everyone for this very politically incorrect question, I ask, “Who has ever heard that Orientals can’t drive?” (I deliberately use the politically incorrect word *Orientals* in addition to the politically incorrect implication that Asians can’t drive.)
- 5.4.5** Well, after having made a huge buildup to the question; and after giving everyone a chance to register the question, the room always bursts into laughter and practically every hand goes up, including the Asian participants.
- 5.4.6** I then continue in this way. I select a person in the group and say, “Okay, Carol (if that is the person’s name), let’s say you and I are riding together down the 5 Freeway and we see two damaged cars on the side of the road with about ten Asians talking a mile a minute with one another with obvious anxiety on everyone’s part.” And I say, “Look, Carol, see what I mean? Orientals can’t drive! I don’t even know how they get a license. They can’t even speak English. I just don’t get it!”
- 5.4.7** Then a couple of weeks later, we are driving down the 5 Freeway again, and there is another accident on the side of the road. Only this time, it is three burly truck drivers standing by their truck, yelling at the four teenagers who were in the car that hit their truck. Now do I say, “Look, Carol, now there’s an accident that has no Orientals in it”? Noooooooo. I say things like, “Look how that truck got turned around like that! How did that happen? That is a new truck too. I hope everyone is okay.”
- 5.4.8** Most people get the point that I am trying to make, which is we need to be very aware of what we already believe. We can always find evidence to substantiate whatever we believe, but there may be much more evidence to substantiate a much different position, yet we miss it because of the way we choose to filter the information that is coming in to us.

5.5 Anecdote 4: “A Popular Question Answered”

5.5.1 I was recently reading *Swami Kriyananda: As We Have Known Him*. It is a collection of anecdotal moments in Swami Kriyananda’s life told by those who have been personally touched by his actions and/or words.

5.5.2 Though each story in the book is poignant, I particularly found the following anecdote to be an excellent reflection of how our personal beliefs and our desire to be right may influence our assumptions and our behaviors and may serve as major roadblocks to our search for truth.

5.5.2.1 This particular anecdote is titled “Are You Saved?” found on page 35 of the book. It tells of a day Swami Kriyananda and fifty other people were on a pilgrimage in Israel in 1985.

5.5.2.2 “Suddenly a young Arab man, apparently a Christian, accosted him (Swami Kriyananda) with considerable fervor: ‘Do you believe Jesus Christ died for your sins?’

5.5.2.3 Though the rest of us were concerned, for if the Swami answered ‘Yes’ he may be considered less than sincere, and if he answered ‘No’ there may be an undesirable disturbance, Swami Kriyananda wasn’t disturbed at all.

5.5.2.4 In a kindly yet penetrating manner, he simply asked the young man, ‘How can God die?’

5.5.2.5 The young man wobbled in shocked silence for a few moments, then departed.”

5.6 The ultimate message of this section is that it is our rather persistent attachments to our rules, our expectations, our assumptions, our fears, our need to be right, our beliefs, and to other elements of life that produce the boulders in the middle of our path to spiritual truth and freedom. If we can minimize, or eliminate, these obstacles, the path will be much easier and much more pleasant to traverse.

Personal Perspective No. 4

The Garden of Eden Revisited

Assume for just a moment that God did not *forbid* Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the tree in the Garden of Eden. Let's assume instead that God *lovingly warned* Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit of the tree because God knew the sad consequences of that choice.¹

Assume God knew if Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree, they would taste the sweet, enticing, addictive nectar of narcissism; and they would be pulled into a labyrinth of delusion. The delusion would be a nightmare beginning with the birth of an ego and quickly sinking deep into the dark and lonely abyss of a perceived separation from God and each other.

This is what God knew would happen if Adam and Eve ate from the tree of “knowledge”; it was the tree of knowledge of the labyrinth of delusion, and so God lovingly warned Adam and Eve to avoid the tree in order to protect them from a tragic dream of pain and suffering and death.

But like many children granted free will, even though lovingly warned to avoid the dangers in life, Adam and Eve betook of the nectar of narcissism and slipped into a vivid illusion—an illusion of separation from God and each other, an illusion forcing them to experience feelings of shame and guilt and fear. They were now wandering hopelessly in a fog, wondering who they were and where God was and why had the Garden of Eden changed so drastically from what they had known and loved.

The ultimate problems for them became “How can we get back home to God and His love and His protection? Where is He? Why hasn't He come to rescue us? He must be mad at us for not heeding His warning. He must be going to punish us because we were so foolish.”

What Adam and Eve did not know is that God never left them. He was cradling them in His arms as they slept, attempting to comfort them as they wandered through the fertile field of forgetfulness, which their illusion had caused to blossom. God has yet to sleep, and He never will until all of His precious, precocious, curiosity seekers awaken from their nightmare.

Now assume that God is very wise, and He knew that His children might get lost one day. And pretend God is very loving and wants to protect His

children and help them find their way home when they are ready to return. He knew that what His children would need if they were to wander is an unerring spiritual compass. So while we were all yet in His womb, waiting to be born, He gently implanted in each one of us a tiny spiritual, eternal navigation system for our soul; and He carefully programmed heaven as our destination.

If we seek, we will find our spiritual compass. It is there. God does not worry of our whereabouts. He knows exactly where we really are, and He waits patiently for us to find our way home and awaken in His loving arms once again.

I personally see this as much closer to the truth. What do you think?

¹I consider these assumptions logical but unsubstantiated and assumptions worthy of close examination and thought.

Section Six

*Who Knows
What Is Good
or What Is Bad?*

Parable 5: “Who Knows What Is Good or Bad?”

Anecdote 5: “The Piano”

What is *Dualism*?

What is *Sin*?

What is *Evil*?

What is *Justice*?

What Are Some Philosophies That Can Assist Us in Making Desired Changes?

Personal Perspective 5:

The Wages of Sin Is Death—Or Is It?

SECTION SIX

Who Knows What Is Good or What Is Bad?

6.0 Parable 5: “Who Knows What Is Good or What is Bad?”

Quoted from *Your Life: Why It Is the Way It Is and What You Can Do About It—Understanding Universal Laws* by Bruce McArthur (A.R.E. Press).

A farmer in India had a very fine horse, but the horse ran away. The farmer's neighbor came to express his sympathy at the farmer's great loss. The farmer's comment was, **‘Who knows what is good or what is bad?’**

The next day the horse came back bringing a herd of wild horses with him. The neighbor immediately came over to express his joy at the farmer's good fortune. The old farmer said, **‘Who knows what is good or what is bad?’**

The next day the farmer's son, while trying to ride one of the wild horses, was thrown off and broke his leg. The neighbor came to offer his sympathy. The old farmer again said, **‘Who knows what is good or what is bad?’**

The next day the army came to the farm looking for recruits. They could not take the farmer's son because of his broken leg. The neighbor came over to express his relief. The old farmer said again, **'Who knows what is good or what is bad?' (And on, and on, and on . . .)**

(This parable reminds me of what Hamlet said in act 2, scene 2 of *Hamlet* by Shakespeare, "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." Please take time to think about this deeply.)

6.1 Anecdote 5: "The Piano"

- 6.1.1 An experience I had demonstrates both the lesson of the parable in **section 6.0** and how perceptions and beliefs design, dictate, determine, and create our emotions and our actions ($P + B = E = A$ **section 4.0**).
- 6.1.2 I went to see the movie *The Piano*. The story takes place in a rather isolated part of New Zealand during the late 1800s. It was a time in which men could buy wives. John and George are the two main male characters.
- 6.1.3 John literally has a wife "shipped" in. Ada arrives with a daughter and a piano. The piano is vital to Ada. She has been mute since she was six; the piano is her greatest connection to the world and the best way to express herself.
- 6.1.4 John does not understand the value of the piano to Ada, so he just leaves it on the shore. Damp salty air will destroy a piano.
- 6.1.5 George does realize Ada's need and offers to trade some valuable land with John for the piano and for free piano lessons.
- 6.1.6 A romantic relationship ensues between Ada and George. John finds out and takes Ada to the backyard, places her hand on a tree stump, takes an ax, and goes *whack!*
- 6.1.7 He cuts off two joints of her right index finger so she can no longer play the piano. **I literally got sick to my stomach, angry, and distraught.**

6.1.8 He has Ada's daughter deliver the partial finger to George. George decides to leave New Zealand; he loves Ada and does not want to cause her any more harm.

However . . .

6.1.9 John's violent act is a turning point in everyone's life. John intends to kill George but comes to realize that he has been wrong about everything. He tells George to take Ada, the daughter, and the piano away with him.

6.1.10 The final scene has Ada sporting a prosthetic fingertip and playing the piano. We find out she is teaching piano and has decided to learn how to speak again.

Now . . .

6.1.11 *The Piano* is certainly not a movie I would go to see a second time, but a friend wanted to see it, so I went.

6.1.12 I did not look forward to the scene in the backyard, so I was shocked at my reaction. When the ax went *whack*, I made an obvious motion of celebration while saying "Yes!" aloud.

13.13.13 My friend looked at me as if I were crazy, of course; but I was celebrating because I knew the ending, and I realized that John's horrendous act had contributed to creating that happy ending.

13.13.14 **The lesson:** I realized that because I knew the ending of the story, I perceived the horrific event very differently the second time; I now saw the event as the catalyst for a major change in Ada's destiny, and because my perceptions and beliefs about that moment had changed, my emotions and actions changed.

6.2 What does the anecdote about *The Piano* teach me spiritually?

I realized that if I truly believe that all things work together for my spiritual well-being, then all events, regardless of my initial reactions to the perceived difficulties in my life, are actually contributing to the

happy ending that is my spiritual destiny. Since I know the happy spiritual ending in store for all of us, **I really do have nothing to fear.**

6.3 Examination of what is good and what is bad requires an examination of dualism, God, sin, evil, and justice.

6.3.1 One definition of *dualism* is “the quality or state . . . of having a dual nature.”

6.3.1.1 Dualism is usually discussed with regard to the basic nature of man.

6.3.1.2 Most people believe that man’s basic nature is dualistic in that our nature is both good and bad.

6.3.2 I believe God is **THE S.O.U.L.**—THE Spirit of Unconditional Love.

6.3.2.1 I believe God is of one nature: **unconditional love.**

6.3.2.2 I believe God contains no sin, no evil, no anger, no condemnation, no fear.

6.3.2.3 I believe all human beings are children of God; therefore, our basic nature is THE Spirit of Unconditional Love and nothing else.

6.3.2.4 We cannot “inherit” spiritual characteristics that are not a part of our spiritual creator.

6.3.2.5 If God is only **unconditional love**, then we are only **unconditional love.**

6.3.3 What, then, is sin?

6.3.3.1 The literal translation of the word *sin* is “to miss the mark.”

6.3.3.2 As is reflected in the religious philosophies of the world, from Amish to Zoroastrianism, the “mark” is **unconditional love** of God and mankind.

- 6.3.3.3 Missing the mark is not a result of a “genetic” characteristic or flaw.
- 6.3.3.4 If we miss the mark, our miss is the result of one or more of the following:
 - 6.3.3.4.1 ignorance of what the mark is, or
 - 6.3.3.4.2 ignorance of the value and the benefits of hitting the mark, or
 - 6.3.3.4.3 ignorance of how to hit the mark, or
 - 6.3.3.4.4 ignorance of our true identity and essence.
 - 6.3.3.4.5 If a person has the knowledge of his/her true essence, knows what the mark is, knows the value and benefits of hitting the mark, and knows how to hit it, they will not miss the mark.
 - 6.3.3.4.6 The loving response to missing the mark is patient instruction, not punishment, condemnation, or damnation.
- 6.3.3.5 God, being **unconditional love**, will not punish, condemn, or damn those who miss the mark; it is not in His nature.
- 6.3.4 I believe “evil” is the result of someone who knows what the mark is but who chooses to *deliberately* miss the mark anyway.
 - 6.3.4.1 Evil is not part of the spiritual “genetic” nature of the person.
 - 6.3.4.2 Evil becomes a choice when a person does not know the value and benefits of hitting the mark.
 - 6.3.4.3 Evil becomes a choice when a person does not choose to learn how to hit the mark.

- 6.3.4.4** Evil becomes a choice when a person does not choose to believe he/she is deserving of the benefits of hitting the mark.
- 6.3.4.5** Evil becomes a choice when a person does not choose to believe he/she is capable of hitting the mark.
- 6.3.4.6** Evil is the result of a person choosing not to accept his true identity and essence.
- 6.3.4.7** God, being **unconditional love**, will not punish, condemn, or damn those who miss the mark for whatever reason; it is not in His nature.
- 6.3.4.8** Even Jesus, while hanging on the cross, did not ask God to forgive the “evil” **actions** of those responsible for his death; Jesus asked God to forgive them for “**they know not what they do.**”
- 6.3.4.9** Missing the mark requires the response of patient instruction, not punishment, condemnation, or damnation.
- 6.3.4.10** There are no “evil” people; there are no people who are not of **THE S.O.U.L.** There are people who lack faith in **THE S.O.U.L.**, who are temporarily unaware of their true essence, or who have chosen to attempt to separate themselves from **THE S.O.U.L.**; but ultimately, the truth will be made known to each of us.
- 6.3.5** What then of justice?
- 6.3.5.1** “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21).
- 6.3.5.2** In the physical world, justice is measured in a multitude of ways, from providing a pardon to performing capital punishment, and most people believe that justice is important to maintaining an orderly and safe society.

6.3.5.3 In the spiritual world, there is no need for justice because injustice does not exist. **Unconditional love** holds no grievances to be rectified.

6.4 I have found many philosophies that have helped me change my perceptions and beliefs. Maybe some of them will help you too.

6.4.1 “Nothing is either good or bad but thinking makes it so.”
—Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 2, scene 2.

6.4.1.1 See **6.0 Farmer** “Who Knows What Is Good or What is Bad?”

6.4.1.2 See **6.1 The Piano**

6.4.2 All things work together for good—Romans 8:28

6.4.3 I think, therefore I am (Descartes); therefore, I am what I think
(*Jeanno Marie*).

6.4.4 Like begets like. Positive thoughts beget positive thoughts. Joy begets joy. *Your Life: Why It Is the Way It Is and What You Can Do About It—Understanding Universal Laws* by Bruce McArthur (A.R.E. Press).

6.4.5 No one can make you angry or sad or happy; you alone are responsible for your feelings and actions; you alone choose your beliefs.—*Jeanno Marie*

6.4.6 We may not be able to control what happens to us, but we can control how we choose to respond to it.

6.4.7 The greatest discovery of any generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes.—William James

6.4.8 I discovered I always have choices and sometimes it’s only a choice of attitude.—Anonymous

6.4.9 Men do not trip on mountains, they stumble on stones.—Chinese proverb

- 6.4.10** The trouble is, if you don't risk anything, you risk even more.—Erica Jong
- 6.4.11** God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference—Serenity Prayer.
- 6.4.12** We are all faced with magnificent opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations.—Charles R. Swindoll
- 6.4.13** A brook would lose its song if God removed the rocks.—Barbara Johnson
- 6.4.14** Minds are like parachutes—they work best when open.—Thomas Dewar
- 6.4.15** It is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves.—Edmund Hillary
- 6.4.16** Fear is the darkroom where negatives are developed.—E. L. in the *AA Grapevine*
- 6.4.17** Never look down on anybody unless you're helping them up.—Jesse Jackson
- 6.4.18** Be patient with everyone, but above all with yourself.—St. Francis de Sales
- 6.4.19** If we try and fail, we have temporary disappointment. If we don't try, we have permanent regret.—Bern Williams
- 6.4.20** The greatest mistake a man can make is to be afraid of making one.—Elbert Hubbard
- 6.4.21** The most important thing about having goals is having one.—Geoffrey F. Abert
- 6.4.22** Don't bother to give God instructions; just report for duty.—Corrie ten Boom
- 6.4.23** A problem is a chance for you to do your best.—Duke Ellington

- 6.4.24** Vision is the art of seeing the invisible.—Jonathan Swift
- 6.4.25** Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.—Jesus
- 6.4.26** A stumble may prevent a fall.—English proverb
- 6.4.27** Those who bring sunshine to the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves.—James Matthew Barrie
- 6.5** Sometimes, if we really do try to walk in someone else's shoes (my mother used to say moccasins because she was part Cherokee), we can change our perceptions and thus have our feelings and our reactions change as a result.
- 6.6** Another way to change our perceptions and beliefs is to invite our soul into our minds and hearts. If we choose to believe that every person's soul is pure, that every person is a child of God, and that any behavior that is not of **unconditional love** is a behavior based on fear, and if we choose compassion over any other reaction, we will find ourselves interacting with people differently.
- 6.6** Compassion does not ignore negative behavior. Compassion does not dismiss negative behavior. Compassion can even insist on educational, equitable consequences for negative behavior. Compassion puts negative behavior in its proper place and then handles it in a loving way, a way without a punitive intent but rather with an intent to help a person grow spiritually and to help ourselves grow as well.
- 6.7** Our thoughts are the foundations to the creation of our realities. We are the total accumulation of all our thoughts. If we continually choose to seek out and think negative thoughts, we will become negative. If we continually choose to seek out and think positive thoughts, we will become positive. If we continually seek **THE S.O.U.L.**, we will find, understand, live, and become one with **THE S.O.U.L.**

Personal Perspective No. 5

The Wages of Sin is Death—Or Is It?

“The wages of sin is death” is a very important statement to examine. Each of the key words needs to be defined spiritually, or else we may assume the meaning is of the physical world.

It is important to remember Jesus spoke in symbols, metaphors, analogies, allegories, and parables. He wanted all his listeners to make the parallels between the world they knew and the world he came to show them.

Wages in the **physical** world is your payment for the job you have done.

Wages in the **spiritual** world is the consequence of your choices.

Sin for most people today means a wrong action, thought, or word worthy of punishment; *wrong* is based on a person’s understanding of what God would consider wrong.

Sin is literally translated, from the time of Jesus, as “missing the mark.” Missing the mark can be equated reasonably with *wrong* but not necessarily with *punishment*. I was a teacher for over thirty years. Many students got many things *wrong* in their work, but I never punished any of them. When they missed the mark, I corrected them and showed them how to hit the mark. I was patient and found different ways to show them how to hit the mark until we found success.

God is a very patient teacher!

Death in the **physical** world means loss of physical life.

Death in the **spiritual** world means separation from God.

Each time we miss the mark *and do not attempt to correct it*, we move further away from God. It is important to understand that *God never moves*—we do! If we want to come closer to God, we just continue to work to hit the mark, and the mark is **unconditional love**.

God is always rooting for us. He is our greatest fan, and He knows we will hit the bull’s-eye one day and find ourselves one with Him again.

Section Seven

Can We Really Forgive?

Can We Really Forgive?

What Is *Forgiveness*?

Anecdote 6: “Personal Struggle”

Story of the Amish

What Is the “Mark” We Are Striving to Hit?

What Is the Key to Peace and Joy?

Personal Perspective 6 and 7:

Faith

From Victim to Victor

SECTION SEVEN

Can We Really Forgive?

7.0 Forgiveness—nothing is more vital to peace and joy than forgiveness.

7.1 *A Course in Miracles: Lesson 122*

“What could you want that forgiveness cannot give? Do you want peace? Forgiveness offers it. Do you want happiness, a quiet mind, a certainty of purpose, and a sense of worth and beauty that transcends the world? Do you want care and safety, and the warmth of sure protection always? Do you want a quietness that cannot be disturbed, a gentleness that never can be hurt, a deep, abiding comfort, and a rest so perfect it can never be upset?”

7.2 “All this forgiveness offers you, and more.”

7.3 Forgiveness is of the spiritual world, and it begins with forgiving yourself.

7.3.1 Acknowledge your error. (See *sin* in section 10.7.4.3.)

7.3.2 Know that now, in the eyes of **THE S.O.U.L.**, your error is not seen.

7.3.3 Acknowledge your error to the one whom you perceive you have harmed and express your sorrow.

7.3.4 Let go of guilt.

- 7.4** The question then becomes, “How do we forgive others of that which we see as wrong, unjust, unfair, hurtful, immoral, illegal, and/or unethical?”

Anecdote 6: “Personal Struggle”

- 7.4.1** When I was fourteen years old, I was desperately struggling to forgive my biological father. He had frequently been physically abusive, emotionally abusive, and psychologically abusive; but then he behaved in a sexually inappropriate way, and I completely lost all trust and faith in him as a father.
- 7.4.2** Having been raised a Christian, and having come to know Jesus personally as my best friend from the time I was four years old, I knew that I “should” forgive my father; but I had absolutely no clue as to how to do that!
- 7.4.3** So as usual, I prayed—I sat down with Jesus and had a heart-to-heart conversation. “Okay, Jesus, here’s how I feel. I hate Dad.”
- 7.4.4** (In my heart-to-heart conversations with Jesus, I am always totally honest, even about my ugliest feelings, wishes, and desires. I don’t try to hide my anger, my fears, and my thoughts. I figure He knows my heart and my mind anyway, but more importantly, I know He does not condemn me. He loves me unconditionally and is there to guide me back to the path of peace and love.)
- 7.4.5** My conversation continued, “I know you would like me to forgive my father, but how do you suggest I go about doing that? I have no clue where to begin.”
- 7.4.6** So He said, “Do some research, Jeanne. How did I handle forgiveness?”

So I did research; I found and read each incident in the Bible in which Jesus forgave, and . . .

- 7.5 I came to realize four rather “shocking truths” about forgiveness.**

- 7.5.1 Jesus never forgave!**

7.5.2 Forgiving is not something we can do!

7.5.3 Forgiveness is the result of what we stop doing!

7.5.4 In the spiritual world, forgiveness is not necessary!

Anecdote 6 (continued)

7.6 When I did the research throughout the four Gospels of the **Holy Bible** (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), I found that . . .

7.6.1 Jesus actually never forgave anyone.

7.6.2 Jesus would say, “Your sins are forgiven,” but He never said the words, “I forgive you.”

7.7 It seemed to be a very deliberate choice on Jesus’s part to say “Your sins are forgiven” even when challenged by the Pharisees. I contemplated this insight for a long time.

7.7.1 Then a realization came rather suddenly: **Jesus never said “I forgive you” because He never judged anyone. He never condemned anyone!**

7.7.2 Jesus never forgave because he saw nothing to forgive in anyone.

7.8 Jesus did not even condemn the ones who nailed Him to the cross.

7.8.1 Jesus asked his father to forgive the ones who had condemned Him and nailed Him to a cross.

7.8.2 More importantly, Jesus asked that they be forgiven—**not for what they had done**, but rather for **not knowing** what it was they were doing. In other words, they were missing the mark and Jesus was asking His father to provide loving instruction not vengeful destruction.

7.9 I came to realize the following:

7.9.1 If I did not condemn my biological father, there would be nothing to forgive.

- 7.9.2** I came to realize that “to forgive” is not something we can do; it is the result of what we stop doing. *When we stop condemning, forgiveness happens.*
- 7.9.2** I came to realize that I had to relinquish my condemnation of my father’s behavior.
- 7.10** So I asked, “How do I relinquish condemnation when I know that my father’s behavior is wrong?”
- 7.10.1** Jesus asked, “Does something, which does no harm, require forgiveness?”
- 7.10.2** I said, “No, but my father’s actions have done harm to me.”
- 7.10.3** You are spirit; your spirit is invulnerable. Everything that happens in the earth realm can be used to bring enlightenment as to your true identity.
- 7.10.4** If something works for your good, then it is not harmful.
- 7.10.5** “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28).
- 7.10.6** You can choose to look at something in a positive way, or you can choose to look at something in a negative way.
- 7.10.7** If you look at every event in your life through the prism of unconditional love, your spiritual purpose in this life—if you choose to see everything in life as either a confirmation of your unconditional love or a pathway to living unconditional love—then every event becomes an event for your good, no matter how “bad” it may look through your physical eyes or your mind’s perspective or your human emotions. If you live in the spirit, if you live in love, you will see the positive impact of each event in your life as a pathway to unconditional love.
- 7.11** I came to realize that there are no levels of faith; there are no degrees of faith—either you have faith or you do not.

- 7.11.1** That is why Jesus said to his disciples when they failed to heal a child and they asked Him why they could not heal the child he replied, “Because of your unbelief. If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matthew 17:20).
- 7.11.2** The mustard seed is the smallest, or among the smallest seeds; that is how little the faith need be in order to move mountains because either one has faith or one does not. The size is irrelevant; the presence is everything.
- 7.11.3** So on faith alone, I came to believe that, in some way, all the things happening to me were for my good. I did not know how; I just knew that it was true.
- 7.11.4** So I said, “Okay, Jesus, I choose to find a way to stop judging or condemning my father. I choose to have faith that what happens to me is for my good.”
- 7.11.5** Suddenly, I was bathed in a warm and loving peace. The struggle was not completely over. It took time and continued prayer for me to completely relinquish all condemnation and feelings of hate, and then my father would do something else that would require the same process again. It takes practice and determination to get to the point where that warm and loving peace can no longer be disturbed, but it is possible, I know, and I am glad I have walked that sometimes rugged path.
- 7.12** I learned that forgiveness is not of the physical world; it is not something that we can do physically, though it can be expressed physically in a hug, a look, a word.
- 7.13** I learned that forgiveness is not of the mental world.
- 7.13.1** Forgiveness is not logical. It would be insane to continue to judge something as wrong and also relinquish condemnation.
- 7.13.2** The mental world can offer understanding. Through understanding, we may choose to pardon someone, which is to relinquish

punishment or consequences; but that is different from relinquishing condemnation.

7.13.3 To pardon can sometimes be a logical choice; forgiveness is not logical.

7.14 I learned forgiveness is not of the emotional world. Forgiveness is not an emotion, though forgiveness can be expressed in empathy, compassion, and ultimately joy.

7.15. I learned that forgiveness is of the spiritual world.

7.15.1 The spirit is pure, invulnerable, eternal, infinite, **unconditional love**; no one can hurt our soul in any way. Pain can be of the body, of the mind, or of the heart, but not of the soul; the soul is not subject to the need to forgive.

7.15.2 There is no condemnation in the spiritual world; there is only **unconditional love**.

7.16 The Amish

7.16.1 On October 2, 2006, an armed gunman entered an Amish school, killed five young girls, and then killed himself. What the Amish did next is a marvelous example of how forgiveness works.

7.16.1.1 Physical comfort: they chose to comfort, not only one another, but also the wife and children of the man who killed their children.

7.16.1.2 Mental understanding: though they could not understand the events in this man's life that led him to such a horrendous action, what they did understand is that the killer had not come to know God's love or he would not have been able to do what he did.

7.16.1.3 Emotional compassion: The Amish offered compassion to the wife and children of the killer; they invited the killer's family to the funerals of the girls and attended the funeral of the killer. They also said that they were

sad that they had not been able to help the killer find the peace and comfort of a loving relationship with God.

7.16.1.4 Spiritual unconditional love: Their response was, “We think it’s all in God’s hand . . . If you have Jesus in your heart and he has forgiven you . . . [how] can you not forgive other people?” (ABC News, October 3, 2006).

7.17 I have learned that many of our struggles with forgiveness come from our attempt to find ways to forgive in the physical world or to forgive mentally or to forgive emotionally, and we wonder why it does not work. It does not work because forgiveness is a part of our spiritual faith that all things work for our spiritual well-being while we still perceive ourselves as bodies with a soul. Forgiveness is unnecessary when we perceive ourselves as invulnerable souls creating or dreaming or acting in a human experience. In the spiritual world, it is not possible to perceive anything to be worthy of condemnation.

7.17.1 It is only through the womb of faith that forgiveness can be born.

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7.17.2 Without faith (a belief without evidence, which becomes a knowing without the possibility of doubt), **unconditional love** cannot exist; without **unconditional love**, forgiveness cannot exist.

7.18 Does something that causes no harm require forgiveness? No.

7.18.1 I do not need to judge anyone or anything in my life as “bad” if it has no negative effect. Since all things ultimately work for my *spiritual* good and my spiritual edification, forgiveness is not needed.

7.18.2 I came to realize that “to forgive” is *not* something that I can *do*. Forgiveness is the result of what I *stop doing*; **forgiveness happens when I stop condemning.**

7.18.3 So since Jesus never personally condemned, he never needed to forgive.

7.19 How did Jesus know that a person’s sins were forgiven?

7.19.1 THE Spirit of Unconditional Love does not condemn; it edifies.

7.19.2 God is THE Spirit of Unconditional Love.

7.19.3 Therefore, God does not condemn; He edifies.

7.19.4 Jesus knew that God does not condemn. He knew all sins are forgiven because they are not “real”—they have no effect on our true identities, which are spirit.

7.19.4.1 The actual translation of the word *sin* is “to miss the mark.”

7.19.4.2 God, as exemplified by Jesus, does not punish those who miss the mark. He loves them, accepts them, and teaches them how to hit the mark by revealing their true identities to them.

7.19.4.3 The **mark we are to hit** is **not** the letter of the law.

7.19.4.3.1 “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment” (Matthew 22:37-38).

7.19.4.3.2 “And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:39).

7.19.4.3.3 “**On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets**” (Matthew 22:40).

7.19.4.3.4 “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Jesus said this when He was challenged for breaking a law of the Sabbath.

7.19.4.3.5 “**Muddy Road**” (See section 5.1.2.)

7.20 *The mark we are to hit is unconditional love.*

7.20 Jesus, and other prophets as well, came to demonstrate that the world we see with our physical eyes is not of great importance.

- 7.20.1** Jesus did not come as a warrior determined to defeat the Romans; He came as the Prince of Peace to show people how to rise above the oppression of the Romans by finding peace and freedom within.
- 7.20.2** Jesus had no desire to kill His enemies; He came to “conquer” them with love.
- 7.20.3** Jesus did not define our purpose in terms of wealth or power or fame or justice; He defined our purpose in terms of love.
- 7.20.4** Jesus did not come in fear of death; He knew that physical death is not relevant to who we really are.
- 7.20.5** If we come to know that all things work together for our spiritual well-being, then we have nothing to fear and nothing to make us angry. We have no enemies. We have no death.
- 7.21** With prayer, understanding, and undying persistence, I came to see my biological father as a person who gave me the opportunity to come to grips with what **unconditional love** really is. It is easy to love those who are loveable, but loveable people are not the only ones who serve as our greatest teachers of the true meaning of **unconditional love**.
- 7.21.1** At first, I learned to differentiate my biological father as a parent in the physical world and as a fellow child of God. In the physical world, I could not love my father as a parent; he failed in that role. But as a child of God, a person who was here to learn from his mistakes, a person whose errors ultimately made me stronger spiritually than I may otherwise have been, that child of God I now love. Now that I know the truth about this world, I have relinquished *all* condemnation.
- 7.21.2** Do I wish I could have learned my lessons in a different way? Yes, but the bottom line is that when it comes to the lessons of **unconditional love**, they will often be hard—they must be hard and they must be challenging, or we will never

learn the depth and breadth of what **unconditional love** really is.

7.22 The following beliefs bring about spiritual freedom through forgiveness:

7.22.1 If we are to come to understand and live **unconditional love**, we must begin by examining our perceptions and beliefs about forgiveness.

7.22.2 A loving god does not punish someone for missing the mark; a loving god finds a way to help us hit the mark. We can do the same for others.

7.22.3 “Fear not, for I am with you always.” Those words of Jesus are more comforting to me than any others that I know.

7.22.4 I am spirit, I am love, I am peace, I am joy, I am eternal, I am infinite, I am invulnerable, I am without fear, I am one with **THE S.O.U.L.**

7.22.5 All things work together for my spiritual good.

7.22.6 God is.

7.22.7 God is love.

7.23 A Course in Miracles: Lesson 121—Forgiveness is the key to happiness.

Here (forgiveness) is the answer to your search for peace. Here (forgiveness) is the key to meaning in a world that seems to make no sense. Here is the way to safety in apparent dangers that appear to threaten you at every turn and bring uncertainty to all your hopes of ever finding quietness and peace. Here are all questions answered, here the end of all uncertainty ensured at last.

Personal Perspective No. 6

Faith

There are no levels or degrees of faith; faith is something that we have or we do not have. Jesus once said to his disciples “Oh, ye of little faith” when they could not heal a child. This statement would seem to imply that there are levels or degrees of faith.

What Jesus was saying is that they did not have faith, at that time, in their ability to heal this child. They may have had faith that they could do other miraculous things, and if they had faith that they could, then they would be able to do whatever they had the faith in that they could do.

Peter showed us better what Jesus meant when He said, “O ye of little faith.” Following is an incident recorded in Matthew 14:22-31 of the King James Version of the **Holy Bible**.

And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.

And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.

But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with the waves: for the wind was contrary.

And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.

But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

And immediately Jesus stretched for his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

Peter had total faith he could do as Jesus asked, and then he lost that faith. He did not have “just enough” faith to walk a few steps on the water and then “run out” of faith and sink.

Faith is without fear; faith is without doubt. Peter had faith he could walk on water, but he did not have faith that he could overcome the ferocious winds of the sea. That doubt and that fear caused him to lose faith in himself, in Jesus, and in God.

Faith needs no evidence. Answers are the lifeblood of faith, and all answers flow freely from God’s fountain of knowledge within each of us, and its water can quench our spiritual thirst whenever we choose to seek **THE S.O.U.L.** with the microscope of genuine desire and with an *empty cup* held out ready to be filled with **THE S.O.U.L.’s** truth. (See “**A Cup of Tea,**” section 2.5.)

Faith is a *knowing* without the *possibility* of doubt in the truths we unveil when we seek for God’s altar within.

Love and joy—fear and sorrow—are the heart’s barometers of our faith.

Peace and tranquility—despair and hopelessness—are the mind’s barometers of our faith.

Faith is the foundation for a loving relationship with God, with ourselves, and with our fellow man.

Personal Perspective No. 7

From Victim to Victor

It seems that dealing with my father's behavior laid the groundwork for me to deal with another difficult event in my life.

When I was a teenager and in college, I was raped by a man I did not know. I lived in Maryland but had gone to Texas with my cousin. She was meeting her fiancé who was in the military and stationed there at the time.

I had decided to give them some time alone, and late at night, I went to the pool of the motel in which we were staying. That choice proved to be a very unfortunate one.

I was a virgin at the time, and even though under extreme stress from the incident, I became pregnant, which I was later told was unusual.

The event happened during a time when abortions were not legal except under circumstances such as mine; but the process was a trying one. I had to go through several psychiatrists' examinations and tests in order to "qualify" for the procedure, and so by the time all of these steps were completed, I was more than three months' pregnant. The procedure by the doctors required an induced labor and delivery. I killed a child; there is no way around that.

I did not report the rape since I was from out of town and we were staying in a relatively inexpensive motel, which would not give my story much credibility. Besides, young girls were not usually believed in such cases as this. So I concluded nothing would come of reporting it.

I am sharing this event because there were many positive lessons I learned from it. The first came on the night I arrived home from the trip to Texas. When it was time to go to bed, I went to the front door and started to lock it. I had never locked my door before. I had always lived in an area that I perceived as safe; and besides, before the rape, I was very naïve.

But that night, I started to turn the bolt and came to a dead stop before my hand moved. That was a turning point in my life. I stood there and said to myself, *NO! NO! NO! I will not become any more of a victim than I already have*

been. I may have been victimized, but I do not have to remain a victim! He may have controlled my body for a while, but he will not control another moment of my life from this time forward.

I told myself, *I have a choice to go through life with fear or to go through life with love. I will not choose fear!* I chose love! I did not lock the door, and I slept like a baby for the first time since the rape occurred.

I do lock my doors today, not out of fear, but out of common sense—there is a difference. The world has changed, and I always want to be reasonable; otherwise, the rape would still be controlling my choices, just in a different way.

The rape also taught me a lot about **unconditional love** and forgiveness. I sincerely believe that all things happen for our spiritual growth and edification. Though I wish we did not have to go through such traumas to learn some of the most valuable spiritual lessons, it seems that there really is no other way sometimes.

It is easy to love when someone is loveable; it is easy to forgive when the indiscretion is forgivable, but it is only when we are challenged to love the unlovable and achieve forgiveness of the unforgivable that we really learn what **unconditional love** means.

I have relinquished condemnation of the person who raped me. I have chosen to be impervious to the apparent attack. I have learned that my soul is invulnerable and untouchable regardless of what may happen to my body. That sense of freedom brings tremendous joy. I learned that I am strong emotionally, psychologically, and most of all spiritually.

I used to wonder before all of this happened to me how some people could say, “Cancer is the best thing that ever happened to me; it taught me what the real things of value in life are.” I finally understood. The cancer had changed their perspective on life—how they saw things, how they valued things. The rape had done the same for me.

Section Eight

Fascinating Things to Read

Personal Perspective 8 and 9:

Why?

Intellectuals

SECTION EIGHT

Fascinating Things to Read

8.0 I have placed this section here, rather than the end of the book, in hopes that it will be noticed and examined carefully. I sincerely hope that all seekers of spiritual truth will choose to read, with interest and delight, at least some of the following books. They are insightful, uplifting, educational, inspiring, and an important foundation from which to launch a diligent search.

Sections Nine and Ten follow, and they contain the real nuggets of insight that my journey has provided me, but first, please indulge yourself in this detour and be sure to read the Personal Perspectives at the end of this section.

8.1 For seekers of knowledge, insights, and understanding about the major religions of the world, I strongly recommend Huston Smith's *The World's Religions*.

8.1.1 Smith discusses the following religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and the primal religions.

8.1.2 Smith captures and expresses, with tremendous respect, the essence and the spirituality of each religion without promoting it or judging it.

8.1.3 You walk away from this book with a broader understanding of God, your own beliefs, and the beliefs of others. You walk away wiser and more compassionate!

- 8.1.4** Though the language is not difficult to understand, this book requires slow, contemplative reading in order to absorb its concepts and contents.
- 8.1.5** Huston Smith has a unique perspective on the religions of the world. Be sure to read the Point of Departure section at the beginning of the book in order to get the most from his writings.
- 8.2** An excellent companion study book for *The World's Religions* is *Exploring "The World's Religions": A Reading and Writing Workbook* by Irving Alan Sparks.
- 8.2.1** Because Smith's book is often used in college religious philosophy courses, Sparks designed a wonderful study guide to Smith's book.
- 2.2.2** I know you will find this book focused, well structured, and stimulating.
- 8.3** Another excellent companion to *The World's Religions* is *The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions* compiled and organized by Philip Novak.
- 8.3.1** I have not read all of the selections in this book, but the ones I have read are wonderful reflections of the beauty and spirit of the religious philosophy they represent.
- 8.3.2** I recommend that, while reading a section in Huston Smith's book, you select a sampling of the variety of sacred writings presented in Philip Novak's feast of fabulous literature.
- 8.3.3** For example, I found the Hadith section of the chapter on Islam very inspirational, a small portion of which follows.
- 8.3.3.1** "No one is a true believer unless he desireth for his brother that which he desireth for himself.
- 8.3.3.2** "Do you love your creator? Love your fellow-beings first."
- 8.3.3.3** "Kindness is a mark of faith: and whoever hath not kindness hath not faith."

- 8.3.3.4** “All God’s creatures are His family; and he is the most beloved of God who doeth most good to God’s creatures.”
- 8.3.3.5** “What actions are most sacred? To gladden the heart of a human being, to feed the hungry, to help the afflicted, to lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful, and to remove the wrongs of the injured.”
- 8.4** For seekers of a loving Christian faith, *If Grace Is True: Why God Will Save Every Person* will be very enlightening and spiritually rewarding.
- 8.4.1** If you are interested in finding a book that presents a caring, nonjudgmental side of Christianity (the side that I think Jesus himself would like us to know), then I know that you will enjoy reading *If Grace Is True: Why God Will Save Every Person* by Philip Gulley and James Mulholland.
- 8.4.2** The book is easy to read and to understand. It is logical, reasonable, and very interesting. Its real-life stories and examples help make the philosophy come alive for the reader.
- 8.4.3** Be sure to read the portion that discusses the authors’ approach to this book; it is quite unique.
- 8.5** For seekers who like logical, straightforward thinking, try reading *Handbook to Higher Consciousness* by Ken Keyes, Jr.
- 8.5.1** This book is wonderful for those individuals who prefer a much more structured approach to spiritual evolution.
- 8.5.2** There are practical tools and methods to help you change (if you want to), presented in a logical order with logical justifications and rationale that can be implemented immediately and successfully.
- 8.5.3** The book is easy to read. It can be read quickly, but it is really intended to be read slowly and contemplatively. It is more of a guide, a study book, so going back to it frequently for reminders is recommended.
- 8.6** For new age thinkers and for those who scoff at new age thinking but are able to “empty their cup,” *Story of Edgar Cayce: There Is a River* by Thomas Sugrue is a must.

- 8.6.1** This book chronicles the extraordinary life of Edgar Cayce, a twentieth-century seer. He was called the reluctant prophet.
- 8.6.2** He was a devout Christian suddenly confronted with a gift he could not understand, was reluctant to accept, and which he ultimately chose to share with as many people on earth as he could.
- 8.6.3** His “travels” took him all over the world while he lay on a couch in his own home.
- 8.6.4** Edgar Cayce’s life story is fascinating to say the least, and concrete, undeniable evidence of his phenomenal abilities abound.
- 8.6.5** This book is a must-read for all seekers. It will open your mind to so many spiritual possibilities. You will never forget your “experience” with this man and his rare gift that you have when you read *Story of Edgar Cayce: There Is a River*.
- 8.2** One of the many wonderful gifts the world has received because of Edgar Cayce’s life and the difficult choices he made is the two-volume book, *A Search for God*.
- 8.7.1** The following quote about these books is taken directly from the preface of *A Search for God*. Because Edgar Cayce was a devout Christian, the **Holy Bible**, Jesus, and the language of Christianity serve as the primary focus of the content.

“Try living the precepts of this book [*A Search for God*].

Here is a unique compilation of information dealing with spiritual laws of daily living. Why is it unique?

The manuscript resulted from the study and work of the original Study Group #1 of the Association for Research and Enlightenment, Incorporated, Virginia Beach, Virginia. It was written not by one person but by many individuals.

The affirmations and basic discourses under each chapter heading came from general readings given by Edgar Cayce.

Questions were asked and experiences during meditation explained in subsequent readings for twelve people.

To these individuals it brought hope, peace, a better understanding of their fellow man and an inner joy in a greater awareness of attunement with the Creator.

There is nothing new here. The search for God is as old as man. This book is passed on in the hope that through it, during the trying times ahead, many may glimpse a ray of light; that in other hearts it may awaken a new hope and vision of a better world through application of His laws in daily life.”

8.7.2 The following topics are covered very well in these two volumes and are worthy of deep consideration.

8.7.2.1 Meditation (a very good discourse on this topic), cooperation, know thyself, know thy ideal, faith, virtue and understanding, patience, love, opportunity, desire, destiny (of body, mind, and soul), knowledge, wisdom, happiness, and spirit.

8.7.2.2 These two volumes are a fabulously practical guide to living each day in a loving, caring, spiritual way.

8.7.2.3 These two small books contain authentic, genuine insights from twelve people who worked together and, individually, to live the principles they discuss.

8.8 Many wonderful books have sprouted from the seeds of Edgar Cayce’s revelations, but one of my favorites is *Your Life: Why It Is the Way It Is and What You Can Do About It—Understanding Universal Laws* by Bruce McArthur.

8.8.1 This book, more than any other I have read, presents and explains spiritual laws in a clear, concise, and logical way.

8.8.2 Just as the physical world has its laws, the spiritual world has its laws.

8.8.3 Coming to understand and apply these laws in your life will be one of the best things you have ever done for yourself, the ones you love, and the worlds in which you live each day.

- 8.8.4** The content is interesting, thought provoking, real, and extremely valuable.
- 8.8.5** I particularly like his discussion of the “ultimate truth.”
- 8.9** For those who wonder if Jesus’s words are true that we can do all that He did and more, you must read *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda. (Be sure to get the newest publication, which is a reprint of the 1946 first edition.)
- 8.9.1** Paramahansa Yogananda was born in 1893 and lived to March 7, 1952.
- 8.9.2** He presents his life in a very real, entertaining, honest way.
- 8.9.3** The reader gets to experience Yogananda’s spiritual evolution and see firsthand some of the miraculous events that happened in his life.
- 4.4.4** This autobiography is more fascinating than words can express; it is an experience, not merely a book.
- 4.4.5** I cannot recommend this book strongly enough. It is a must-read.
- 8.10** If you enjoy literature that is intriguing, captivating, thought provoking, and spiritual in nature, you will love *Siddhartha* by Herman Hesse published by MJF Books and translated by Hilda Rosner. (I like this translation best.)
- 8.10.1** The story is an easy one to follow, but the message is deep.
- 8.10.2** Rosner’s translation flows smoothly and with a very good rhythm.
- 8.10.3** The book is small but packed with thought-provoking dialogue.
- 8.10.4** The message rises slowly from the subconscious to the conscious mind and gently lingers there for a very long time.
- 8.11** If you enjoy poetic prose infused with wisdom and love, *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran is the book for you.
- 8.11.1** This book travels from the mind through the heart to the soul.

8.11.2 Kahlil Gibran brings spiritual insight to twenty-six important topics in our lives, and he does it in a very small but poignant collection of comments on each.

8.11.3 The topics are love, marriage, children, giving, eating and drinking, work, joy and sorrow, houses, clothes, buying and selling, crime and punishment, laws, freedom, reason and passion, pain, self-knowledge, teaching, friendship, talking, time, good and evil, prayer, beauty, religion, and death.

8.11.4 The following are some of my favorite lines:

8.11.4.1 “Work is love made visible.” (30)

8.11.4.2 “You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.” (20)

8.11.4.2 “Love one another but make not a bond of love: let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls.” (16)

8.11.4.3 “It is when your spirit goes wandering upon the wind, that you, alone and unguarded, commit a wrong unto others and therefore unto yourself.” (42)

8.11.4.4 “You talk when you cease to be at peace with your thoughts.” (66)

8.12 Other than the four Gospels of the **New Testament** of the **Holy Bible**, no other book has had a greater impact on my spiritual journey than *A Course in Miracles* published by the Foundation for Inner Peace.

8.12.1 The origin of the text has a somewhat unique story behind it, but I have absolutely no reservations about the truth of the content.

8.12.2 *A Course in Miracles* has three sections: the text, workbook for students, and the manual for teachers.

8.12.3 The first time I read the text, I understood about 40 percent of it.

- 8.12.4** I then did the exercises in the workbook for students, which took a year since it has a lesson per day with 365 lessons.
- 8.12.5** When I finished the lessons, I read the text again; and this time, I understood about 85 percent. I have continued to read it over the years and have gained more each time.
- 8.12.6** The content of *A Course in Miracles* reaches beyond all religious dogma.
- 8.12.7** The content can be baffling and requires a truly open mind. It asks us to accept some truths that seem to contradict our everyday realities.
- 8.12.8** Because its messages are so close and sacred to me, I cannot do any more than to ask you to explore, examine, question, and study this word from **THE S.O.U.L.**
- 8.12.9** I had been taught, through prayer and meditation, many of the same concepts revealed in *A Course in Miracles* years before the book was published, and I had been sharing those concepts while still questioning them myself.
- 8.12.10** When I read *A Course in Miracles for the first time*, I felt that I had received confirmation for the lessons that I had learned through prayer and meditation. I always question/examine my beliefs, and this book brought an end to many of my doubts.
- 8.12.11** I cannot guarantee that *A Course in Miracles* will have the same impact on you that it has had on me, but I sincerely hope that you will read it and discuss it with others, and I hope that it brings spiritual enlightenment into your life.
- 8.12.12** Marianne Williamson has written several books based on the concepts she discovered in *A Course in Miracles*; and she handles those concepts with dignity, grace, sensitivity, insight, and conviction.
- 8.13** Any reader who likes to “nibble” on the words they are consuming and likes to chew them slowly and to digest them completely will thoroughly enjoy tasting Stephen Mitchell’s translation of *Tao Te Ching* (pronounced like Dow Deh Jing). Every line is a morsel worth savoring.

(To continue the analogy . . .) The text is filled with mouth-watering juxtapositions of opposing concepts like wisdom and desire, ego and spirit, our inner selves and outer selves. It provides what, on the surface, seem to be contradictions to common sense, but upon close examine are actually pure nuggets of playfully powerful paradoxical truths. Some examples follow. Remember that these stanzas are part of a total piece of art, and so they will make more sense in the context of the whole work. I am just sorry I cannot provide more samples here; the text is awesome!

8.13.1 *Tao Te Ching* 22 (I call this “How to find joy.”)

If you want to become whole,
let yourself be partial.

If you want to become straight,
let yourself be crooked.

If you want to become full,
let yourself be empty.

If you want to be reborn;
let yourself die.

If you want to be given everything,
give everything up.

8.13.2 *Tao Te Ching* 14 (I call this “How to find wisdom.”)

Look and it can't been seen;
Listen and it can't be heard;
Reach, and it can't be grasped.

(Several verses come next; then . . .

Just realize where you come from:
This is the essence of wisdom.

8.13.3 *Tao Te Ching* 46 (I call this “How to find peace.”)

When a country is in harmony with the Tao,
the factories make trucks and tractors.

When a country goes counter to the Tao,
warheads are stockpiled outside the cities.

There is no greater illusion than fear,
no greater wrong than preparing to defend yourself,
no great misfortune than having an enemy.

Whoever can see through all fear
will always be safe.

8.13.4 *Tao Te Ching 27* (I call this “God’s compassion.”)

A good traveler has no fixed plans
and is not intent upon arriving.
A good artist lets his intuition
lead him wherever he wants to go.
A good scientist has freed himself of concepts
and keeps his mind open to what is.

Thus the Master is available to all people
and doesn’t reject anyone.
He is ready to use all situations
and doesn’t waste anything.
This is called embodying the light.

What is a good man but a bad man’s teacher?
What is a bad man but a good man’s job?
If you don’t understand this, you will get lost,
however intelligent you are.
It is the great secret.

8.14 I hope that all seekers read the **Bhagavad Gita**. The translation I like the best is the one by Stephen Mitchell published in 2000. Mitchell’s translation touched my mind, heart, and soul like no other translation has (as with all of his translations of complex texts).

8.14.1 The **Bhagavad Gita** is often misunderstood. The story (analogy) seems to be saying that God (Krishna) encourages battle, but it does not. It is teaching the message that your choice, no matter which one you make—to go to war or not—must not be made on emotions like fear or sorrow but rather on devotion to God.

- 8.14.2** After teaching Arjun all the reasons to go to war without fear and sorrow, he says, “Thus I have taught you the secret of secrets, the utmost knowledge: meditate deeply upon it, **then act as you think best**” (Verse 18:63). Krishna then goes on to say that regardless of Arjun’s choice, as long as his focus is on Krishna, that his purpose is for God, then fear not for all will be well.
- 8.15** Every seeker can benefit from exploring the writings found in *The Other Bible: Ancient Alternative Scriptures*, published by HarperSanFrancisco, a division of HarperCollins.
- 8.15.1** I have not yet conquered this text, but I am making it one of my lifetime goals.
- 8.15.2** The time I have invested in reading this book has been primarily focused on the **Gnostic Gospels**; but I am looking forward to reading **the Dead Sea Scrolls, Kabbalah**, and other sacred texts in this monstrous volume.
- 8.16** One of my most favorite books of all, because it is such a treasure trove of spiritual gems, is *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings*.
- 8.16.1** It is from *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* that I retrieved several of the parables I have included in this handbook.
- 8.16.2** I never get tired of contemplating these little jewels of wisdom, and I often turn to this book when I am looking for an example of a concept I want to demonstrate.
- 8.17 Quantum physics/mechanics: rather than books, I would recommend viewing *The Elegant Universe* for free online: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/elegant/program_t.html.**
- 8.17.1** This series moves the viewer from Einstein’s theories to the contemporary string theory. I have watched it several times and still do not understand everything, but I am getting the picture that there is a great spiritual revelation about to spring from the string theory that will answer many questions we have about ourselves as humans and as spirits.

8.17.2 Another interesting movie that touches on some of these same principles and concepts is *What the Bleep Do We Know!?* This movie does not hold the same credibility for me that *The Elegant Universe* does, but it is interesting, to say the least.

8.17.3 Quantum physics/mechanics may prove to be the intersection of spirit and science. It is a fascinating field. I do not profess to understand it all, but I am beginning to get chills as I see the possibilities.

8.17.4 *The Seat of the Soul* by Gary Zukav is a must-read! His book describes what the intersection of spirit and science looks like in our everyday lives.

8.18 There are many more books I could include here, and I am sure that there are books you would put on your list that I have not included here, and I am sure that there are many wonderful books out there I have yet to read. But the search needs to begin somewhere, and these books can serve as a wonderful starting point (or as great books to return to if you have not read them for a while). I sincerely pray that you explore these wonderfully inspiring thought-provoking sources of spiritual insight.

Personal Perspective No. 8

Why?

Oh, Christians, Christians, Christians, what are some of us so afraid of? Don't we know it is our own ego that is the father of our fears? Why do we let fear and ego-driven arrogance thrust us into the arms of ignorance? Why do we, as a group, often resist examining other religions? Why do we deprive ourselves of so much joy and communion with God?

I am a Christian. Jesus is my savior; He showed me the way to the Christ within—the Christ consciousness. Christ is God's voice and spiritual navigator for our souls and is embedded permanently within every one of God's children regardless of their ideology, and Christ expresses Himself through every religion. Jesus was the full embodiment, the complete personification of the Christ consciousness; but his whole purpose was to show us that we are all made of the same cloth as He, the spiritual cloth of God's royal robe. Why, why, why do we choose such narrow dogmatism that serves only to shut us away from God and from each other?

We do not have to give up Jesus to love and respect Buddha or Mohammad or Moses or Krishna or Yogananda or Zoroaster or any other missionary of God's message of love and acceptance.

My soul has been edified, uplifted, and purified by so many other religions without sacrificing my spiritual integrity or devotion to Jesus.

If you have read my commentary on the parable "Is That So?" then you have seen a perfect example of how reading a Zen Buddhist parable and a section of *A Course in Miracles* taught me a life-changing lesson of love, nonattachment, and non-violence—which, I am sure, created a huge Cheshire cat grin on Jesus' glowing face.

Years ago, it occurred to me, that if we reject examination of other pathways to truth, we essentially bind God's mouth with duct tape and plug our ears with the wax of ignorance.

I hope we choose to remove that duct tape from God's mouth and the wax from our ears, and begin rejoicing in God's freedom from bondage. Let's seek His love throughout all the ages and throughout all the cultures of the

universe, for He is there—alive and well and unfettered, patiently waiting for us to listen to *all* He *has* said *is* saying and *will* say until the end of time.

If we seek without reservation, we will experience God's miracles in Paramhansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*; we will understand God's true intentions through *A Course in Miracles*; we will grasp the wisdom of God's words in action in the life and writings of Gandhi; we will see God's magnificent face smiling in all the mirrors of his soul, each so beautifully reflected in Huston Smith's *The World's Religions*; we will hear the sound of one hand clapping in the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama; we will taste God's sweet love in the refrains of Gibran's *The Prophet*; we will delight in God's humor, wit, and wisdom with the perceptive paradoxes in the *Tao Te Ching*, and we will feel the powerful echo of God's voice in the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

It is my sincere prayer that we all will open our minds as well as our hearts and souls to all the wondrous facets of the awesome spiritual prism I call **THE S.O.U.L.** and joyfully give to God the full power of His loving voice.

Personal Perspective No. 9

Intellectuals

I have heard that some ministers tell their congregations, “Intellectuals have difficulty with Christianity.” I pondered that statement. Maybe I have misinterpreted the meaning of the statement, but since I am a Christian and I am intellectual, it spurred the following thoughts.

A statement such as that carries with it many implications.

Following are the definitions of the word *intellectual* presented in the *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary: Eleventh Edition*: “of or relating to the intellect or its use, developed or chiefly guided by the intellect rather than by emotion or experience, requiring use of the intellect” or “given to study, reflection, and speculation; engaged in activity requiring the creative use of the intellect.” It is also defined as “intellectual powers or an intellectual person.”

Based on the definitions above, I believe many members of many congregations would qualify as intellectuals. If that is true, then the statement that intellectuals have difficulty with Christianity may present the following problems:

First, the statement seems to encourage ignorance and thoughtlessness.

Second, the statement seems to insult God for giving His children a brain and then expecting His children not to use it.

Third, the statement seems to insult the members of the minister’s congregation.

Fourth, the statement seems to insult the minister himself/herself.

Fifth, the statement seems to insult Jesus, who was, Himself, an intellectual.

Jesus was a teacher, and some of the concepts He taught are very difficult ones to grasp. He used layered parables and complex analogies as His primary teaching tools; and He expected people to think about, examine, explore, discuss, question, and contemplate His ideas.

I sincerely hope that when people hear statements such as “Intellectuals have difficulty with Christianity” that they will be inspired to question the meaning

of what has been said. Since I have not been present when this statement has been made, maybe I have taken it out of context; but the important thing in seeking spiritual truth is questioning and examining, not merely accepting.

Jesus instructed everyone to love God with all of our hearts and minds and souls; so when it comes to our search for spiritual truth, I believe it is wise to use our minds to the fullest, in addition to our whole hearts and souls. It is wise to think, ponder, question, and seek without boundaries.

Xlibris

Section Nine

*Glimpses into
The Tenets of Unconditional Love:
One through Six*

Personal Perspective 10:

God Smiled

SECTION NINE

Glimpses into *The Tenets of Unconditional Love: One through Six*

The twelve tenets of unconditional love are the result of years of dedicated listening, study, prayer, experience, observation, contemplation, examination, reflection, meditation, analysis, commitment, and a strong desire to become spiritually wise and loving.

These tenets of faith are the foundation for what I have come to call
THE GOSPEL OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE.

Jeanne Marie

The First Six Tenets

- 9.0** The gospel of unconditional love is founded on twelve tenets of faith.
- 9.1** God is THE Spirit of Unconditional Love (THE S.O.U.L.).
 - 9.1.1** God is “spirit” (life force).
 - 9.1.2** God is “unconditional love.”
 - 9.1.3** Thus, God is THE Spirit of Unconditional Love.

9.2 Unconditional love is

9.2.1 Emotion that is without fear, fused with

9.2.2 Thought that is without condemnation, founded on

9.2.3 Faith that is without doubt.

9.2.4 The S.O.U.L. is *the original* life force from which all other spirits of unconditional love (*s.o.u.l.s.*) have been spawned.

9.3 The qualities of unconditional love are understanding, patience, kindness, gentleness, humility, strength, hope, faith, compassion, wisdom, infinity, and eternity.

9.3.1 Understanding

9.3.1.1 *Understanding* in the physical world means comprehending the consequences of an action within the physical and social worlds.

9.3.1.1.1 *Understanding* in the physical world is *not* synonymous with *accepting* or *concurring*.

9.3.1.1.2 Understanding in the physical world recognizes a need for appropriate consequences; however, the consequences are not to be a form of punishment, but a need for edification.

9.3.1.2 *Understanding* in the mental world means comprehending the causes and effects of feelings, ideas, words, and actions.

9.3.1.3 *Understanding* in the emotional world means having the ability to empathize with a person.

9.3.1.4 *Understanding* in the spiritual world means

9.3.1.4.1 Comprehending, without condemnation and without fear, a person's thoughts, feelings, words, and actions.

9.3.1.4.2 Grasping the purpose of an event in our lives and seeing our opportunity to grow spiritually from it.

9.3.2 Patience

9.3.2.1 *Patience* is the measurement of our faith; *impatience* is the measurement of our ego.

9.3.2.2 *Patience* is the measurement of the peace we experience as a result of our degree of understanding of the spiritual purpose a person or an event has in our life (paraphrase of Edgar Casey).

9.3.3 Kindness

9.3.3.1 *Kindness* is a measurement of our ability to perceive and meet, in a loving way, the needs of others.

9.3.3.2 *Kindness* is a measurement of our selflessness.

9.3.4 Gentleness

9.3.4.1 *Gentleness* is the measurement of our sensitivity to the vulnerabilities of others.

9.3.4.2 *Gentleness* is the measurement of the texture and the strength of the spiritual cloth in which we wrap the truth.

9.3.5 Humility

9.3.5.1 *Humility* is the measurement of our awareness of our spiritual oneness with **THE S.O.U.L.**

9.3.5.2 *Humility* is the measurement of our awe in the presence of **THE S.O.U.L.**

9.3.6 Strength

9.3.6.1 *Strength* is the measurement of our ability to see and avoid temptations that would take us away from the

love that we are and away from the love we are to live and to be.

9.3.6.2 *Strength* is the measurement of our ability to overcome fear.

9.3.7 Hope

9.3.7.1 *Hope* is the measurement of our desire for everyone to experience the peace and joy of knowing **THE S.O.U.L.**

9.3.7.2 *Hope* is the measurement of our anticipation that everyone will come to know **THE S.O.U.L.**

9.3.8 Faith

9.3.8.1 *Faith* is the measurement of our knowledge of the true essence of **THE S.O.U.L.**

9.3.8.2 *Faith* is the measurement of our oneness with **THE S.O.U.L.**

9.3.9 Compassion

9.3.9.1 *Compassion* is the measurement of our ability to comfort.

9.3.9.2 *Compassion* is the measurement of our ability to heal.

9.3.10 Wisdom

9.3.10.1 *Wisdom* is the measurement of our effectiveness in discerning and combining knowledge, truth, and compassion.

9.2.10.2 *Wisdom* is the measurement of our spiritual insight.

9.3.11 Infinity

9.3.11.1 *Infinity* is the measurement of the limitlessness of **THE S.O.U.L.** and our **s.o.u.l.s.**

9.3.11.2 *Infinity* is the destination of each loving act we perform!

9.3.12 Eternity

9.3.12.1 *Eternity* is the measurement of the timelessness of **THE S.O.U.L.** and of our **s.o.u.l.s.**

9.3.12.2 *Eternity* is the measurement of the timelessness of each loving act we perform on its journey to infinity!

9.4 What unconditional love does is lift people up, seek only itself in all things, and create everlasting peace and joy.

9.4.1 Lifts people up

9.4.1.1 **Unconditional love** focuses on the beauty and the love in others and helps them see the beauty and the love in themselves.

9.4.1.2 **Unconditional love** opens the pathway for people to experience loving others unconditionally in return.

9.4.2 Seeks only itself in all things

9.4.2.1 **Unconditional love** seeks, in all things and all people, their true essence, which is **unconditional love**.

9.4.2.2 **Unconditional love** seeks but a beautiful reflection of itself.

9.4.3 Creates everlasting peace and joy

9.4.3.1 **Unconditional love** is the peace that soothes infinity.

9.4.3.2 **Unconditional love** is the joy that tickles eternity.

9.5 The things unconditional love is free from are condemnation, doubt, fear, needs, grievances, pain, vengefulness, attack, and attachment.

9.5.1 Unconditional love is free from condemnation.

9.5.1.1 **Unconditional love** sees no need for condemnation.

9.5.1.2 **Unconditional love** does not see reasons for condemnation but, rather, sees beautiful opportunities for creating avenues to itself.

9.5.2 **Unconditional love is free from doubt.**

9.5.2.1 **Unconditional love** knows the true essence of everything and everyone; so **unconditional love** has no doubt.

9.5.2.2 **Unconditional love** knows itself.

9.5.3 **Unconditional love is free from fear.**

9.5.3.1 **Unconditional love** is founded on faith. Faith swallows up fear.

9.5.3.2 **Unconditional love** knows our ultimate destiny—peace and joy for all souls—thus, the willowy shadow of fear faces extinction in the afterglow of bliss.

9.5.4 **Unconditional love is free from needs.**

9.5.4.1 The word *need* implies lack; **unconditional love** experiences no lack, and so it has no needs.

9.5.4.2 **Unconditional love** sees **THE S.O.U.L.** in all things and requires nothing else to know fulfillment.

9.5.5 **Unconditional love is free from grievances.**

9.5.5.1 Since **unconditional love** is invulnerable, there is nothing for which to hold a grievance.

9.5.5.2 Since **unconditional love** knows all is eternal, there is nothing to grieve.

9.5.6 Unconditional love is free from pain.

9.5.6.1 Since **unconditional love** knows that all things work together for our spiritual well-being, it feels no pain.

9.5.6.2 Since **unconditional love** is the great healer, it feels no pain.

9.5.7 Unconditional love is free from vengefulness.

9.5.7.1 The word *revenge* implies a need to retaliate for an injury, but **unconditional love** is invulnerable, so there is never a need for revenge.

9.5.7.2 **Unconditional love** views attack as merely a symptom of a person's misunderstanding of who he/she is—a symptom which requires correction in the other's self-awareness, not revenge.

9.5.8 Unconditional love is free from attack.

9.5.8.1 Since **unconditional love** is invulnerable, no attack can be successful.

9.5.8.2 Since **unconditional love** sees only itself, it recognizes only the love in others; thus, it sees nothing to attack.

9.5.9 Unconditional love is free from attachment.

9.5.9.1 *Attachment* means “**linked to by a strong need or desire**” (*Jeanne Marie*).

9.5.9.2 Since **unconditional love** neither requires nor desires anything for itself, no attachment to anyone or anything is established.

9.5.9.3 Since **unconditional love** knows that attachment is a form of confinement of the object of its love and of itself, it does not choose to be attached.

- 9.5.9.4 Since **unconditional love** is aware of the eternal nature of all souls, attachment, as a result of a fear of loss, is not necessary.
- 9.5.9.5 Since **unconditional love** is spiritual, it does not attach itself to things of the physical, emotional, or psychological worlds; and since it is in constant contact with **THE S.O.U.L.**, it has no need for attachment to anyone or anything else.
- 9.5.9.6 Lack of attachment does *not* mean lack of loving someone; it means loving someone without fear of loss.
- 9.5.9.7 Since **unconditional love** is understanding, patient, kind, gentle, humble, strong, hopeful, faithful, compassionate, wise, infinite, and eternal, it is without need for attachment.

9.6 Each person is a child of THE S.O.U.L. and is, thus, created spiritually in THE S.O.U.L.'s image.

- 9.6.1 We are not our physical bodies; bodies are merely vessels we use to carry the refreshing, nourishing nectar of **unconditional love**.
- 9.6.2 If we see ourselves, or others, as something less than **unconditional love**, we are misperceiving.
- 9.6.3 We are invulnerable, we are eternal, we are infinite, we are joy, we are peace, we are **unconditional love**.

Personal Perspective No. 10

God Smiled

As a child, I met Jesus, and I liked him a lot. And I did not know why someone would be so mean as to tempt Him to make bread out of stones when He was so hungry. God saw my intense little frown and He smiled.

As a teenager, I came to know the love of God, but I got angry that He allowed Satan to create such pain and chaos in the world. God saw my feisty frustration and He smiled.

As a young adult, I came to love my fellow man and thus sought a way to help all of us conquer the power of Satan. God saw my dedicated desire and He smiled.

As an adult, I came to love God and thus sought in prayer to receive understanding. God saw my deep devotion and He answered:

Satan is a metaphor. Satan is not a force outside yourself; Satan is a force within. Satan is a symbol of your ego, an ego that creates your greatest temptations, an ego that fights against Me to preserve its own existence, an ego that manufactures all the chaos in the world.

I do not resist your ego, for to resist says there is something to fear, to resist energizes, to resist implies a need to control, to resist says the ego is a worthy adversary, to resist denies free will and thus denies Me of being loved freely by My children. I do not resist.

I know your struggles, and I know that when you do come to understand the true enemy of your peace and joy and love—an enemy you have chosen as your ruler, neither a ruler of My making nor a ruler of My choice—you will awaken from your nightmare and you will hear my loving voice.

“Ah, so,” I said, and I smiled.

We all are angels with a free will.

With this awakening, the possibility to conquer evil became real. I had come to know my enemy. The struggle would not be easy; in fact, it rages yet today, but I am winning; slowly but surely, I am winning. And God is smiling.

Section Ten

*Glimpses into
The Tenets of Unconditional Love:
Seven through Twelve*

Personal Perspective 11 and 12:

Something to Think About

One Hand Clapping

SECTION TEN

Glimpses into *The Tenets of Unconditional Love: Seven through Twelve*

The twelve tenets of unconditional love are the result of years of dedicated listening, study, prayer, experience, observation, contemplation, examination, reflection, meditation, analysis, commitment, and a strong desire to become spiritually wise and loving.

These tenets of faith are the foundation for what I have come to call
THE GOSPEL OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE.

The Last Six Tenets

10.1 THE S.O.U.L. is the only spiritual source of energy; there is no opposing force.

10.1.1 I used to believe there was God (**THE S.O.U.L.**) and there was Satan.

10.1.1.1 I believed **THE S.O.U.L.** must have an opposite and equal force just as do the forces in the physical world.

10.1.1.2 I believed God, who is the father of love, had an opposite, Satan—the father of fear—just as in the emotional world, love and fear are opposite and equal forces.

10.1.2 Now I have come to a different conclusion.

10.1.3 The illusion of spiritual duality

10.1.3.1 When seeking the truth, it is vital to relinquish attachment to current beliefs. Attachments are the primary obstacles to finding the truth.

10.1.3.2 Science demonstrates that it is not possible to create or destroy energy; we can merely change the form in which the energy is expressed. I believe this is true of our souls as well.

10.1.3.3 **THE S.O.U.L.** created us as individual bundles of energy, which embody all of **THE S.O.U.L.**'s spiritual and mental characteristics. Our essence is intelligent **unconditional love** energy, which cradles free will. All energy is of God.

10.1.3.4 We cannot be destroyed, only reshaped. Much like a balloon, the contents (air) stays the same, but the shape of the balloon is molded to reflect the demands of our will. As we press on one portion of the balloon, the air shifts to another part of the balloon creating a different shape. It is our will that shapes our unconditional love energy.

10.1.3.5 **Unconditional love** is the “air” in our spiritual balloons. With free will, we get to shape our spiritual balloon any way we want; we can give it the horns of the devil or the wings of an angel, but the energy of each is the unconditional love energy with which we were made.

10.1.3.6 There is no separate energy for us to fight, or energy that is an enemy of God. Our egos are what we create when we change the shape of our souls with our free will. Our battle is internal, not external.

10.1.3.7 As we change our shape, we are moving farther from the shape that God created us to be and the shape

that reflects his love. We begin to become confused and frightened; we lose sight of our true identity.

- 10.1.3.8** If we choose, we can return to our original shape. When we seek God, we begin to shift the energy of our unconditional love from the “ugly” image we have made back to the beautiful shape God created us to be.
- 10.1.3.9** Our internal battle, while we are in the physical world, rages between our ego and our s.o.u.l.
- 10.1.3.10** However, **THE S.O.U.L.** (God) does not engage in our battle unless He is invited. **THE S.O.U.L.** watches the evolution move from “ego” back to “s.o.u.l.” with patience and love. **THE S.O.U.L.** knows the ending of our story; we will all ultimately be aware of our true essence again and will no longer seek a different shape to fulfill the superficial desires of the ego.
- 10.1.3.11** **THE S.O.U.L.** does not resist our ego’s efforts to be powerful or wealthy or famous since it knows that ultimately we will discover that those things are merely illusions. They hold no substance. They do not bring us to our ultimate destiny of bliss in the arms of **THE S.O.U.L.**
- 10.1.3.12** Free will comes down to one choice, the consequences of which determine the quality of life. We will choose to shape our souls to match that which God created us to be, or we will choose to shape our souls to meet our ego’s demands.
- 10.1.3.13** The source of the energy that fuels our choice is the same in each case; it is the **unconditional love** energy from which we are created. That is what God sees in us at all times; he knows our essence has not changed, only how we have chosen to shape our essence changes.
- 10.1.3.14** More and more each day, I find reason to choose **THE S.O.U.L.** over the ego, forgiveness over

condemnation, love over fear, unity over separation, peace over despair, and joy over sorrow.

10.1.3.15 All that **THE S.O.U.L.** has asked of us is to love Him with all our heart and mind and soul and to love our fellow man as ourselves.

10.1.3.16 I have joyfully chosen to shape my balloon like wings.

10.1.4 What of Satan?

10.1.4.1 I have come to believe that *Satan*, *sin*, and *evil* are not separate forces in battle with **THE S.O.U.L.**; they are symbols of the natural consequences we face when we choose the ego over **THE S.O.U.L.**, and the ego is energized by a misguided application of our **unconditional love** energy.

10.1.4.2 *Satan* is the symbol of our ego and is thus the symbol of our temporary memory loss of who we really are and of our true inheritance. The ego is energized by a misguided application of our **unconditional love** energy, which results from a misperception of our true essence (see Personal Perspective of “**God Smiled**”).

10.1.5 When I was young,

10.1.5.1 I was taught that there was God and there was Satan.

10.1.5.2 I was taught that sin was bad.

10.1.5.3 I was taught that I was born in sin; I must be bad since sin is bad.

10.1.5.4 I was taught that Jesus was the only way to God.

10.1.5.5 I no longer believe those ideas about God or Jesus or me or others.

10.2 People of all faiths, beliefs, and philosophies can discover, understand, live, and “be” unconditional love.

10.2.1 Since we are **unconditional love**, we are all capable of discovering, understanding, living, and “being” **unconditional love**.

10.2.2 Since we are **unconditional love**, there are as many ways to discover our true identities as there are people.

10.2.3 People of all faiths, beliefs, and philosophies can find, and will find, spiritual truth if they seek it.

10.3 Any person who seeks THE S.O.U.L. will find THE S.O.U.L.

10.3.1 Since **THE S.O.U.L.** is within each of us, it is always possible to discover/uncover **THE S.O.U.L.** if we seek Him.

10.3.2 Since **THE S.O.U.L.** wants each of us to uncover who we really are and wants an unobstructed relationship with us, He has given each of us the ability to find Him.

10.3.3 Since **THE S.O.U.L.** can successfully use any tools we give Him to “dig” our way to the truth, we are guaranteed success. No matter what religious philosophy we have been taught or experiences we have had, we will succeed when we seek.

10.4 Every person will achieve awareness of his/her oneness with THE S.O.U.L.

10.4.1 God does not fail.

10.4.2 God has all of eternity to wait for us to seek and find Him.

10.4.3 God is patient.

10.4.4 This concept obviously implies a belief in *reincarnation* or some other concept of the extension of *time* that allows us to grow into our awareness at our own pace and in our own *way*.

10.5 We all are always exactly where we need to be to achieve full enlightenment.

10.5.1 Every moment of every day provides an opportunity to find **THE S.O.U.L.**

10.5.2 Everything we do can be used by **THE S.O.U.L.** as a tool to find Him, no matter how “bad” the action may appear in the physical world.

10.5.3 Everything that happens to us can be used by **THE S.O.U.L.** as a tool to find Him, no matter how “bad” the incident may appear to be in the physical world.

10.6 All things work together for our spiritual well-being as we seek THE S.O.U.L.

10.6.1 If we examine everything in life through our spiritual eye, then we can see how anything that happens to us can be viewed as an opportunity to “stretch our **unconditional love** muscle” and come closer to **THE S.O.U.L.**

10.6.2 This tenet of faith is what can move any of us from victim to victor. We may be victimized, but we do not have to remain victims; and the way to become a victor is to use everything that we perceive to be “bad” as an opportunity to come to discover, understand, live, and “be” **unconditional love**.

10.6.3 **This tenet of faith is what sets us free; it is what makes us invulnerable.**

Personal Perspective No. 11

Something to Think About

I am a seeker of ways to discover, understand, live, and “be”
unconditional love.

Section 2 of this book presents the following parable; it is important to repeat it here.

“A Cup of Tea” (Reps)

Nan-in, a Japanese master during the Meiji era (1868-1912), received a university professor who came to inquire about Zen.

Nan-in served tea. He poured his visitor’s cup full, and then kept on pouring.

The professor watched the overflow until he no longer could restrain himself. “It is overfull. No more will go in!”

“Like this cup,” Nan-in said, “you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?”

One of the Most Controversial Verses in the Holy Bible

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the father, but by me” (John 14:6).

Many people who pick up this book will be Christians, so I want to take a minute to address the Christians and all others who may have some concerns about my message.

Please realize that I am not trying to dissuade anyone from his/her convictions; my goal is to help people think critically and come to their own conclusions thereafter.

Because I believe that THE S.O.U.L. can be touched by everyone everywhere and that THE S.O.U.L. can touch everyone everywhere, I believe that taking His statement literally genuinely pierces Jesus’s heart. I believe taking His

statement literally creates fear, not faith; encourages condemnation, not love; and divides us rather than unites us. These consequences are not of **THE Spirit of Unconditional Love**.

As a seeker of truth and wisdom, I would like to take a moment to examine very carefully the above statement made by Jesus.

Since Jesus rarely spoke in literal terms and nearly always used parables, analogies, and innuendo to teach his lessons, I believe it is important to listen to much of what he said with that kind of ear. Jesus spoke in terms of this physical world in order to help us understand the spiritual world.

I sincerely believe Jesus was saying that **the spirit of unconditional love** is the way, the truth, and the life, and it is **the spirit of unconditional love** that is the only way to be one with God. That is the message he came here to teach. That is what he embodied; that is the spiritual foundation of the way we are to live.

Just as I believe that Jesus was speaking figuratively when he told his disciples the bread was his body and the wine was his blood at the last supper, I believe that he was speaking figuratively when he said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

His word is the bread—the nourishment—of our souls; his blood is the spiritual life force of our souls. That is what he was giving his disciples at the Last Supper, his word and his love. **In the quote above, he was saying to them, live as I have lived—with love—without condemnation—without attachment—without fear—live in the spirit not the flesh, and you will know the creator of your soul.**

I sincerely believe that **the spirit of unconditional love** is the only way to know God intimately since that is what He is. I believe Jesus was the embodiment of that love; but I believe that that love can be, and is, realized and experienced by many people through many means other than by knowing that Jesus existed as a man and as the only savior.

Jesus said that we could do all that He did and more, that is because we have the same spiritual genes; He is our older brother whom we can trust to **show us** the way, but the way can be discovered by other means as well.

I believe that THE S.O.U.L. is love and THE S.O.U.L. is just and THE S.O.U.L. has designed a way to salvation that would save all of us—not just a select few.

“When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.” I believe **THE S.O.U.L.** has many teachers ready to appear for all of His students.

I believe that all **THE S.O.U.L.** expects of us is to sincerely seek (“Ask and it shall be given unto you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you” from Matthew 7:7), and a person will find **THE S.O.U.L.** no matter what his or her culture and/or religious teachings may be.

Jesus said in John 14:21, “He that hath **my commandments** and *keepeth* them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.”

His commandments were, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang *all the law and the prophets*” (Matthew 22:37-40; bold and italics are mine).

It is *not* necessary to know Jesus the human to know and follow these laws. People discover and live these laws all over the world—these two laws (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18) existed in Jewish law before Jesus was born; these are the Jewish scriptures (law) that Jesus was quoting to the Pharisees when they tried to trap him with their questions.

THE S.O.U.L. will not give up or give out or give in to our separation.

Paul’s Insights

Paul made it very clear in his letter to the Romans 2:13-15, “For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, *do by nature* the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: **which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience, and also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or excusing one another.**” In other words, they follow the law that God has put

in everyone's heart of hearts (their souls); and they are just before God, and the law is **THE S.O.U.L.** (italics are mine)

There is one more passage to address, **Romans 8:11-14.**

“But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his **Spirit that dwelleth in you** . . . *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God*” (italics are mine).

God has written His law in all of our hearts (souls). Everyone can know and follow the law if he/she seeks to find it and desires to live it. “There is no respect of persons with God” (Romans 2:11; meaning, no child has a greater place in His heart than any other child), so all of His children have been given what they need to find their way home.

He has given each of us the road map; we merely need to desire to seek to find the map within us and follow it. In my personal life, Jesus serves as my best travel companion, guide, copilot, and navigator as I work my way back home; but Jesus is not the only “tour guide” God gave us.

If people come to know **THE S.O.U.L.**, they will come to know the Christ—which is *God's word, who walks among God's children, dressed in many garbs*. Those who seek will come to know God Himself—**THE Spirit of Unconditional Love**.

The Path Is Narrow

Jesus said the path to God is narrow, and I agree—but not for the reasons that most Christians have come to believe. The path is narrow because it is about finding and living the most challenging (yet most freeing and beautiful) kind of love there is to experience—**unconditional love**. Choosing and living **unconditional love** requires a personal and deep commitment to a freedom from condemnation, a freedom from attachment, and a freedom from grievances; and it is **that commitment and the maintenance of that kind of love** that makes the path seem narrow.

I believe all souls will ultimately find and follow this path to **THE S.O.U.L.**

I sincerely believe that those who seek will come to know the *s.o.u.l.* of Jesus, though we may not know him by that name; we may call him Siddhartha Gautama or Ghandi or Mohammad or Krishna or Father Paul or Sister Margaret or rabbi or Uncle John or neighbor or friend or—even at some point in our lives—we may have called him enemy. But when we do, by whatever means, discover **THE S.O.U.L.**, we will come to know the *s.o.u.l.* of Jesus too.

Jesus has a special place in my heart since it was he who first showed me the peace and joy of **THE S.O.U.L.**, but I know others have come to know that love through other means as well.

Lao-tzu, purported to have authored the *Tao Te Ching*, lived before Jesus—centuries before Jesus. According to Stephen Mitchell’s preface to his translation of the *Tao*:

Lao-Tzu’s central figure is a man or a woman whose life is in perfect harmony with the way things are . . . In surrendering to the Tao [the way], in giving up all concepts, judgments, and desires, her mind has grown naturally compassionate. She finds deep in her own experience the central truths of the art of living, which are paradoxical only on the surface: that the more truly solitary we are, the more compassionate we can be; the more we let go of what we love, the more present our love becomes; the clearer our insight into what is beyond good and evil, the more we can embody the good. Until finally she is able to say, in all humility, “**I am the Tao (way), the Truth, the Life.**”

The teaching of the *Tao Te Ching* is moral in the deepest sense. Unencumbered by any concept of sin, the master doesn’t see evil as a force to resist, but simply as an opaqueness—a state of self-absorption, which is in disharmony with the universal process so that, as with a dirty window, the light can’t shine through. This freedom from moral categories allows him his great compassion for the wicked and the selfish.

Thus the Master is available to all people
and doesn’t reject anyone.
He is ready to use all situations
And doesn’t waste anything.
This is called embodying the light.

What is a good man but a bad man's teacher?
What is a bad man but a good man's job?
If you don't understand this, you will get lost,
however intelligent you are.
It is the great secret.

Without question, this reminds me of Jesus; and I can't help but think that during the missing years of his life, he may have encountered those who studied and practiced the *Tao Te Ching*. His own expression of "I am the way and the truth and the life" may have come from that knowledge and may have meant that he embodied the very philosophy that could set each of us free.

Personal Perspective No. 12

One Hand Clapping

In Zen Buddhism, the masters often use koans, spiritual puzzles, to help lead their students to an awareness that reaches beyond normal thought. One very famous koan is, “What is the sound of one hand clapping?”

There can be a multitude of answers—ranging from someone “slapping” his fingers against the palm of his hand, which imitates the sound of two hands clapping, to very esoteric answers that are meaningful only to those who create them.

“What is the sound of one hand clapping?” I believe it is a lonely sound of silence. When we are alone, no matter how loudly we may shout, we have no voice; no matter how desperately we clap, we cannot be heard.

Our spiritual purpose in life is to discover, understand, live, and “be” **unconditional love**; we cannot achieve that alone. Just as the one hand claps best when joined with another hand, we come to understand and achieve the depth and breadth of **unconditional love** best when we choose to love others.

The sound of the silent agony of one hand clapping is deafening.

Thankfully, when we achieve living and “being” **unconditional love**, the sound of one hand clapping joins with the sound of other hands clapping and becomes the peaceful, joyful sound of oneness—of unity, and when we are of one mind and one heart, there is no need for any other sound.

The Lord *will* bless you and keep you. The Lord *will* make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you. The Lord *will* lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.¹

This I know.

¹ A modification of Numbers 6: 24-26

Soon to come: *Living Unconditional Love Day-by-Day*.

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