

Acknowledgments

I want to thank Joya Birns for her support and help with pre-editing; Daniel Reynolds for his encouragement; Linda Smith, Carol Wolfley, Sheila Saunders, Paul and Alex Jackson for reviewing sections of the manuscript and offering comments and insights.

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INTRODUCTION

*I've tied the ends of the earth together,
Lift now the lid of the jar of heaven.
Close those eyes that see only faults,
Open those that contemplate the invisible
So no mosques or temples or idols remain,
So "this" or "that" is drowned in His Fire.*

Rumi

Do our individual meditations or prayers have repercussions upon our social life? Do our spiritual experiences affect our immediate circles and beyond? Can we really find a link between our personal sphere of action and the social arena? Aren't these two areas—the personal/spiritual and the social/political—traditionally separated from each other, like faith and science, in a way that justifies perceiving the spiritual person as someone who is remote from daily cares, or at least socially uninvolved?

In calling this book *A Revolution of Hope*, I challenge these assumptions. In so doing, I join a growing group of leaders, entrepreneurs, social activists, and visionaries who inform their daily choices from a wellspring of spiritual/religious commitment to their inner self. For them, the spirit is the indispensable springboard of their work and their lives, not a separate realm of existence.

Before moving into the exploration at the heart of this book, I will offer a preamble on the state of the world from the perspective of the globalization of economics that parallels, and makes manifest, the global consciousness shift happening at present. This will be a brief survey of the major trends in world affairs and their implications on the political, ecological, social, and hence spiritual dimensions of life.

The bulk of this work is divided in two parts. First, we will examine how the spirit seeks to be acknowledged in our lives, and look at the realm of spiritual experience. A peak spiritual experience can stimulate the complete reshaping of our being, serve as a milestone that puzzles us, or go almost unnoticed and remain buried for years. It can be the door to an entirely new perception of reality. The conundrum of such an experience is that it belongs to a world that our everyday language and faculties of understanding entirely fail to grasp, let alone convey to others. And yet this is only an apparent dilemma, as we shall see.

The second part of the book will look at practical applications—the many ways social renewal is already happening before our eyes, in small, almost imperceptible doses, apparently too little to make an impact. And yet there are already many of these practical approaches that together form a whole, with certain identifiable characteristics. Recognizing the strength of the parts and their link to the whole is what gives hope a tangible dimension.

The bridge between the two parts of the book is formed by an acceptance of the reality of the spirit—particularly the journey of the soul after death and that part of our soul that C. G. Jung called the “shadow”—as it is possible to understand in a phenomenological/scientific way, deprived of dogma. Through this lens, the variety of spiritual experiences now surfacing on the horizon of consciousness can coalesce and reveal their ultimate direction and meaning.

Finally, we will return to the larger picture to explore what both spiritual and experiential perspectives can contribute in terms of a modern alternative to the present model of globalization.

Beyond the Veil of Our Daily World

The contribution I want to offer the reader is the realization that spiritual experience is the basis for renewing ourselves and injecting new culture—in fact, new concrete spiritual reality—into a dying materialistic culture. We invite the reader to realize the strength that can come from an understanding of a spiritual reality of hope emerging in our time, together with the life-changing practices that can lead us toward the creation of a new culture. Understanding and practice together can create an unshakable inner reality of hope; knowledge and discipline can mutually support and strengthen each other in a synergistic fashion.

The reality of spiritual experience, whether it concerns the time before birth or after death, is slowly gaining leverage. Bestsellers, such as *Return from Tomorrow*, *Saved by the Light*, and *Embraced by the Light*, portray biographies of individuals who have acquired unshakable certainty about the existence of the light beyond and of the source of an unconditional love. Recent movies, such as *Groundhog Day*, *Run Lola Run*, *Next Stop Wonderland*, and *Sliding Doors* portray “multiple alternative” scenarios—a first layer in the understanding of the theme of destiny or karma. Others portray experiences at the intersection of

the physical and the other world, such as *Fearless, Resurrection, The Boy Who Could Fly*, and *What Dreams May Come*.

We are also surrounded by growing numbers of claims of all kinds of supernatural experiences that obviously challenge credibility. How can we find our way between the genuine and the sensational? How can we remain scientific and discriminative in a field that obviously goes beyond the classical definition of science? Is there a way to follow an “Ariadne’s thread” that allows us to detect the reality of life before birth and after death in our own life? It is my claim that we can, at least to a great extent.

We will proceed in stages to build an understanding of the experiences beyond the veil of our daily world. We will look first at what has been done from a scientific perspective. Although the classic scientific approach soon finds obvious limits in the spiritual field, it will help us in our preliminary steps. Many people have reviewed their ideas and enlarged their horizons from the weight of this evidence alone.

The “inner world” of reincarnation has become a reality for those individuals who have been able to remember in great detail dramatic events from their previous lives; so has the “outer spiritual world” for those who have had a near-death experience. More and more books are published every year on these topics. By looking at the most precise biographical and descriptive sources, we will further see that threshold experiences do not happen randomly. They are subjected to their own laws and inner logic.

Our approach will be phenomenological. According to this view, there is no need to look beyond phenomena. While a single phenomenon may seem unique and isolated, others may present another facet of the same motif and offer a clue to a solution of the mystery. From the sum of secondary complex phenomena we will try to move towards primary—primordial—phenomena. Secondary phenomena are, in this respect, like variations on the main theme of the primary phenomena. Although “primary” invokes the idea of something simpler, in this instance we are moving into the sphere of what, in a Jungian fashion, we may call “archetypal phenomena.” Thus, primary may be simpler, but in no way simplistic. In fact, this next level can be reached only with the help of a combined spiritual and scientific approach to spiritual phenomena. What lies beyond our immediate level of perception is the level of concrete reality of other individuals who

have gained access into spiritual realms. This is similar to what happens when what a child cannot understand eventually becomes a part of everyday knowledge later in life. Thus, experience from the higher ground of primary spiritual phenomena is the only way to shed light on secondary phenomena.

In so doing, two results should be achieved. First, the mass of information we present in this discussion should begin to order itself around certain sets of themes—the primary phenomena. But also, what seems the exclusive domain of spiritual knowledge alone—information without immediate apparent reference to the realm of experience—should start to acquire relevance in our daily life. From the experience of primary phenomena, all secondary phenomena will become more understandable and acquire more meaning.

This book is an invitation to travel into the expanding territory of consciousness that is evolving before our eyes in the new millennium. It is a field in motion, and what arises from this discussion seeks no conclusion. Rather, the goal is to show some signposts along the way and indicate relations between spiritual experiences available now and the kind of practical soul and social work that more and more of us can only now engage in. We are likely to realize that we are collectively stepping into a new consciousness and moving into a more perceptible grasp of the spiritual reality that exists all around us and within the physical world. Our sense of wonder will be as valued as our skepticism; our desire to embrace new ideas, as essential as our earnestness to test them.

Interested and immersed in social and ecological work ever since my youth, I have known the depth of inner despair that the perception of global reality can bring to those who seek to look at the world without the solace of utopias or pat consolations. My spiritual journey began in earnest soon after I engaged in social and ecological activism. Spirituality and engagement did not walk hand in hand all the time. At times it was barely possible to see how spirituality could have any concrete effect upon my social engagement, or how I could keep the two alive on a parallel course. Often I was tempted to completely forgo the dimension of social involvement.

It was then that I confined my social activism to my professional life and stepped into the areas of spiritual and destiny work, realizing that inner healing was needed before I could initiate the change I wanted privately to embody. It was this path that led me to explore most of the tools of personal change in the second part of this book. But the same happened in reverse as well. My spiritual practice and knowledge were put to the test. Their ultimate effectiveness seemed marginal if they could not have an effect on the larger dimensions of social change. Gradually a realization dawned—that my journey through personal darkness was the way to understand and acquire inner resources that I could not otherwise have gained. At this point hope returned and, to this day, continues to lay a path for a new way of looking at the world.

A Brief Overview

Chapter 1 looks at the impact of economic globalization on the life of the planet and on our personal lives. It forms the backdrop against which all the rest of the information offered in the following chapters acquires relevance.

Chapter 2 begins the exploration of modern spiritual experiences from a phenomenological perspective. It explores all those experiences that point to life before birth: repeated earthly lives and pre-birth experiences.

Chapter 3 takes a look at the spiritual perspectives of Cayce and Steiner, which offer us hypotheses for the integration of the material from the previous chapter, and also serve as a link to the following chapter.

Chapter 4 discusses the experiences that point to life after death. This culminates in an in-depth exploration of near-death experiences that lead us in Chapter 5 to explore the central elements of the spiritual revolution of our times, and the emergence of the “divine feminine” in the consciousness of the planet. At this level we can detect how what occurs at a spiritual level can have a determining influence over culture and social renewal.

Chapter 6 refers to techniques of experiential spirituality that emerged in the twentieth century to help us support inner changes that can eventually have an impact at the cultural and social levels. In fact, many of these have already had important but little-acknowledged impacts at the social level.

The Conclusion returns to the larger picture of globalization and expands the view on factors that contribute to an alternative model embodying spiritual renewal, social change, and global sustainable development.

Chapter 1

GLOBALIZATION, WILLING OR NOT

In the history of the collective as in the history of the individual everything depends on the development of consciousness.

Carl G. Jung

The magnitude of social, economic, and ecological challenges in the world today provides a backdrop for a perception of hopelessness that grips individuals, groups, and whole countries. The hope that exists speaks another language than the one we are accustomed to or the one most media routinely use. It is as if a large cloud were hanging over our planet and rays of light, often undetected, struggle to emerge at particular places to lend strength to groups and individuals in their endeavors. We can reach the dimensions of this picture only in degrees. At the moment it will suffice to look at the more immediate aspects and the main entities and forces at work behind the turmoil of the emerging new millennium. After investigating the spiritual revelations of the new millennium in the chapters to come, we will return to the larger dimension of the sociopolitical picture from an enriched perspective.

The twentieth century has been the century of social experimentation. All social change has been deemed justifiable to attain the goals preset by utopian thinking. Millions have died in the massive experiment called fascism and millions have died in the name of the communism developed primarily in Eastern Europe and Asia. Human life itself lost value and meaning in the pursuit of “noble” societal goals. The human being, the object of the experiment, lost its status as an individual to be considered only as part of a group, nation, or social class, sacrificed to the old god of the motherland or the new mystique of a classless society. Violence was justified, if not glorified, in a march toward a better future. This judgment is not meant as a self-

righteous criticism, but rather as a reflection of the loss of meaning that materialistic thinking has instilled in each and every human heart, at least potentially. For the first time, on a planetary scale, a large part of humanity became capable of considering human loss acceptable if the outcome were desirable. This was no longer done primarily in the name of tribe, race, nation, or religion as in preceding centuries, but in the name of social ideology. Mussolini, Hitler, Mao, Stalin and their cohorts have filled the history books with tragic human loss that was either deliberately planned or the consequence of “unfortunate mistakes.” An estimated 61 million died in Russia at the hand of the soviet government; the Chinese communist are responsible for 35 million; 21 million died in Europe through the Nazi regime. In Cambodia 30% of the population died in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge upheaval. What is this detached, rational mindset that in its extreme can coldly contemplate obtaining its goals, no matter the cost?

Economic Globalization

After the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, capitalism and socialism have learned to cohabit in a strange marriage of sorts. The hallmark of the times lies no longer in the utopias of political thinking, but on the dictates of a much more impersonal world economy. After World War II, with the accords of Bretton Woods, the stage was set for international organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the International Trade Organization, whose importance has been slowly growing to the point of progressively relegating the nation-state to a de facto subordinate role. This is the present stage of the much-debated “globalization.” Let us review some of its milestones at the end of the century.

Globalization found its ideological justification in the expression “market democracy” or “democratic markets” used by Presidents George H. W. Bush, Reagan, and Clinton to denote the assumption that democracy automatically follows the establishment of free markets and unregulated liberal capitalism. At this point, and without a counterweight, it is a one-sided form of development placed beyond the sovereignty of governments and operating according to the dictates of the market alone. It is facilitated—but most often *imposed*—by organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary

Fund in the name of economic liberalization. Its end result is the increasing chasm between industrialized nations and the marginalized economies of a rapidly sinking developing world. The response to this one-sided type of development encourages the growth of religious fundamentalism in both worlds.

Liberalization most often corresponds to policies that emancipate the pursuit of profit from any direct scrutiny of the political body and an accelerated erosion of social services that would alleviate the problem. The only visible net result of these policies lies in the drive to compete at whatever hidden cost the environment, labor, and local cultures can bear. However, behind the veneer of legitimacy and acceptance, the mantra linking free markets to competition, better services and goods, and therefore to wealth and happiness is increasingly tested. In effect, the continuous trend of destruction of all spiritual and basic human values benefits only the economic criteria of a growth completely divorced from the deeper aspects of what it means to be human.

The General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) was finalized in 1993 in Uruguay and signed in Morocco. Through this agreement emerged the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) as the body that ensures implementation of and compliance with all GATT agreements. In 1994, the WTO was given authority by about 130 world leaders to strike down any country's laws or even constitutional provisions if they presented an obstacle to its mandates. This endorsement further committed the signing countries not to pass future legislation contrary to the provisions of the agreements sanctioned by the WTO.

In most countries, as in the US, these agreements were secured with the fast-track approach, leaving the nations' lawmakers and citizens hardly any time to get acquainted with such epochal provisions, much less scrutinize and debate them. This gave the WTO the status of a global unelected government.

The provisions on investments were found in the Trade Related Investment Measures (TRIMS) agreement, which freed international investors from the legislation set in place through local state regulations. Local governments' sovereignty in matters of consumers' rights was bypassed by making labeling a barrier to trade and bringing stan-

dards down to the least demanding ones through TBT, the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade. For example, the South Koreans discovered that grain they imported from the US was contaminated by pesticides more than one hundred times over levels acceptable to them. South Korea was practically forced to accept these imports to avoid a WTO showdown.¹

As another example of the consequences of the liberalization of the circulation of capital, consider the effect of “hot money.” By 1998, an estimated \$2 trillion moving through the world’s stock exchanges was labeled “hot” because the money generated high returns in the very short term, and because the funds move quickly and disruptively in an unpredictable fashion. These movements lay at the root of Britain’s devaluation in 1992 and Mexico’s devaluation in 1995. In the 1970s and 1980s the Asia-Pacific region (Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, Korea, Indonesia, etc.) had experienced unprecedented economic growth following a model of regulated cooperation between government and business, which could be qualified as “corporatist capitalism” to differentiate it from an unregulated liberal economy. In the 1990s these countries liberalized their financial markets following the dictates imposed by the World Bank. This led to an invasion of short-term capital investing, for example, in a lucrative real estate boom at the expense of long-term productive investments. The crisis hit East Asia in 1997/98, causing the collapse of currencies and stock markets with subsequent profound economic dislocations that these countries carry to the present day. By 1998 the crisis had spread to Russia. At present, foreign investments in countries such as the Philippines draw from hot money at a rate of about 80%, with the result that the countries have little or no control over the allegiance of this financial capital to the welfare of the country.

Globalization has been dubbed an “elite globalization,” because the only protected rights are those of transnational corporations (TNCs) and of capital. Little, if any of the WTO provisions address the protection of the environment or of labor, and none of them have teeth. GATT is the only United Nations agreement that is actually enforced. Agreements taken at the Earth Summit, the Social Summit, and the Women’s Summit are all voluntary. This indicates how clearly all matters not financial or economic fall off the radar of elite globalization.

Workers' rights, women's rights, cultural and religious values, and environmental preservation are not part of any long-term consideration of the economic elites that drive globalization forward. In short, elite globalization stands at in opposition to anything that can be defined as sustainable, life-giving, and affirming development.

In the pursuit of the American model of growth, India's imports of coal have surged by more than 101,000% from 1973 to 1993. India's annual CO₂ emissions had reached 1.93 metric tons per person in 1998. Not surprisingly, by 1996 Asia became the largest contributor to greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.² And how many more of these imports would be needed in order to attain imagined goals of prosperity! From 1950 to 2001, the global use of oil increased 7.5 times, that of gas by nearly 13 times according to the Worldwatch Institute. According to this organization, ever since the early 1980s humanity as a whole has been withdrawing resources at a faster rate than the Earth can renew itself. In other words, we are drawing from the nonrenewable capital itself, no longer from the natural dividend.³

Another effect of the present kind of globalization is the destruction of ecosystems. Thailand has destroyed 87% of its mangroves, one of the world's most productive ecosystems, in the attempt to convert most of them into fishponds. In 1998 the corresponding rates of loss were 85% for India, 61% for Vietnam, and 61% for the Philippines. Furthermore, the Asia-Pacific region as a whole lost 4.4 million acres of forests from 1975 to 1986, and in the following four years reached 11.6 million acres.⁴ The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), publishing the *Living Planet Report*, estimates that we are drawing at a rate of 1.2 Earth-equivalent planets. The WWF also devises a *Living Planet Index* in order to determine the condition of the global forests and freshwater, ocean, and coastal ecosystems. According to their estimates, from 1970 to 2000 this index has decreased by 37%.⁵ The above are only a few indicative numbers illustrating the ecological devastation that affects the globe, in the illusory pursuit of the American way of life for all.

Globalization carries other destructive consequences for the social body—chief of all, the fact that it displaces farmers to cities. While the rationale is that they will be absorbed by industries that need

their help, the reality is that they join the growing ranks of unemployed in rapidly proliferating cities. Rural depopulation of developing countries ranged between 20 to 45% in most severe cases in 1995, against an average of 7% in industrialized countries.⁶

Not surprisingly, wealth disparity accompanied this global trend. In 1965 the poorest 20% had 2.3% of the global income, and the richest 20% grabbed a whopping 70%. But that was then. By 1995, the share of the richest climbed to 85%.⁷ The 1999 United Nations Human Development Report found among other things that:

- the income disparity continuum encompasses the 1.3 billion people who live on less than a \$1 per day, to the world's richest 200 who have doubled their net worth to more than \$1 trillion between 1994 and 1998.
- the income of the 2.4 billion of the world's poorest is equivalent to that of 358 billionaires.
- in comparative terms the income gap between the top richest fifth (in terms of countries) and the poorest fifth was 30 to 1 in 1960, 60 to 1 in 1990, and 74 to 1 in 1997.

The general trend we have described is not a matter of industrialized countries versus the developing world. Much the same can be said within the US itself. In 1998 roughly 50% of all after-tax income was equally divided between the top 20% and the lower 80%. The top 1% of families netted more income than the lower 38%. These data, extreme as they appear, mask further layers of economic reality in net wealth capable of generating income. Here, a small 10% of America's wealthiest families own between 70% to more than 90% of financial assets ranging from stocks, bonds and other financial obligations to real estate and productive business assets. According to a 1995 survey done by the Federal Reserve, the wealthiest 1% of the country held 42.2% of stocks; an equal amount was shared by the following 9% and little more than 15% was spread among the remaining lower 90%. In contrast, the very same lower 90% holds 70.9% of total debt and liabilities.⁸ Another index of this disparity is reflected in the fact that

between 1990 and 2000, the average CEO salary rose by 571%, and the average worker's pay by 37%.

The emancipation of capital from the economy is such that wealth is no longer necessarily linked to economic output and growth. In the same year in which Enron collapsed, former CEO Kenneth Lay collected a bonus of more than \$100 million at the same time that employees lost their jobs and a total of \$800 million from their pension funds. That this was no isolated incident is confirmed by other well-known cases and the fact that between 1999 and 2001, the CEOs of twenty-three large companies investigated by the Security & Exchange Commission earned 70% more than the average CEO.⁹ This quick survey gives us an idea of how globalization is driven from tiny elites within the US and other Western industrialized countries without even accruing a benefit to the general populations of these countries.

All of the above unwanted or unfortunate consequences of globalization are summarized in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *Human Development Reports* that have been released since 1996. They have qualified this growth through the policies of globalization in these terms:

Ruthless growth—that keeps close to 2.4 billion people in poverty. Social inequality soars to such extremes that, in 1999, Bill Gates and two of the top owners of Microsoft's net worth equaled the assets of 43 countries with a combined population of 600 million people.

Jobless growth—concurrent and constant high levels of unemployment and underemployment are possible although economies themselves can show growth. It is expected that this rate will reach up to 80% in the most affected countries.

Futureless growth—that creates the continuous erosion of renewable resources, destruction of ecosystems, environmental catastrophes, and long-term consequences such as global warming.

Rootless growth—referring to the weakening, if not destruction, of cultures, the majority of them indigenous, whose spirituality and values cannot compete with the constraints of liberalization that undermine their livelihood and resources.

Voiceless growth—that has emancipated itself from all processes of democratic determination while disregarding all human rights.

But let us look more closely at the ideological underpinnings of neoliberal capitalism that drive globalization forward. Market democracy has expanded at the social level what Darwinism has proposed at the natural level. In the realm of nature Darwin, or rather those who followed in his wake, postulated that evolution of plant and animal species is driven by the “survival of the fittest.” In contrast to this, many new developments in biology stress the role that cooperation plays in the attainment of mature, stable ecosystems and in the evolution of species. While some of Darwinism’s tenets hold true in relation to the realms of nature, they fail to address the human condition in any other realm beyond the animalistic instinctual level of the struggle for survival.

The thoroughly materialistic view that reigns in Darwinism and in much of orthodox science has given us the legacy of the picture of the human being as a complex machine. Like a machine, it is to be taken apart and reassembled; hence the idea that it can be altered, patented, and recreated is only a logical outcome of these initial premises. To counter this mechanistic view, we have to find our way not only to what is material in creation—which Darwinism at least partly addresses—but also to what is of spiritual origin.

Paralleling Darwinism, neoliberalism promotes the constructive role of unrestrained freedom of the economic forces of the market. Thus, the refrain goes, the thousands of daily economic decisions—driven by selfishly motivated, independent economic agents—will obtain the greatest good for the whole through the infallible guiding wisdom of the “invisible hand” of the market. In this view of things, all parts in the equation try to extract benefits at the expense of another.

The producers want to sell at the highest price, the intermediaries want to buy at the lowest and sell at the highest, and consumers want to buy at the lowest. In the reality of the concentration of power attained by monopolies, oligopolies, and cartels, the small competitors, intermediaries, and consumers lose the unrestrained access to the market that would establish a “fair price” for goods.

Many of the neoliberal tenets driving globalization are an insidious part of a commonly accepted mythology of our times—take the Gross National Product (GNP) and other economic indicators, for example. The idea of GNP used to propel this worldview masks many aspects of social and environmental decline under the heading of growth, since it simply measures the financial flow of goods, regardless of their destination. An environmental cleanup shows up on the positive side of the ledger for the man-hours, resources, and materials used to fight the accident that disrupted the environment. The ecological impact simply appears as a positive factor—it actually generates growth. A TNC may benefit from plundering local nonrenewable resources as in the clear-cutting of forests, and exporting both the timber and its own profits. While the local economy is devastated, all of this is presented as a gain for the corporation. Likewise, family breakdowns and the associated added costs of housing, childcare, litigation, and lawyers are claimed to contribute to the economy. So do gambling, lewd entertainment and the commodification of sex. In brief, decay and destruction are seen as positive in the balance of the economy if they imply additional economic costs, and become invisible if they don't.

The analysis of the phenomenon of globalization can be pushed to its final spiritual aspects, as Nicanor Perlas invites us to do.¹⁰ Among the provisions of the Trade Related Intellectual Property Agreements (TRIPS) of GATT is the interesting Article 27, addressing the patenting of living organisms. Previous to TRIPS, a microbe had been patented in 1980, and soon after came the patenting of plants and animals. These provisions virtually criminalize the Third World's farmers' traditional activities of seed propagation. Philippine farmers have seen their invaluable species of *lagundi*, *banaba*, and *nata de coco* patented. The same occurred to India's cherished *neem* tree. Corporations have not only patented animal specimens, but, continuing the

trend, a patent was obtained on human embryos in the early 1990s. The extension of the fragmentation of the human being into its parts allows the patenting of genetic fragments under the provisions of Article 27, as has been done in the US. Article 27 allows, among other things, the patenting of microorganisms; its provisions can be made to extend to human cell cultures and hence to the human genome.

Emblematic steps like gene patenting, ushered in by globalization, tend to pass unnoticed, compared with the magnitude of the ecological, social, and cultural crises to which public media draw much attention. However, something of untold significance makes its way into culture when the idea of the human machine finds its ultimate consecration at the cellular and atomic level, and the last drop of spirit is squeezed out of human experience. And yet, this is the really frightful horizon that humanity embraces with elite globalization. This is actually the premise from which all other steps naturally follow.

Elite globalization ultimately represents the triumph of a mechanistic view of the human being. The denial of the dimension of soul or spirit logically opens the door for the commodification of all aspects of life, be they plants, animals, or the human genome, or at larger levels, labor, local cultures, local environments, or the whole biosphere. We are called to consider that only the economic value rules their existence and measures our enjoyment of them.

On another level, the picture painted by elite globalization is one of fear and scarcity. While the implicit goal of globalization is to bring the whole world to the levels of consumption of America, it must be clear to any economically savvy analyst that this is simply not possible, even if the ecological devastation of the model were desirable at a planetary level. Another complementary aspect of the present trend of globalization, at odds with its veneer of universal concern, is the reality of growing competition for key limited resources, chief among them fossil fuels, whose supply industrialized countries struggle to control for their primary benefit. In view of these constraints and of their costly side effects, globalization can preserve only a certain level of credibility through the rhetoric of the clash of civilizations—at present the supposedly Judeo-Christian worldview placing itself more and more in opposition to Islamic fundamentalism, the pseudo-cultural confrontation that Benjamin Barber aptly names in the title of his book

Jihad vs. McWorld. It is clear, however, that any living understanding of what is spiritual and alive is simply squeezed out of globalization's equation of scarcity. The Western culture it wants to preserve is the ultimate empty spoil of worn-out tradition. Ultimately, the present model of globalization, left to itself, spells out the reality of the death of culture that philosophers and thinkers have been foreseeing and fearing since the nineteenth century.

The Birth of Civil Society

That another outcome is possible we owe to an important new global force, one that has grown from worldwide grassroots movements: Civil Society. Its presence on the world scene has been felt in stages. At the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, while official meetings were going on under tents on a stretch of beachfront, 18,000 citizens of every race, nationality, social class, and religion gathered for the Non Government Organizations (NGO) Global Forum to establish a protocol for voluntary concerted action. The result of this energetic encounter was the drafting of "The People's Earth Declaration: A Proactive Agenda for the Future." Two years later, at the International Conference on Population and Development, the Women's Movement likewise played an important role in the content of the official conference document.

From 1996 to 1998 worldwide NGOs played a crucial role in derailing the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), which was promoted secretly by TNCs in concert with leading global financial institutions. The alarm was initially sounded when an NGO posted a draft of the highly secret MAI on the Internet. At the previously mentioned November 1999 WTO Summit in Seattle, 50,000 demonstrators effectively compromised the blueprint of globalization that had proceeded mostly unhindered. These actions marked the emergence of a third force in addition to governments and the private sector primarily represented by multinational corporations. This third force, Civil Society, questioned the prevailing predicament of growth and its exclusive reliance on economic indicators and the financial bottom line. The present model of development has entered a phase of decline, noticeable because it is eroding the finite resources on which it depends and ulti-

mately undermining the purchasing power that supports its growth. It has aptly been compared to a cancerous growth.

In Seattle, the general consciousness of the globe awakened to the realization of how economic concerns were swallowing and eliminating all other social, political, and spiritual concerns. During the ongoing UN Social Development Summits, thousands of NGOs are now invited—an important first step in the recognition of the increasing global role of Civil Society. The year 2001 saw the birth of the World Social Forum, first held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, with the theme “Another World is Possible.” It was attended by 20,000 participants. Two years later, attendance climbed to more than 100,000. The fourth forum was held in Mumbai, India, attracting 80,000 people from 132 countries. The fifth forum, held again in Porto Alegre, was crowned with a record participation of 150,000.

The power of Civil Society has been felt in other ways, at the national level, even before the end of the century. Nonviolent movements have led to India’s independence in 1949, desegregation and civil rights in the United States and South Africa, democracy in Poland, and the removal of dictatorships in the Philippines, Chile, and other countries.

In East Germany civil rights, environmentalist, and women’s rights’ groups emerged from under the umbrella of the Lutheran Church to stage massive rallies that contributed to the fall of the regime in 1989. The South African rule of apartheid was brought down by boycotts, strikes, and demonstrations—civil disobedience, not only in the country but all over the world. Most of this was done nonviolently.

Throughout the 1990s, democratization advanced in African states where dictators were ousted through popular grassroots movements—in Benin, Cape Verde, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. Ivory Coast street protests drove General Guei from power in 2000, ousting him after only one year. Similar tides of popular discontent drove rulers from power in Bolivia (in this case, with attendant violent actions), Ecuador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Peru. In the last few years, political tyrants have been swept out of power in countries such as Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan. Lebanon’s pro-Syrian government was top-

pled after demonstrations by almost one million protesters in April of 2005.

We have entered a fertile time of potential revolution, spurred by countless individuals actively redefining their relationships with the paradigm of materialism and adopting new relationships with the spirit. Dubbed the Ecological Revolution by some, its goal is to finally bridge the gap between science and faith that first entered modern consciousness at the advent of the Copernican scientific revolution in the sixteenth century. In the next chapter, we will turn to a characterization of this emerging culture, based upon a new, tentative understanding of what defines the human experience.

Chapter 2

OF LIFE BEFORE BIRTH

*I have press'd through in my own right,
I have sung the body and the soul, war and peace have
I sung,
And the songs of life and death,
And the songs of birth, and shown that there are many
births.*

Walt Whitman

We have seen that the main trend of globalization defines the realm of the living from a merely economic perspective, from the price tag that can be placed on it. However, things acquire a new complexity when we look at the same issues from political or cultural perspectives. Let us place in this context the debates that take place around the modification, extension, abridgment, or termination of the moments of birth and death.

Prior to the Copernican revolution, there was a tacit recognition of values concerning birth and death. They were simply the domain of a religious outlook that still enjoyed a very high level of acceptance. These issues have been more and more redefined and questioned, in order to encompass larger sets of values and expanding needs of the individual emancipated from the dictates of social structures, institutions, or tradition. Birth and death are presently redefined in relation to our ability to shape our own destinies; to deny, question, or transcend tradition; and, ultimately, our desire to form new, individual relationships with the spirit.

Since the nineteenth century, and even more from the twentieth century onward, modern humanity has acquired power over parts of the human biological cycle that were considered sacred or beyond the reach of human knowledge and intervention. Let us look in a dispassionate manner at some of the milestones that brought us to the present.

It may come as a surprise that the first successful attempt at human artificial insemination occurred in 1776. It was performed by the Scottish surgeon, John Hunter. Toward the end of that century Malthus published the famous *Essay on the Principles of Population*

as *It Affects the Future Improvement of Society*. In 1832, Charles Knowlton wrote the first treatise on birth control: *Fruits of Philosophy; or, The Private Companion to Married Couples*. It was followed by the introduction of rubber condoms on the American market by mid-century. In England the advocates of birth control created the Malthusian League in 1877, at which time Annie Besant went on trial for having published Knowlton's booklet. Probably the first clinic performing abortions opened in Amsterdam in 1882, under the auspices of a female physician, Aletta Jacobs. The century ended with the timely discovery of Thomas Traherne's poetry. The poet had an uninterrupted memory going back to birth and the time between lives, much of which is depicted in his poems.

The movement towards birth control truly accelerated towards the time of the First World War. In 1912, London saw the First International Eugenics Congress, which developed the idea that controlling birth could be used to attain racial goals. Abortion was legalized in 1917 in Russia, and a Mother's Clinic for that purpose opened in London shortly after. Around this time M. Sanger's *Family Limitation* was published and the Birth Control League of America was founded.

An interesting cluster of events occurred in the early 1930s. The Pope countered the trend of the century with the Encyclical *Casti Connubi*, which condemned the use of birth control as a crime against nature and God. The Nazis' rise to power was accompanied by the law against hereditarily ill progeny, accompanied by a mandate for 56,000 sterilizations of "unfit" individuals. Another law prohibited the marriage between healthy and mentally retarded people. On the other side of the Channel the British Euthanasia Society was founded with such luminaries among its members as George Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russell, and H. G. Wells. Another milestone, in 1934 Bill Wilson had his famous spiritual experience and in 1939 Alcoholics Anonymous was founded. Perhaps more could be mentioned here how this fact about AA relates to birth and death? Shortly after, George Ritchie had one of the earliest, famous near-death experiences (published much later in the book *Return from Tomorrow*).

A new impetus emerged towards the sixties. In 1956, China decreed the first campaign for birth control. In the US, the Food and Drug Administration approved the first oral contraceptive in 1960. The end of the decade was accompanied by the publication of *On Death*

and Dying by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, and a little-known book promoting euthanasia of defective children was a success in Holland (*Medical Power and Medical Ethics* by Dr. J. H. Van den Berg).

From the stage of thought and trial, we moved into a period of full realization after the 1970s. The practice of CPR brought a dramatic change in emergency wards and prolonged the life expectancy of those suffering from heart failure. Two significant events followed each other closely: Humphrey Derek performed the assisted suicide of Jean Crane in 1975 and followed it with the publication of *Jean's Way* in 1978, also the year of the birth of the first test-tube baby, named Elizabeth Brown. China established the "one child policy" the following year. Jack Kevorkian designed the suicide machine in 1989 and used it the following year on Janet Adkins. Other modern developments brought us to cloning and the famous sheep Dolly in the late 1990s.

What appears from this overview is the expanded power of humanity to modify the cycles of birth and death in a dramatic fashion and on a large scale. We are in effect moving now in the direction of genetically modified organisms. All of these steps can be seen as necessary or unavoidable developments. If the old moralistic approach were enough to stem the tide, we could argue that things would not have come to this pass. What is humanity gaining and what does humanity have to learn? All of the propositions on the modification and altering of the natural life cycle—its extension, abridgement, and artificial recreation—have logical, plausible arguments both in favor and against them. On that level we cannot reach a deeper understanding, one that would guide us in the context of each personal situation.

This book does not address these matters from a moral perspective; rather it tries to dispassionately present the other side of the equation—the quiet, unseen revolution that surrounds us and offers us the tools and the way to address these concerns from an individually informed perspective, equidistant from the slogans of progress or the injunctions of outworn moral imperatives. The thresholds of birth and death can be reconsecrated through renewed wonder derived from fresh knowledge and new experiences presenting themselves to those who dwell in the new millennium.

The above has been offered as background to the information that will be provided in this book. It is clear that modification of the human cycle affects us on all levels. When we talk about abortion or euthanasia, we are touching on ethical matters as well as pushing political hot buttons. When we speak of genetically modified foods, powerful economic interests are added to the equation.

While the sacredness of birth and death may diminish, they do not cease to offer us new revelations. It is this renewed awe that we want to place at the center of the discussion about the moral choices that face every individual. While most of us have become familiar with euthanasia or cardiopulmonary resuscitation, we may also have acquired glimpses of a growing host of spiritual experiences that concern both death and birth. Most of them come with catchy three-letter acronyms. Most inclusive of all and oldest in origin is the term OBE for “out of body experience.” Very popular and hotly debated is the term NDE for “near-death experience.” Other terms we will find in the present exploration are ADC for “after-death communication,” and, of more recent origin, PBE for “pre-birth experience.” These and other experiences will form the object of our exploration.

The above-mentioned phenomena are part of the evolution of the individual as much as they represent the birth pangs of a larger revolution affecting the planet itself. Individual and Earth evolution are intimately united in a mutual path of transformation that can cause confusion and painful readjustment—both personal and societal. It is not mere coincidence that this shift occurs at the time of a serious ecological crisis that threatens the global ecosystem, indicating the urgency of personal and collective change.

To address this shift, we will move from the individual level of consciousness to the larger level of reality. To attain this goal it is convenient to proceed from an exploration of the experiences that point to life before birth and then move to those that point to life after death. We will primarily address the ways that past-life experiences break the surface of consciousness and make reincarnation a more and more plausible working hypothesis. We will then look at how this experience has been translated into a modern key to understanding. Then, we will turn to experiences that give human beings a growing certainty of a life after death. We have proceeded this way because, at the end of this exploration, we will be better able to offer an explanation of the

second aspect of our investigation—the planetary shift of consciousness.

Karma and reincarnation have long been the doctrine of the ancient East. There these beliefs survive mostly in Hinduism and Buddhism. In the West, these concepts have long been forgotten. It may come as a surprise to learn that in the earliest centuries of Christianity, many religious authorities—chief among them Origen—still held on to a belief in previous lives. In modern times, the earliest ideas from the East live side by side with emerging formulations of the West, of which more will be said later.

Before going into previous-life memories, we will look at an experience that is also becoming more common at present, one that has been called PBE or pre-birth experience. More and more people (mothers especially) receive clear indications of the soul that is to be born.

OUR BIRTH IS BUT A SLEEP AND A FORGETTING

*And from a cliff-top is proclaimed
The gathering of the souls for birth,
The trial by existence named,
The obscuration upon earth.
And the slant spirits trooping by
In streams and cross- and counter-streams
Can but give ear to that sweet cry
For its suggestion of what dreams!*

Robert Frost

Remembrances of previous lives are not the only experience of the realm before birth. A growing field of awareness concerns the ability to sense and feel the individuality of the coming newborn—chiefly, but not only, among mothers. In the above lines, Robert Frost portrays in beautiful images what only poetic language can apprehend in its fullness—namely, the soul's desire to incarnate from the realms of the spiritual into the material. Is this just poetic license and flight of fancy, or is there a deeper truth to the words of the poet?

This reality is what Sarah Hinze seems to confirm in her re-

search into a little-investigated realm that more and more people are beginning to experience. What prompted her to research the matter was the wealth of her own experiences as a mother of nine children, particularly in relation to her fifth pregnancy, which followed a miscarriage. The result of this research appeared in the book, *Coming from the Light*. The following story, referring to a daytime experience and entitled *My Name Is James*, offers us a typical example.

My experience with the unborn is quite simple. We had five children, plus one miscarriage, and were trying, at this point, not to have another baby. But in quiet moments, I would hear a small, almost audible voice say, "My name is James, and I'm ready to be born." This happened a few times, so I shared it with my husband.

I was a little excited, but my last baby was only two, and I was still thinking I was not ready to have another child. In addition, we were planning to leave for India to work as missionaries.

On my birthday, April 5, my husband took me out for dinner and afterward we were intimate. But I had no inkling that I was pregnant until we were on the plane heading for India, April 17. It was quiet, and I was praying. I felt the Lord speak to my heart, "Blessed is the fruit of the womb." I knew then that I was pregnant. Nine months later, James was born in Pune, India. (Detrah H.)¹

The experiences collected by S. Hinze received the ad hoc name of "pre-birth experiences—PBEs. These are very specific experiences received most often by parents and close relatives (especially siblings) of a future child. More rarely, they can fall upon adoptive parents, midwives, and close friends. PBEs occur in almost equal proportion before conception or between conception and birth.

A Sense of Special Mission

Communications from unborn souls are either visual or auditory, and may be waking or dream visions. These are some of the criteria that in different degrees and combinations accompany all PBEs. The experi-

ence of the pre-born soul is accompanied by light that shines from them or around them, together with a radiation of warmth and love. Souls on their way to Earth communicate an eagerness to incarnate, as well as a sense of loss of their heavenly home. They impart to recipients that it is time for them to embody in the womb and that they come to Earth with a sense of special mission. The incarnating souls are accompanied toward their new earthly mission by “escorts,” who are generally, but not exclusively, deceased relatives.

Bauer, Hoffmeister, and Georg have studied many similar phenomena and have enumerated some of the main traits of these pre-birth experiences.² Whether in a dream or in day consciousness, the visions refer to a realm other than that of our daily experience. Through the image of the individual that appears in the dream, the gaze, the quality of the eyes, the stature, size of head, expression, posture, gait, or way of speaking, the recipient gets to know something about the character and personality of the coming child.

The experience need not always be a blissful one, although most of them are. The following is an example provided by the above-mentioned authors. It refers to a twenty-year-old woman who experiences ambivalence about a coming birth:

I knew I would conceive a child—it was as though a great dark space was coming towards me. However, I did not want to avoid it but get to meet it. And then, after the conception I experienced ease of mind and the feeling that I could bear all the misery and hard times with a strength that came from the child and not from myself.³

Descending entities may retain memories of their condition before birth, in the realms between lives. In some warning PBEs, the souls try to communicate with living souls who are receptive in order to prevent suicide, rape, abortion, or other disruptions to their imminent destiny. According to Bauer et al., in those dreams or visions the children express these obstacles in terms of wanting to come but finding doors and windows closed, and having to go through keyholes and other entryways.⁴ They may also provide messages as to how to help the process of incarnation of the coming soul. It has been observed that

children are very receptive to the messages of incarnating souls. Indeed they may be communicating with these souls when they are engaging with their so-called imaginary friends.

Even more interesting to the emergence of a new consciousness is the still rare phenomenon of those who retain an uninterrupted consciousness pointing back to their life before birth. This allows us to look directly at the experience of the messengers themselves, rather than that of the recipients. Such was the case of the poet Traherne, four centuries ago, who portrayed these experiences in his poems *The Perspective*, *The Salutation*, and *Wonder*. The following is a sample from his poem *Wonder*:

How like an angel came I down!
How bright are all things here!
When first among his Works I did appear,
O how their glory me did Crown?
The world resembled his *Eternitie*,
In which my Soul did Walk;
And every Thing that I did see,
Did with me talk.

Another example of day consciousness of the realms of existence before birth is mentioned in the story *I Spoke Another Language*, from the cases collected by Sarah Hinze.⁵ The conversation is presented in the form of a dialogue between the individual, Gwenevere Hulse, and (presumably) an angel. It portrays an episode that returned to the woman's memory at the time of writing her life's story. In the time preceding birth, her soul was apprehensive about the change of environment upon leaving the spirit world. The angelic being offered her reassurance. Then came the experience of birth, physical sunlight, and contact with all the relatives who held her. This was accompanied by feelings of loneliness, an inability to understand what was said and a need to cry. The memory also recovers a language that the soul understood in the spirit, and the lingering ability to communicate in that language for a few years after birth. Then forgetfulness set in.

A Light in the Distance

Let us finalize this study of pre-birth experience with the unusually clear experience of a person identified as Mrs. B. and her resolve to incarnate, going far beyond the example just quoted.⁶ (See full text in Appendix 1.)

Mrs. B. grew up in a dysfunctional family. Her mother was not married and her mother's partner was an alcoholic. Apart from the daughter in the story, her mother had both an earlier miscarriage and a later one following the birth of Mrs. B. The birth of Mrs. B. was rendered possible due to a doctor's intervention after the child, in utero, had given signs of dying. After the rescue, the child was born but was physically malformed and sickly. Although the mother was ashamed to show her in public, the child projected a certain inner happiness and delighted in playing with her two imaginary brothers.

Mrs. B. related her pre-birth experiences as an adult: "The experiences I want to narrate have not been forgotten or concealed beneath the passing years. It is more as though, closing my eyes, I were remembering something that had recently happened or, to be more exact, *as though it existed right now*, filling the whole of time, outside of me, above me" (italics added).

On the occasion of a great inner fear resulting from hearing adults talking about the "end of the world," the child's memory awakened, knowing that she had something to do in the world. This gave rise to a succession of feelings; first, a recognition of the love that emanated from all of creation towards her, and a feeling of personal responsibility. Later, a sense of loneliness gave way to crying.

In her second experience she recognized the presence of what is outwardly described as a white-clad, winged angel. The being accompanied the child during her early years, then one day announced that he was withdrawing. Just before doing so, he conveyed the central experience to Mrs. B.: The angel "pulled away something like a curtain which appeared to have been just inside the forehead." What the child saw afterwards was like a dream but also "a long forgotten memory." At the beginning she was surrounded by darkness and could see a light in the distance. In moving towards it, she received the following message, clothed in images. She was first warned about her parents and especially her mother, but this was not enough to lessen her desire to incarnate. She also realized that she could choose between two life

scenarios, the first “externally beautiful but inwardly impoverished,” and the second, “rich and beautiful within.” She chose the second, and sensed both the love around her and a feeling of sadness. In leaving she started to experience time and the oblivion of what lay behind her. She sensed the company of the being at her side and heard a voice reminding her that she had a task to accomplish. In moving forward the consciousness of the task faded away.

We will now move further back in the life before birth and break ground in matters of reincarnation, within the parameters of spontaneous recall. Therefore, we will not bring to bear any of the results obtained under hypnosis in past-life regressions. Ultimately this work addresses only ways of working with destiny and the laws of karma from a fully conscious perspective.

CHILDREN WHO RETURN

*Wert Thou that just maid who once before
Forsook the hated earth, O tell me sooth
And cam's't again to visit us once more?*

John Milton

Ian Stevenson⁷ and Carol Bowman⁸ have worked with children from complementary perspectives. Stevenson, a psychiatry professor and researcher, was interested in the scientific and phenomenological aspect of reincarnation. He came across puzzling claims from children who asserted with conviction that they had been someone else before, and, in general, indeed quite recently. After collecting and reviewing cases of supposed reincarnations, he would verify the information given with relatives of the person claiming to know his or her previous incarnation. He would then verify the information about the person the child claimed to have been, what the child knew of the person, and any facts concerning the first possible incarnation.

What helps this research is that in most cases the children presumably reincarnated near the time and geographical milieu of their previous life. Stevenson uses all the scientific procedures available in his field and adds an interdisciplinary approach. He usually investi-

gates cases with the help of local scientists. With them, he sometimes questions up to fifty or more people in order to verify the validity of the claims. He has collected more than 2,500 reports of “reincarnation cases.”

Carol Bowman’s point of departure has been a more existential question: her son’s and daughter’s unusual behaviors and phobias. With very little prompting, her children were able to retrieve past-life memories that lay dormant just beneath the veil of consciousness. Retrieving these memories helped bring prompt healing to phobias that had no root or possible explanation in present life. This was the perspective that motivated her to inquire about how common this experience is in children and what therapeutic value the retrieval of past-life memories may have. In both Stevenson’s and Bowman’s studies, the discussion concerns only the apparently immediately previous incarnation, as opposed to one that may have occurred long ago.

Inspiring as all of the conclusions drawn by the two authors may be, we remind the reader that what traditional science is able to investigate is simply epiphenomena, cases of short lives interrupted by sudden circumstances and resumed relatively quickly. These are limited cases of reincarnation where, given the circumstances, few of the larger laws of reincarnation manifest themselves, and we actually have a psychological continuity between lives—therefore, many elements of predictability, which is hardly characteristic of a full reincarnation, as we shall see later.

We will take an example from Ian Stevenson’s studies, one that the scientist had the unusual fortune of being able to follow at a very early age.⁹ Samuel Helander, a Finnish boy, was born on April 15, 1976, in Helsinki. Stevenson inquired into this case in person in 1978 and 1981. When his mother was pregnant with Samuel, she was contemplating abortion. In the tenth week of her pregnancy, her deceased brother, Pertti, appeared in a dream, saying: “Keep that child.” Pertti was Marja’s younger brother, born on June 8, 1957, deceased on June 10, 1975. The cause of his death was an undetected, severe case of diabetes, causing a coma from which he did not recover.

As soon as he could speak, Samuel started talking about the life of his maternal uncle, Pertti Haijio, and referring to himself as “Pelti,” having difficulty pronouncing the letter *r*. He persisted with the name until the age of six. He also addressed his parents by their respective

names of Pentti and Marja, rather than Mom and Dad. To Marja he explicitly said, “You are not my mother.” Instead he called his maternal grandmother, Anneli Lagerqvist, “mother,” and he was about two when he attempted to nurse at her breast. Samuel’s strong attachment to the grandmother ended by age five, when he stopped referring to her as his mother.

Attempts to explain his identity to Samuel failed. Upon looking at Pertti’s photograph, he would recognize himself. He also had specific memories of what had happened to Pertti, such as an episode at age three when a dog bit his leg, about which Samuel had never been given previous knowledge. Upon looking at photographs he recognized as “father” Pertti’s father, who had been absent from the family since the time the grandmother had remarried.

While other incidental remarks might be mentioned, suffice it to say that the child also recognized Pertti’s grave as his own. Like his uncle, Samuel had a strong fear of water; Pertti had nearly drowned after falling from a quay through a thin cover of ice, and after this event his water phobia kept him from swimming. Samuel’s grandmother said that giving him a bath was a true nightmare. The family remarked that certain of Samuel’s gestures—such as standing with one foot forward and one hand on a hip—were the same that Pertti used to assume; no one else in the family used these gestures.

In this condensed example, many of the features of children’s spontaneous memories of previous lives are present, while some are missing. Those symptoms that Stevenson lists include:

- prediction of rebirth made by the person who will incarnate (very rare)
- dreams before conception or rebirth by family relatives, indicating reincarnation
- birthmarks or birth defects
- statements about the previous life by the child
- unusual behavior or phobias manifested by the child

Prediction of Rebirth

The first symptom is so rare that we will discard it from the analysis. It seems to occur primarily among indigenous people: Stevenson quotes the Alaskan Tlingits and the Tibetans.

Dreams Before Conception

The second symptom confirms the studies of Sarah Hinze's PBEs. It appears in our example of the dream of Marja. Premonition dreams most often occur to a mother, but may also come to a spouse, relative, or friend. The dreams are usually experienced before the birth, and sometimes before conception. Here again, traditional cultures have higher incidences. Stevenson indicates that among these are the Burmese, the Alevis of Turkey, and the tribes of Northwestern America; but these dreams occur throughout the world. Usually a known person or stranger introduces him- or herself to the pregnant mother, asking for permission to be borne by her, or simply announcing his or her coming birth as a matter of fact.

Birthmarks and Birth Defects

Birthmarks or birth defects seem to appear in places where a previous life personality contracted wounds or suffered internal diseases. Stevenson checked these cases by taking photographs of the birth defects. He also corroborated previous life wounds and diseases with medical records or autopsies of the deceased person.

An example is the case of the presumably reincarnated Turkish bandit known by the name Cemil Hayik.¹⁰ The advantage of this example is that his life was documented and his autopsy was available to Stevenson. He was, in fact, one of the most wanted bandits in the southeastern province of Turkey of Hatay. In 1935 he committed suicide when he realized that he could not escape the French police, who had burned the house where he and his brothers were staying. He shot himself under the left side of the jaw. The corpses were seen by thousands. In this case there was what Stevenson calls an "annunciatory dream" experienced by a distant relative of the husband of a woman expecting a child, a day before delivery. The newborn in question had a birthmark under the left side of the jaw and another on the top of the head, the places where the bullet had entered and exited Cemil's body. His father soon remembered the relative's dream about Cemil. The child demonstrated symptoms and behaviors similar to the ones we have seen in Samuel Helander—in his case, nightmares of fighting the French that continued until he reached age seven. His anger with the police had survived and was now associated with a phobia of blood. At

birth the birthmark under the jaw had bled abundantly and become larger later. He also frequently experienced pain in his teeth.

A different but striking example is the case of Gillian and Jennifer Pollock.¹¹ The identical twins were born at Hexham, England, on October 4, 1958. Their older sisters, Joanna and Jacqueline, had been killed in an automobile accident at ages eleven and six, respectively. Mr. Pollock, who believed in reincarnation, announced to his pregnant wife that the sisters would be reborn as twins. Jennifer and Gillian had memories of their supposed lives as Joanna and Jacqueline between ages two and four. However, what is remarkable in this instance were the birthmarks: "Jennifer, the younger twin, had two birthmarks that corresponded in location and size to the two marks on Jacqueline's body. A mark on Jennifer's forehead, near the root of the nose, matched a scar that had persisted on Jacqueline's forehead after she had fallen and cut herself there; and a brown mark (nevus) on the left side of Jennifer's waist matched a similar congenital one on Jacqueline."

Birth defects seem to appear in place of a wound from a previous life, e.g., a more extensive injury with possible loss of limbs. Stevenson documents the case of a young child who was born in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.¹² At age four he died as a result of an incident with a fodder-cutting machine in which he lost three fingers and the tip of his thumb. His mother had greatly mourned the loss, and had seen him in a vision, announcing that he would soon be reborn. Thirteen months later and three miles away, a child by the name of Lekh Pal Jatav was born to a farmer and his wife. Their son had a normal left hand, but all fingertips on the right hand were one-third shorter than usual. What was unusual is the fact that his condition did not resemble the rare congenital anomaly called brachydactily that occurs in one of 40,000 births, but almost always involves both hands. In the case of brachydactily, the fingers are normal but shorter; in the boy's case, the tips of the fingers had no bones. The child was frail and sickly, and soon started talking about his previous village and previous parents, brothers, and sisters, adding that the current place in which they lived was not his home, and that he did not want to live in the village. At age eight, a fortuitous circumstance allowed the child to go to the previous-life village. He recognized someone who had been one of

his brothers and, when submitted to a test, he could single out his previous mother, as well as his brothers and sisters, and offer details about his previous life. It is of added interest to this case that the reincarnated Lekh had no phobia of fodder-cutting machines.

This last point underlines the significance of individual reaction. The manifestation of birthmarks, birth defects, and/or phobias seems to follow similar patterns. It may appear at first a mystery as to why some people are reborn with pronounced birthmarks, birth defects, or phobias stemming from previous wounds, while others, having undergone similar deaths, have only slight defects or behaviors or none at all. The tie between stimulus and response is a key factor. Children who die are most often unable to offer anything but an automatic response. Adults can respond to stimuli with growing degrees of self knowledge or through raw emotion. Cemil Hayik carried into the next life not only his emotions, but also the marks of the scars that led to his death. He had little desire to transform his feelings and explore new kinds of responses to his plight.

Talk of Previous Life

Statements about previous lives—according to both Stevenson and Bowman—occur in a spontaneous manner, most often between ages two and five, and tend to begin around age three. Stevenson noticed that memories fade between ages five and eight. In fact, induced relaxation, as practiced by Bowman, does not work as well with four- to six-year-olds. It is more successful with eight- to eleven-year-olds. This seems to indicate that what is immediately available to consciousness in younger children is veiled only when they reach prepuberty, and then is buried more deeply over time. Apart from rare exceptions of individuals who maintain their memories through their adult lives, most children forget theirs before or around school age. School marks an obvious change in children's lives, since they forego their family milieu and life of play and enter the world of abstract thinking. Memories disappear regardless of whether parents support or negate children's claims. Up to this time, children have been living in a world of visual imagery, which they now must lay aside to make way for the experience of schooling.

Memories from a previous life tend to cluster around the final years, months, and days before death. The event of death plays a cen-

tral role and is remembered clearly, especially if the individual has undergone a violent or sudden transition. Stevenson concludes that facts and people remembered are more connected with the proximity to death than with the length of association within previous lives. In exceptional cases, events may be recalled of the life between death and new birth. Stevenson met three people who could recall events immediately following death, such as the funeral or details about burial. Although an unusual occurrence, it still reinforces the central importance of the event of death.¹³ Memories of life between death and rebirth may touch on other realms immediately adjacent to life on earth. Bowman confirms an event that Stevenson recorded only once: children who remember events before their birth, their descent to earth, and/or “choosing” their parents.¹⁴

There are quite a few indicators that children are remembering previous life events. A child remembering a tragic death speaks of it in a serious way, accompanied by a sense of grief. He sounds older than his age, speaks with intensity, and may use concepts beyond the grasp of his age group. His focus turns inward, a very precocious step for a young child. He may be surprised by an adult’s lack of understanding when he speaks of a previous life as a matter of fact, or wonders why adults do not remember their previous lives. The child may use present-tense sentences such as: “I have a wife and two sons,” or “My house is much bigger than this one.” Otherwise, he may emphasize the difference between the two lives with sentences such as “When I was big....” Bowman observes that the child recalling a previous life may be immediately part of its reality. A child who had drowned in a swimming pool was asked whether she was wearing a bathing suit at the time. In order to respond, the child looked down at her body and confirmed.¹⁵

Previous-life memories appear in yet another state of consciousness: dreaming. Past-life memories appear in vivid, coherent, and recurrent dreams. Unlike other dreams, the scenario is realistic. It has a beginning, development, and end. It will tend to return, unaltered, in time or undergo slow, progressive modifications. These dreams may continue well into adulthood. According to the level of trauma, the dreams can turn into nightmares. The difference from regular dreams is that the child will rarely remember them, unless asked and given a chance to talk about them soon after.

At a deeper level are what have been called “night terrors.” The child is absolutely terrified, screams, walks or runs, and acts violently while appearing awake. Afterwards, she will have absolutely no memory of the event. Night terrors occur during the deepest cycle of sleep. They manifest themselves starting at age three or four, and fade by age five or six. This is the span of time when a child is most likely to have spontaneous previous-life memories.

A final, much rarer but strong indication of the possibility of reincarnation memories is a phenomenon called xenoglossy. This occurs in cases of children who are able to speak a language—either in waking life or while asleep—that is different from any they have been taught in their environment. Manifestations of xenoglossy range from a completely different language to one spoken in a neighboring region, or a different dialect from the one spoken in the child’s place of origin,¹⁶

Unusual Behaviors or Phobias

Previous-life memories may exist at a more unconscious level but manifest in behavior. Ian Stevenson found that phobias related to a previous life’s mode of death affected 50% of people who recalled dying a violent death. The phobia may in fact appear before the child learns to speak and, therefore, explain what is troubling him. Stevenson mentions the example of Ravi Shankar Gupta, who had a barber phobia connected to his memory of having been killed by a barber in a previous life. He retained it later in life, even though he understood the origin of his fears. A child with a strong water phobia retrieved past-life memories of having died from drowning. Another, who had been a political insurgent in previous lives, developed a phobia related to police officers, which motivated him to hide when he saw them.

Child play and likes and dislikes are other areas where previous-life memories can appear. Some behaviors cluster around the difference in social class between one life and the next. Children who have memories of having belonged to a wealthy milieu may be contemptuous and disparaging of their present family, refuse to do housework, or look down on the clothes they wear. In the reverse situation, a child of a rich family may behave in ways that the family finds coarse; he may ask for food that his family doesn’t eat and only lower-class people are known to eat. An Indian child, reborn as a Brahmin, who

remembered having belonged to a lower caste, asked her vegetarian family for pork. She had had little emphasis on hygiene and was willing to take on chores that the rest of the family found repulsive (for example, cleaning toilets).

Sense of an Unfinished Life

Children's memories live just beyond the veil of consciousness. Any sensory experience—a sight, smell, or taste, an object or picture—can trigger past-life memories. Music has a strong evocative power. The sight of blood, ropes, or knives may bring back the memory of a violent death. In these instances, however, the child may simply express a phobia and not be able to articulate a memory. A child's first traumas, i.e., the first day of school, can trigger memories of past-life abandonment or separation. Finally, other strong triggers are landscapes or persons known in previous lives.

Some children have recognized a landscape they had never seen before in their present life, and have led adults around and through it on the basis of their memory. Then, they have shown their parents the place where they lived. Ian Stevenson describes many such examples of children who have reincarnated very close to the place of their previous existence. Life circumstances led them to pass by these places, where previous life recollections were triggered. A child may walk up to a perfect stranger and ask, "Don't you remember me?" and then explain, "It was a long time ago." Ian Stevenson gives the example of a Thai child who recognized and called by name a previous-life aunt, whom no one in his present-life family had known. A Turkish child was able to recognize two ice cream vendors selling ice cream on his street.

We have seen the phenomenology of past-life memories in children, but are all children equally affected? The studies of Ian Stevenson and Carol Bowman show that we are dealing with a very specific group of children. A large part of Stevenson's recorded past-life memories come from children who died a violent death (61%), a sudden or unexpected death, or died young (under the age of twelve) of natural causes. In other words, we are dealing with people who carry a sense of an unfinished life. Stevenson has found intervals between reincarnations that last from a few months to a maximum of 25 years. The average (median) interval between lives, for 616 cases, was 15

months. He also detected a statistically significant shorter interval for children who had suffered a violent death than for those who had died naturally.

In the present, people who recall a former life often have a good memory, and may have had the same in the just-previous life. The shock of a strong difference between the lives is what may induce the memories. We saw the examples of Indian children born in very different social milieus. On the other hand, too much shock could induce a phobia and no conscious memory. In most case studies, the children have been reborn in the same country or culture.

The child's environment also plays an important role. Open mindedness to the idea of reincarnation helps the family identify the possible nature of the memories. Stevenson lists other supporting factors: honoring and remembering the dead, strong family ties, a less materialistic outlook, the ability to listen to dreams, preservation of visual imagery (more storytelling, less media), more time for reflection versus busy-ness, and a slower pace of life.

From a psychological perspective, a few elements will emerge from this first preliminary inquiry into these "peripheral" aspects of reincarnation. The studies of Bowman and Stevenson touch on "borderline cases" of reincarnation. We could say that they involve lives that have been interrupted, and two quick, successive incarnations. This becomes manifest in the fact that children return to an environment similar to the one they left. The interval between reincarnations has been so short that feelings have survived unchanged, just as they would have been in this lifetime. Overall, Stevenson concludes, traumatic memories form the majority of previous-life memories. It is, in fact, the moment of death that plays a central role in past-life memories. Major traumas and phobias are for the most part related to the moment of death.

How we view death and how we face it sets the tone for the subsequent life. This may seem unfair in the case of children facing violent deaths. In their instance, being able to achieve an understanding they could not reach on their own seems to offer a release from the trauma of a previous life. This makes Carol Bowman's findings all the more important, since her focus is the healing of past-life traumas.

Ian Stevenson attains the important, still tentative conclusion that, while heredity plays a certain role, the possibility of the idea of

reincarnation shows that individuality plays an equally important role. In fact, it is as if two forces meet: the individual who comes from a previous incarnation, who unites with the body that is subject to the laws of heredity and genetics.

TRAUMA AND LIBERATION

I seem to remember former states and feel that in them I have learned some of the lessons that have never since been mine here, and in my next step I hope to leave behind many of the trials I have struggled to bear here and begin to feel lightened as I go on.

Louisa May Alcott

It is far more difficult to document an encounter with individuals known in a previous life in the case of adults than it is with children. The disappearance of memories with age is the first factor; the longer lapse of time between incarnations is the second. Only one such instance to our knowledge has led to a “reunion.” Consider the case of Jenny Cockell, as documented in her book, *Across Time and Death: A Mother’s Search for Past-Life Children*, which she wrote in 1993.¹⁷

In this life, Jenny grew up in England with a lot of tension between her parents. However, she could always count on the love of her mother. Later, her parents separated, and Jenny and her brothers stayed with their mother. These were hard times for them, hard pressed by survival issues. Throughout her college years Jenny had difficulties with men, ending in what she calls a “catastrophic relationship,” which led her to live in fear. She finally married into what appeared a much happier relationship.

Events That Precede a Traumatic Death

According to Jenny, what preserved her previous-life memories was an unhappy childhood that caused her to seek refuge in her inner world. Jenny’s memories faded a little once she married, but experiences could be triggered by a sound or a smell. Obsession with the past, after

subsiding, was re-enlivened near the same age at which Mary—Jenny’s previous incarnation—had met her death. This was, she says, “the beginning of one of the most stressful phases of my life.”

As a child, Jenny had the recurrent dream of a woman’s death. The woman was in a large, white room, where she lay ill in a bed. She had difficulty breathing, ran a fever, and perceived her thoughts in a confused way. She was resisting the thought of death, consumed by the regret of leaving her children behind. Grief, accompanied by guilt, played a much more important part than the fear. This persistent dream was further accompanied by other conscious memories. She knew her previous name had been Mary, and believed she had had seven or eight children. She could describe Mary’s personality, her clothes but not her face, and she felt that she had lived from around 1898 until the 1930s in Ireland. Her memories of Mary’s husband were vague. What she could remember in great detail was her physical environment. She had a detailed memory of a cottage, and a village with streets and shops that she identified as Malahide, in Ireland. She could draw quite detailed maps of it.

The first statements about her memories came in Sunday school, when she was almost four. It was then that she realized that this, as well as her faculty for premonition, was not a common experience. As an introverted child, she remembers that, because of family tension, she liked to spend time on her own to brood over her memories. She also played with two imaginary friends, those who had been Mary’s brothers. Her doll she called Elizabeth, the name of Mary’s youngest daughter. Two other experiences in her present life may have been an echo of her previous one: Hearing Irish music gave her a feeling of homecoming. Dressmaking, which she knew had been Mary’s occupation, was an instinctively acquired skill.

When, as an adult, she became consumed by the desire to find out about her previous life and her children, she underwent hypnosis. The results were mixed, and no significant knowledge was added. She decided to pursue her quest, only on the basis of her conscious memories. The first corroboration came in stages. Comparing a map drawn from memory with a modern map of Malahide, she saw a good degree of similarity. Going to Ireland for the first time in 1989, she experienced familiarity with the landscape. In Malahide she recognized many of the places, despite changes that had occurred over fifty years.

Doing genealogical research, she found data about her family. Her name had been recorded as Mary Sutton, married to John Sutton; they had six children born between 1923 and 1932. Mary herself was born in 1895 and died in 1932. There were 21 years between her death and Jenny's birth in 1953. Mary had died from toxemia, following pregnancy. Fever and difficulty breathing may have been the result of pneumonia.

Jenny later found out that there were two more children who had not been listed on the baptismal lists. In 1990 she met with her previous-life son, Sonny, then age 71. She shared memories of the minutest details of the cottage and the way they used to live, which Sonny confirmed. Only minor details differed: a friend she thought of as Molly was actually called Mary. She found five more of her children in the three following years, all except her daughter Bridget, who had had died.

Mary's husband had been an alcoholic, physically abusive to his wife and children, and, maybe for that reason, Jenny had hardly any recollection of him. Her later problems in life echoed this imprint from a previous life. After the reunions and the writing of the book, Jenny's depressions did not resurface.

A similar experience to that of Jenny Cockell has been narrated first-hand by Betty Riley, a native of Philadelphia then living in the South, in a book called *A Veil Too Thin: Reincarnation Out of Control*.¹⁸ The patterns that emerge in this second narrative are all similar to those of the first. As in the first case, most of the memories cluster around a time preceding a traumatic death. However, the events relate to the early seventeenth century, and the memories of them were awakened only gradually. The chief interest in Betty Riley's account lies in the modality of awakening of these memories. The first time they occurred, Betty was forty and recovering from illness.¹⁹ At that point, Betty had a lucid dream of a scene that had occurred in old London to an "old woman in rags." She witnessed many scenes while, at the same time, physically smelling and hearing everything with a sense of familiarity. Upon awakening, she felt physically drained. When asked about the dreams by a third party, she could add details such as the names of streets, the name of the ruling king, the money used, and slang terms. She did this from a slightly altered but wide-awake state, speaking with a British accent. In a second stage, close in time to the

first, she relived the circumstances of her death while meditating, this time identifying with the “old woman in rags” she had previously seen. These visions would flash back to her mind any time she attempted to meditate.

At this point, unwanted memories started erupting into her daily life. These experiences would also surface abruptly upon her falling asleep, causing moments of panic. Betty felt that the exploratory hypnosis—aimed solely at determining the veracity of her testimony—most likely played a part in this.

It was Dr. Stevenson who suggested she go to England. Soon after arriving, she felt at home in London, where she could indicate how buildings had appeared four centuries before. She could also relive, in more depth, the feelings and emotions that had accompanied the end of that life. The experience awakened new symptoms upon her return to America, which were accompanied by a certain sadness. At this stage Betty was so identified with the old woman in rags that she started taking on habits, feelings, and emotions of her previous self. This was further accompanied by physical symptoms, such as three-day migraine headaches.

Through a guided meditation, an epilogue was stimulated—but not without final turmoil. New scenes of the previous life erupted in her consciousness, to the point that Betty felt her own sanity threatened, being temporarily unable to separate her two personalities. Writing ushered in the return to normal life. Finally, all the memories wove themselves into a coherent whole and, through her writing, Betty felt that she reached a “peace that surpasses all understanding.”

All of the above illustrates that a natural psychic ability is a two-sided weapon and no guarantee for balance in confronting memories from beyond the threshold of consciousness. There is a reason for living our lives with little spontaneous knowledge of our previous incarnations!

A Sense of Estrangement

If quick reincarnation occurs after a traumatic death, what happens when whole groups of people meet a premature death? What happened to the victims of the Holocaust? This is a question with which Rabbi Yonassan Gershom has struggled. The rabbi was drawn to examine the claims of more than 250 people who believed they died in the Holo-

caust—not all of them Jews in their current lives.²⁰ Most of them were born between 1946 and 1953, the generation of Baby Boomers who played a great part in the civil rights and peace movements. Gershom finds some exceptions in people born as early as 1939, or as late as 1970.

The most striking characteristic of this group were the non-Jews who felt an immediate connection with Judaism from the moment they entered a synagogue. They believed they were embracing their old faith. Finding the Jewish faith brought them an experience of intense joy and the desire to convert immediately. They often showed an astonishing grasp of the finer aspects of Jewish mysticism. For all of these people, the possibility of the idea of reincarnation offered great relief; fear and pain often subsided shortly thereafter.

Among the symptoms, we find nightmares and phobias with Holocaust themes. The individuals may be hyper-reactive to any of the following: sirens, black boots, uniforms, police officers, heat from a furnace, or barbed wire. The Swedish writer, Barbro Karlen (pen name), has claimed to be the reincarnated Anne Frank. As a child this was her recurring nightmare: “The darkness closes tighter and tighter around her, she is weeping and afraid. Her little body is shaking and she is drenched in sweat. She can hear them running up the stairs, the shouted orders pierce her body like knives. Dogs are barking and with a crash the door is kicked in.”²¹

As an adult, she experiences the nightmare retaining many common themes and evolving further: “She (Anne) sees her mother and father, whom she recognizes well, and other people sitting around them. They are all sitting as still as mice; their fear is so manifest that you can almost touch it. She hears the tramp of boots and doors being slammed. Men’s voices are shouting and she huddles up in her father’s lap. She is weeping silently. She knows that the least rustle will mean death and she is shaking all over. She is once again a child seeking comfort and security in her father’s arms.”²²

As a child, Barbro was hyper-reactive to people in uniform. She could not play hide and seek without panicking and beginning to cry. Taking a shower also felt uncomfortable, and she could not bring herself to eat certain foods, for example, brown beans. The only way to overcome her fear of uniforms was to wear one herself by joining Sweden’s mounted police. Here is the climax of her experience:

The panic which hit Sara (the author's real name) in that moment was indescribable. She turned away from the mirror image with some excuse to her well-meaning friend. Stinging tears were forming behind her eyelids and she broke into a cold sweat. When she saw the image of herself in uniform it was as if someone had poured a whole bucket of live spiders over her. They crawled over her body, under her hair, into her mouth, nose and ears. Everywhere there were big black hairy spiders crawling over her.²³

Barbro Karlen visited Amsterdam when she was ten years old. As a child she was surprised that other people knew about Anne Frank, not having read the diaries herself. Once in Amsterdam, she led her parents to Anne Frank's house without hesitation. Suddenly, memories overwhelmed her and she had to feel the reassuring presence of her mother in order to press on with the visit. The feelings intensified when they entered the hiding place, and Barbro started to relive her nightmares. She had difficulty breathing and went into a state of panic. She felt cold, in contrast to the summer heat. After a while she started to cry and saw the image of a man in uniform above her, then saw him raise an arm to hit her. While still a child Barbro had also experienced a particular recollection that put her into a state of shock. At school a child had thrown a stone that hit her on the temple. She was taken, unconscious, to a hospital. In this state she saw herself in the company of her previous-life father, sitting and talking with him. She saw the scene as if from above, but somehow knew she was looking at herself.

Gershom relates other reincarnation memories that emerge upon visiting the place of death in a previous life. He narrates the experience of a young American exchange student, Judy, visiting Dachau. During the visit she knew exactly where everything was and would move around with familiarity. She could also describe the building where she had died, although it did not stand there anymore. During the tour she continuously had the feeling of walking in mud, although it was summer and the path was covered with gravel. Mud, however, was constantly present during the years that Dachau was in operation. Upon arrival in Germany, Judy contracted menstrual cramps that she had never had before. In Dachau she saw her own death at age

sixteen or seventeen, when she was pregnant. Her menstrual cramps left her soon after the visit.

Another characteristic of the people Rabbi Gershom studied is a recurring sense of estrangement. They may express it by saying that they did not want to come back into an incarnated body (or not so quickly) or by expressing a feeling of not belonging to their present-day family. Like the children in Stevenson's examples, they wanted to be called by their previous-life name. Gershom notices that associated illnesses, such as asthma or bronchitis as well as eating disorders, are common.

Finally, there is the example of Marilyn Sunderman, who could recall three tragic deaths in previous incarnations.²⁴ In the first chronological life, she remembered having been a male artist traveling from court to court during the Middle Ages. He had been the lover of a queen whose portrait he had painted. When he decided to abandon such a risky situation, she had him killed.

In the next life she recalled, she was a woman traveling through Spain, France, and Italy, disguised as a monk, preaching and healing. She died at the hands of the Inquisition, and experienced departing the Earth and carrying hatred from that life. The inquisitor was the reincarnated queen.

In the most recent previous life, Marilyn was a young Nazi man. While women and children were being forced toward the woods, he reached out to help a young child whose eyes had hypnotically attracted him. He died trying to protect the child—the reincarnated queen and the inquisitor.

In Marilyn's story, two individuals have followed each other in three successive incarnations. Her story continues into the present with a further meeting with the reincarnated queen, now named Tanya, who brought back the memories of their previous lives together in ways not significantly different from any of those we have enumerated so far. In the life she lived as a Nazi, Marilyn was hit on the lower left side of the back with a rifle butt. At that place a blue-black mark mysteriously reappeared shortly after meeting Tanya. Upon overcoming her fear of Tanya, the pain associated with the mark soon faded away.

Both Barbro Karlen and Marilyn Sunderman underwent similar experiences in their present lives. Enemies of previous lives appeared in present time with an antagonism or hatred hardly attributable to ran-

dom life encounters. Sunderman concludes: "I also knew there was another thing I needed to do. I needed to forgive everyone along my path who had ever done me harm and, even more importantly, I needed to forgive myself for my part in it all."

Karlen mentions suffering repeated threats, harassment, and slander before she manages to close the chapter of continued reverberations from one or more previous lives. This is how Barbro Karlen describes, near the conclusion of her book, the revisited dream, which we have already seen twice. She is in the "annex," before the house is raided by the Nazis. "She sees herself as Anne, and as Sara. The picture changes the whole time. She is sitting at a table writing. It is the same little room that she has seen before in her dreams. But now the helplessness and the fear are no longer surrounding her."²⁵ With a feeling of indescribable harmony, Sara returns each night to the annex and writes the story of her life. Of her persecutors she knows that if she gets the whole truth written down, they will never be able to hurt her anymore. Only by stripping them down to their naked evil can she free herself from their spirits and their curses, once and for all. She concludes: "But first she must be able to forgive them too and feel sorry for them, in spite of all the ill they have done her. When she could forgive them they would themselves be called to account before the Law. She could do nothing about that. She could only free herself from them, and by forgiving them pave the way to a better future for herself as well."

The experiences we will explore next could hardly be called common. They are, in fact, unique and concern individuals who bring forth distinctive qualities. The interest of their reports lies in what their experiences offer us about the aspects of the reality of reincarnation that rarely break into consciousness in a way that can be analyzed. Ultimately, however, these testimonies point only to what can be gleaned from the perspective of a larger picture that we will approach in the next chapter.

UNITED THROUGH THE CENTURIES

I lived in Judea eighteen hundred years ago, but I never knew that there was such a one as Christ among my contemporaries....

And Hawthorne, too, I remember as one with whom I sauntered in old heroic times along the banks of the Scamander amid the ruins of chariots and heroes....

As the stars looked to me when I was a shepherd in Assyria, they look to me now a New Englander.

D. H. Thoreau

We have already moved into the field of group reincarnation, although only in a general way. The story that follows moves us into a further dimension of the reality of karma and reincarnation. When we look at karma from the perspective of various individuals and a few millennia, we cannot resort to proof in the conventional understanding of the word. What will help us is the phenomenological approach, together with indications offered by historical information.

Historical consciousness was, in fact, the initial dimension that propelled doctor-turned-author Guirdham Guirdham toward the adventure through space, time, and consciousness that he portrays in three successive books: *The Cathars and Reincarnation*,²⁶ *We Are One Another: Astounding Evidence of Group Reincarnation*,²⁷ and *The Lake and the Castle*.²⁸

Guirdham was the scribe of a process he initially could not fathom. His profession as a doctor and psychiatrist gave him the basis for exploring the subject matter in a scientific and analytical fashion. His philosophical and historical interests made further exploration possible. Becoming open to the idea of reincarnation during the process of exploration, he first attempted to test it on historical grounds. It is due to exceptional circumstances that this was possible. In stages he moved from being a spectator to finding himself as an actor in a drama that developed across many centuries. Progressively more people were drawn to him and to the initial actors in the drama. Their lives continued in everyday physical reality as well as in a world where they retrieved memories of their earlier associations on their Earth journey.

Of Dreams and Inquisitors

The story began in 1944, almost twenty years before the first encounter between a patient, Ms. Smith, and Dr. Guirdham. At age eleven, Ms. Smith had been saved from an attack of peritonitis. As we have seen, illnesses or states of stress can be gateways to memories of previous lives that then erupt into consciousness or half-consciousness. During her illness Ms. Smith had dreams in which she would call out loudly to someone named Roger. (This was also the name of a dog she had owned ever since she was four or five years old.) In a delirious state she talked about having another baby, and when the Catholic priest approached her with the Last Sacrament, she screamed in terror. During her illness she kept notebooks in which she recorded experiences one would surmise that she otherwise would have at least partly forgotten. It is not surprising to learn that Ms. Smith also had faculties of precognition. Once, she revealed to a friend the content of a letter she had not opened. She had also sensed the deaths of her father and other people beforehand. These unusual gifts frightened her and often made her feel “lost in time,” not always able to tell whether something had already or was about to happen.

Before meeting with the psychiatrist, Ms. Smith had written a novel about a young woman becoming pregnant and losing a child. The woman had lost her lover and decided to commit suicide by fasting. After various intermediate episodes she was brought to a cathedral—a place that she dreaded—and managed to escape by bribing her captors.

The first meeting between patient and doctor occurred in 1962, and the visits continued until 1966. At that time Ms. Smith was suffering from a recurring nightmare, during which she would shriek loudly. In the dream she saw herself lying on a floor and being approached by a man who filled her with terror. This dream had started in her early teens. At the initial onset of the cycle of nightmares, Ms. Smith had fallen unconscious a few times.

Initially the dream occurred once a month. In her early thirties the frequency increased, and by the time she decided to be treated it was recurring two to three times a week. What was curious from the beginning of the professional relationship was the fact that Guirdham had a similar dream. He had nightmares where he saw himself sleeping while a tall man approached him from the back, and he would awake

screaming loudly. This nightmare used to recur three or four times a year during his forties, and more often in his fifties. When he was finally able to confront the visitor, the nightmare disappeared. This was about the time he began meeting with Ms. Smith.

Ms. Smith's nightmare also disappeared, right after the first meeting. She was finally able to shake off her fear of being left alone in the dark. However, another nightmare appeared in which she saw herself dragged out of a cathedral. During the dream she would shout the word "Tolosa," the old Occitan name for Toulouse. Upon awakening she would remember "St. Etienne," the actual name of the cathedral.

The therapeutic relationship evolved further through the disclosure of old records that Ms. Smith kept in her notebooks and other dreams. The first dream was one that Ms. Smith had experienced upon traveling close to Toulouse. There, she saw herself trying to escape from someone who was forcing her into the cathedral. In a later recurring dream, she saw someone tying knots into her hair, telling her that he would never let her go. She knew this memory was also associated with Toulouse.

The process of healing took a dramatic turn in 1965. Ms. Smith confessed to Guirdham what she knew ever since their first meeting—that they had been connected in a previous life. She revealed to him that they had been lovers, he a Cathar by the name of Roger, she a Catholic who soon renounced her faith and was excommunicated. She also knew that the man who haunted her dreams before meeting Guirdham was a certain Pierre de Mazerolles.

With the revelation of names and places, the setting was narrowing down to thirteenth-century southern France at the time of the Inquisition. At another turning point, Ms. Smith relived in a dream her death at the stake, at the hands of the Inquisition. Later she also dreamt of how Roger had undergone torture. At this point, Guirdham could continue what Ms. Smith had begun, through historical research. This was possible, even though the characters in this plot are not major historical figures, because the Inquisition kept records of those who had been interrogated and condemned.

Although he could not find records for Ms. Smith herself, he could identify himself, his family, and other actors in the drama, such as Pierre de Mazerolles. The latter was involved in Cathar circles, al-

though somewhat remotely, and had been part of the massacre of inquisitors at Avignonet. This was the figure who had haunted both Ms. Smith and Guirdham's dreams.

What we have seen so far follows the pattern of previous-life recalls with which we have become familiar. The memories that surface belong to a psychologically undigested life sequence, for the most part details of tragic deaths and separations. The episodes that Ms. Smith recalled are related to the interrogators of the Inquisition, as well as her and her lover's deaths. In her childhood these memories resurfaced during a critical illness. The nightmares and phobias of the dark are also themes familiar to those who recall previous lives.

Guirdham gave little thought to reincarnation before meeting with Ms. Smith. Moreover, he had had no recollections stirred up even upon visiting the places of the supposed Cathar incarnation. However, towards the end of the journey, he experienced day visions while walking down the street. He would see a man singing hymns and praying inside a building. He knew that this was in France and that the people he saw were victims of persecution. After the vision, he would fall down. This whole sequence of events repeated itself three times. By the end of Ms. Smith's treatment, other significant, though minor, experiences awakened Guirdham to the reality of repeated earthly lives.

A Stream of Connected Souls

In the second book, the movement that was begun by Ms. Smith continues. We receive more information about the Cathar incarnation from a second actor in the same Cathar scene: Miss Mills. The nature of the communications and the mode of recall are initially very similar. New developments follow and a window in time opens via a stream of connected souls who appear on the scene, closely connected to Miss Mills.

In 1968, when Guirdham was recovering from a heart condition that led him to retire from his work, he was introduced to Miss Mills by his wife, who thought she would be good company for him. The acquaintance progressed and in time Miss Mills disclosed to Guirdham the specific content of some dreams.

Miss Mills' biography bears many similarities to that of Ms. Smith. At age five she had nearly died of diphtheria. At that time she was suffering from two recurring dreams. In the first, she was running away from a medieval castle that stood on the summit of a hill. She

knew she was escaping something horrible. In the second dream, while she was walking barefoot with others towards a stake, someone hit her with a burning torch. Two years later, on the occasion of a building burning down, she displayed a deep fear of fire. She also had a phobia of trumpets, even hiding when the boys' brigade would play. Like Ms. Smith, Miss Mills had psychic gifts. When she was thirteen, she had sensed the imminent death of her uncle.

The first question that Miss Mills asked Guirdham referred to names she had heard in dreams: Raymond and Albigenian. In the months following their acquaintance, Miss Mills recorded more names of people and places from her dreams. These corresponded to historical individuals recorded by the Inquisition, and closely associated with the characters previously identified. She also started picking up biblical quotations; images of crosses that she drew; and quotations in French, Latin, and English. The crosses were recognizable as Cathar crosses.

Toward the end of 1971, Miss Mills became aware of communicating with departed souls that were visible to her. These souls gave clues about their identities and were eventually recognizable from historical records as Braïda de Laurac, a Cathar; Guilhabert de Castres, a Parfait (celibate priest) and Cathar bishop; and Bertrand Marty, the head of the Cathar Church at the time of the events and until the famous fall of the castle of Montsegur. It is interesting to note that both de Laurac and Marty had been at Montsegur (de Castres died before the capitulation of the castle), preparing Miss Mills to relive the horrors of the siege of the fortress.

With Miss Mills new elements arose in Guirdham's research. She could consciously communicate with departed souls, although this communication happened in stages. Before any contact was established with the first soul, she suffered an attack of tinnitus, which causes a persistent ringing in the ear. Later, she heard one and then various voices. It was de Laurac who first became visible and introduced the two other figures.

The newest element that Miss Mills made possible was the appearance of other actors in this reincarnation drama. These were all people who mostly had had connections with each other in early childhood and had been disconnected ever since. The first person to make contact was Betty, calling at the time when her husband had died un-

expectedly from a heart attack. Betty, too, had suffered from diphtheria at age seven, and had patterns very similar to those of Ms. Smith during her illness. She also kept a record of the communications she had received during her illness. The recurring names mentioned were mostly of those who had a part in the Avignonet massacre of the inquisitors. They were soldiers called “sergeants at arms.” Betty died after having an opportunity to visit Cathar country in southern France and particularly Montsegur. The visit to the castle transformed her and allowed her to overcome her grief and die serenely. After her death, she continued to communicate with the circle of related souls, providing important pieces of the puzzle.

Jane was Betty’s mother. She first appeared to Miss Mills in order to share the content of the notebooks that her daughter had written during her illness. She, too, later felt the need to go to the Languedoc in southern France. Two experiences reawakened her previous-life memories. In a dream, she was in a castle on a hill and recognized soldiers attired in the typical garb of sergeants-at-arms. Two days later, she was reliving her death at the stake after the fall of Montsegur, which actually happened on the anniversary of the historical event. She awoke with physical symptoms—burns up to her knees. The lesions disappeared quickly, even though the pain persisted for a time. Betty and Jane’s presence in Miss Mills’ life was soon followed by that of another school-days friend, Kathleen, and of an ex-business associate, Penelope. The latter died soon after reestablishing contact, and her husband Jack communicated her experiences as well as his own.

All of the actors in the drama relate variations on memories of two or three common events. The first was the massacre of Avignonet, just as had been the case with Ms. Smith. The second was the death at the stake at Montsegur. The second episode had been preceded by many precise memories of a Cathar sacrament called the *Consolamentum*, an equivalent of the Last Rites. The individuals could recall the words, gestures, and sequence of events. All the people in this small group, except Guirdham, had had relationships with the sergeants-at-arms who had Cathar sympathies and had been present at the Avignonet massacre. They were later part of the fall of the castle of Montsegur and were burned at the stake as heretics. The tragic deaths left scars for obvious reasons. In addition, some of the souls were young, and therefore even more unprepared to die. For the sergeants-at-arms,

death at the stake was not necessarily an idealistic choice. Their part in the Avignonet massacre, so they believed, left them no choice in the matter.

All the souls who had been together in southern France in the thirteenth century were now reincarnated within close proximity in the same area of England, and some of them had close ties during their school years. Their recalls often happened at a time of great stress or illness. A visit to a place of their previous life was another powerful trigger, as was the anniversary of a tragic date (e.g., the fall of Montsegur, or the massacre of Avignonet).

For those who have been so close in different incarnations, Guirdham describes a phenomenon that he calls “psychic fusion.” Some of the individuals, particularly Miss Mills, could take on the pain associated with the illness of a loved one without the symptoms associated with it. In other instances, the other person would have the symptoms without the pain.

Ascent and Descent: Formation of Affinities

In the first and second book, disjointed references to other places and epochs appear in very few instances. In 1965 Miss Mills had the same dream five times, in which she had been pursued by a mob in France in the eighteenth century. The dream ended in the thirteenth century. Guirdham, too, had a recollection of having been a sailor in France in the eighteenth century. It is as if these separate events cast their shadow ahead of time, announcing the future of the group’s odyssey. Later, at the time of the second book, Miss Mills made one very short reference to the Mythras mysteries. It is clear that the climax of the events of the third book had already been laid out during the two previous phases. At this point we will follow the phenomena that accompany the story rather than the story itself.

Miss Mills continued to be the central character of the story. Many strands converged towards her in different incarnations. At first the events led to what seems to be confusing information, difficult to place in a single incarnation. The individuals involved in the drama sought to understand the connection between experiences aroused by the English landscape and the Cathar incarnation, but without success. Instead, it appeared that another incarnation was coming to the fore: an incarnation in the seventh century AD, in England, at the time of the

spread of Celtic Christianity. That incarnation's fulcrum was the period of persecution of the Celtic Church by the Catholic Church. After reliving at length the Celtic incarnation, the individuals' memories were directed towards a French incarnation during the eighteenth century and the time of their imprisonment in England.

Finally, Guirdham's connection with Betty formed the background that opened the view to a Roman incarnation in the fourth century AD. Not surprisingly, this incarnation occurred during a tumultuous period. The scenario takes place during the last days of the Mythras cult. The individuals who were its members experienced persecution by Christianity in the form of the Roman State.

As we can see, the reincarnations do not emerge in a chronological fashion. We move back and forth in time, depending on the constellation of the individuals present at the moment, and the prevalent incarnation that connects them. In effect, even though the same individuals keep reappearing, certain links acquire more strength in one incarnation and less in others. There is, in fact, no such thing as a "soul mate" in the whole of the five incarnations.

Not all of the individuals reappear at all times, nor are all of their names known in every given incarnation. Nine of them follow each other in every incarnation. These are Guirdham; Miss Mills, called Clare in the third book; and Betty and Kathleen, whom we have met before. Added to them are Jocelyn, Annette, Mrs. Butler, Graham, and Marion.

In the earliest incarnation, the group is part of the surviving esoteric mysteries of Mythras. These are mysteries that do not stand necessarily in contrast with Christianity itself, but rather with the official Christianity of the Roman State. The proof is that the individuals reappeared in a following life imbued with the intention of preserving the old cosmological knowledge of the Celts in a Christian form. However, the times no longer allowed for that possibility, because of the perceived threat that an independent Irish Church represented to the authority of the Pope. The Celtic Church did nevertheless leave tangible traces and influences all over the European continent. In a following incarnation, the group's commitment to esoteric Christianity deepened, while on the historical level, what already happened in the seventh century was all the more real in the thirteenth century.

The Pope formed a temporal alliance with the state in the figure of the French king, which allowed the persecution of Cathar Christianity to take the form of a crusade. What is interesting for historical record is the fact that Catharism was present in many of the places that Celtic Christianity had prepared many centuries before. Catharism, a form of Manichaeism, held (among other things) the desire to cultivate new forms of social life, to restore vitality to the offices of religious representatives (parfaits, bishops), and finally to adopt a different view of evil through the belief in its transformation through good.

In the following incarnation, the zeal to make Christianity a social reality took the specific form of French Freemasonry, a generous ideal that finds itself bound to, and probably manipulated by the contradictory political strivings of the French empire. Masonry shared with Manichaeism the desire to build new social forms and the cultivation of a spirituality independent of religious authority—hence the traditional enmity of the Catholic Church. Historically, most of the affiliates of this branch of Freemasonry were Protestant and fervently anti-Catholic. We are not told specifically how things stood for these individuals in particular. They found themselves (at least some of them) to be sincere idealists in a situation that could not allow for any ideal to be concretely realized. The ideals of Freemasonry could hardly survive intact when mixed with the political ambitions of the French emperor.

A certain pattern emerges: the sequence of incarnations follows a movement of ascent and descent. In the first three incarnations, the souls strive to bring together old esoteric traditions and the tenets of Christianity. Until their thirteenth-century incarnation, they carry some memories of their previous lives. A veil comes over their consciousness during modern times (as with all of humanity), and it becomes a test of the faith of the companions. It becomes clearly visible in the souls' Napoleonic incarnation. In the three previous incarnations, the group had been witness to the end of certain movements and the knowledge that they spread. They had taken a last courageous stand. The same happened in the Napoleonic incarnation, only this time the individuals seemed to be idealists in a time when ideals could not really survive. Napoleon's determination was purely personal, and stood mostly in sharp contrast to other genuine ideals, Freemasonry included.

Finally, the movement took a step forward in the last incarnation, where the newly reincarnated English souls stood as pioneers in a movement of awakening toward the future. This group of souls has in fact been a group of pioneers of the spirit. At first they witnessed the death of ideas that had come at the end of a cycle or too soon for the times. This, in turn, allowed them finally to announce truths and ideas, particularly karma and reincarnation, that humanity can gradually rediscover. From this perspective, the lives of these individuals acquire a meaning that unites them with much of Europe's historical evolution.

We can now look at the major phenomena portrayed, mainly by observing three characters. What becomes clear is why Clare (Miss Mills in the previous book) forms a central link to all the other people involved. She is in effect one of the individuals who strives to embody the ideals that she represents in every incarnation. In three of her previous lives she had suffered persecution by the Church, and finally endured her fate in an English prison. She bore her burdens with remarkable equanimity, offering help to others in the last incarnation as she had in the preceding ones.

Clare's recollections form the central element that allows for the rebuilding of the chain of events. Many of these recollections are accompanied by physical pain. In her first recall of the Celtic incarnation, Clare faints at the place where, in that incarnation, she had fallen ill in her flight from Lindisfarne, which had just come under the control of the Catholic clergy. During many of these experiences of recollection, Clare lives in an altered state apparently caused by the pain: her eyes close, her expression turns blank, her body sags. The same process happens when she relives other people's memories, as for example in the stoning of Betty in her Celtic incarnation. Reliving her own Napoleonic life, she also physically manifests symptoms that were inflicted upon her in that life—for example, an inflammation at the same place where she had been struck on the ear by an English sailor. The same happens again when she recalls her Roman incarnation, in which she had been beaten on several occasions for helping other practitioners of the Mythras cult to hide. In fact, Clare's memory evolves from purely remembering to completely reliving. In the first stages, she is helped by her spirit guides. Later, she can bear the weight of the memories on her own.

The Weaving of Higher Aims

Different people come to the fore according to the importance of the link in each incarnation. Ms. Smith was the first link to Guirdham's Cathar life, because they had been lovers separated in tragic circumstances. In the Napoleonic incarnation, Guirdham is most connected to Clare and Marion. Although part of the same group, Guirdham and Marion had acted unscrupulously toward Clare in that incarnation. Finally, in the Roman incarnation, Guirdham was closest of all to Betty. She was Camillia, the Roman mistress; Guirdham, the superficial and vain slave Berenice, who had an opportunity to expand her range of interests thanks to Camillia's involvement in the Mythras cult. This manifested itself most of all in the possessive love the slave revealed for his mistress. According to the incarnation that plays the most important role for the group at the moment, links are formed through affinities built at the time. People appearing in dreams or visions have the characteristics of that incarnation that are most readily recognizable to the dreamer.

Links of destiny acquire all the more importance when a group needs help and depends upon an individual who must atone for trespasses against him- or herself and others. Such is the case of Annette, the person who must undergo the trial of fire in this life. In her Celtic incarnation, Annette demonstrated a stubborn trait that undermined her: she practiced healing on her own, without belonging to the Celtic clergy. She was a very uncompromising person. She harangued the crowds against Catholic authorities and labeled a certain priest as the "incarnation of evil." In her Cathar incarnation, she had pursued the status of Parfaite with little consistency and failed at it. Later, in her Napoleonic imprisonment, she became addicted to gambling with dice. In her Roman incarnation, she was a rich young man interested in the use of herbs—without, however, practicing medicine. In that incarnation, the young man was deeply enamored of Berenice (Guirdham) who did not return his love. After overcoming his infatuation, he protected Clare and Guirdham from persecution by the authorities.

In their present incarnation, Guirdham and Annette could not meet each other, no matter how much he attempted to make it happen. A last-minute accident or illness always prevented it. Guirdham sees his misfortune as a just return for his behavior toward Annette in the

Roman incarnation. Annette had a chance in her current lifetime to become a healer. However, she had to develop the compassion that had not emerged from a rash temperament in previous incarnations. Fate brought this element in the form of repeated illnesses and accidents. She first suffered a comatose state after going through critical peritonitis. This was followed by a fall resulting in a concussion, with a resulting swelling on the left temple and a badly bruised left foot. A little later she was involved in a car accident from which she suffered another severe concussion. The last was the hardest ordeal because, apart from being in critical condition, she also spiraled down into a period of self-negativity, becoming hypercritical of others. This last episode—which was partially the fruit of complete exhaustion—eventually led her to a breakthrough, but was accompanied by depression. All these trials were the price Annette had to pay in order to learn compassion and to experience other people's pain, necessary for all those who desire to practice healing.

Annette was not alone in her trials. The strength of the group was lent to her by different individuals. When ill with peritonitis, Guirdham's wife took on some of her burden by carrying part of her pain. She had been Annette's mother in her Celtic incarnation, an incarnation that obviously played an important role in the present. Clare, too, took on some of the suffering when Annette was going through her last two accidents. She carried pain without symptoms at exactly the same time that Annette was suffering from the accidents. The doctor who cured her was sympathetic to the input that the group of friends had offered. He himself was connected to the group in the Celtic incarnation, where he had been a scribe who recorded the demise of Celtic Christianity during a synod. The strength lent by others allowed Annette to more easily bear the trials of fate.

Although the above revelations open up far more dimensions of karma, it is remarkable that the way they reach us does not differ much from anything we have seen so far. The central events most apt to be recalled are still those that cause the most trauma, and much of the knowledge concerns the modality of death or other very critical events.

The whole of the weaving of destiny between these individuals reveals how a group that has harmonized much of its previous karmic entanglements can turn its goals towards higher aims. Guirdham is ac-

knowledge for having written the book; however, Clare plays a much more pivotal role, and all the other individuals play parts of variable import in this revelation about how karma and reincarnation work, and reach the public ear at a time when this information is sorely needed. It appears that the group itself has a biography unfolding over various incarnations. Revealing the reality of karma and reincarnation is the most obvious of its present aims.

With this story, we have now completed our overview of the phenomena that cover the whole realm of experiences pointing to the preexistence of the human spirit. We have many parts of the puzzle, but many more are yet missing. Therefore, we need to turn to a knowledge of the higher worlds from the perspective of modern spiritual perception, as offered to us by Edgar Cayce and Rudolf Steiner. We will offer a perspective from which all the scattered pieces of this puzzle will find their place in a larger view of the integration of our life on Earth with our life in the spirit.

Chapter 3

THE SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE

*The soul of man is like to water;
From heaven it cometh,
O heaven it riseth,
And then returneth to Earth,
Forever alternating.*

J.W. Goethe

Karma and reincarnation have been the subject of spiritual teachings since ancient times. Knowledge of these laws has been preserved from tradition primarily in India and various other parts of Asia. It is only in the early twentieth century that teachings concerning past lives have re-emerged in human consciousness and have been expressed in a way that suits the modern scientific outlook.

This re-emergence is due in great part to Edgar Cayce, and even more so to Rudolf Steiner. What these two men have in common is that they spoke about karma and reincarnation based on the results of their own spiritual investigations. We will look at the life of these two innovators in relation to what they have offered us via their biographies and revelations.

It is significant that Steiner and Cayce started delivering the core of their teachings at about the same time, between the years 1923 and 1925. At that time, both were able to speak of previous lives—not in general terms, but in relation to particular individuals. Cayce referred to the lives of individuals who came to see him for guidance, and he often commented that they had been connected to him in previous incarnations. Steiner traced the karmic biography of well-known individuals after their deaths. In addition, it should be noted that by this time Steiner had already made public many of the laws of karma for twenty years, albeit from a general perspective.

This chapter will allow us to deepen our comprehension of the experiences that point to the realms of life before birth, primarily those experiences involving conscious recall of previous lives. The two last

sections in this chapter—the soul’s journey after death and the meeting with the shadow—will also serve as an introduction to and transition into the next chapter of experiences that point to life after death.

EDGAR CAYCE’S REVELATIONS ABOUT KARMA

*See, I fly like a bird,
And floating in the air I descend to Earth...
Stepping forth I follow the tracks
Of my previous deeds; for I am
A child of Yesterday,
My becoming is in the keeping of the gods of Akeru.*

Egyptian Book of the Dead

Edgar Cayce was born near Beverly, Kentucky, in 1877 into a family of farmers. His unique individuality manifested in singular ways beginning in childhood. As a baby he demonstrated an abundance of joy and a sunny, cheerful disposition, accompanied by good health and vigor. At ease within his world, the newborn cried little and called little attention to his needs. Growing up, he found himself comfortable being alone. He could get very absorbed in his own questions that he would pursue to their end, with little distraction from his environment. Although not the sportsman type, he liked the outdoors. Others found themselves fond of the child and later Cayce became a natural leader. His father recognized that the child seemed to know and have an interest in engaging with everyone.

From early childhood, the child was surrounded by imaginary playmates—departed souls he could converse with. Cayce continued his relationship with his grandfather, whom he had witnessed drown at age four. Fortunately for the young soul, these experiences were accepted—at least by his mother, who could also see and talk to Edgar’s invisible friends. As Cayce remembered it, his grandfather Thomas Jefferson also had extrasensory gifts. He could converse with departed souls and was able to move objects at a distance without any apparent physical contact.

Cayce’s interest in spiritual matters was obvious from early on. As a child, hearing the expression “as strong as Samson” from a

woodcutter, he felt compelled to find out who Samson was.¹ This was the beginning of his lifelong exploration of the Bible. He asked his parents to read him the whole book, and by age fourteen he had read it several times. A little earlier he had joined the Christian Church of the Disciples of Christ, whose ministers were fond of him and began to trust his opinion in biblical matters.

These precedents naturally paved the way for Cayce's first spiritual experiences. At age thirteen, after reading about the vision of Manoah—an episode connected with the life of Samson—he retired to his favorite tree. That night he prayed to God, asking for a gift that would be of use to his fellow men. Instantly he felt borne upwards. At the foot of the bed stood a figure; around him, filling the whole room, was a radiant light. The figure said, "Thy prayers are heard. You will have your wish. Remain faithful. Be true to yourself. Help the sick, the afflicted." Immediately after, Cayce rushed out of the room to experience the moonlit landscape, which was imbued with a new radiance.²

Cayce left school after the eighth grade because his family was financially unable to offer him higher education. He tried a succession of jobs before finding and confirming his spiritual vocation. His life can be conveniently divided according to the places he lived.

Between 1877 and 1920 Cayce lived in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. Here he deepened his interest in Christianity and became a member of the Disciples of Christ, where he taught Sunday school and was very respected for his opinions. For much of his life he agonized in the struggle between his earnest faith and the psychic abilities he had ever since his childhood, not knowing how to reconcile them. The tension caused him to doubt the source of information in his readings and the legitimacy of his way of working. After many years, the results he obtained opened the way to the possibility of harmonizing Christian teachings with a wealth of esoteric knowledge not usually considered in association with it. Cayce strove hard to find this integration—witness his rigorous and scrupulous effort to recognize the few but clear hints that the Bible gives about reincarnation.

In light of the experiences mentioned above, it was not surprising that Cayce proved to be a great hypnotic subject at age twenty-three. A symptomatic event occurred at this stage. Cayce developed a mysterious aphonia, or loss of voice. For almost a year he could speak only in a whisper, his health deteriorated and he lost sixty pounds. He

could be cured under hypnosis, although the results were not stable, and he became increasingly dependent on a certain Dr. Layne. The aphonia returned three years later. On that occasion he was visited by another physician. In that doctor's office Cayce lost consciousness, and when he returned to his senses he was able to speak again. It was at this point in his life that Cayce started to offer readings about people's health while lying unconscious, communicating to them indications he received from the spirit.

As is evident from Cayce's dependence upon Dr. Layne, part of the seer's inner struggles revolved around freeing himself from those who wanted to use his knowledge for their own gain. He was often unable to resist their influence and their entreaties. Cayce relates in great detail the struggles he encountered in the use of his gifts. In one instance, he had agreed to give a reading about the evolution of stock market securities in order to repay a debt of \$300. In another instance he could not refuse a favor to his father. He concluded then: "This whole transaction brought troublesome conditions mentally and physically for me, as well as for my father. I was forced to discontinue giving the information, and operations were necessarily suspended."³ Something similar occurred to the seer when he predicted the outcome of horse races for a friend. For a year after that episode he was unable to give readings. Cayce's conclusions about the misuse of his gifts are worth quoting in full: "Those looking for material things, sensational things, get them—but the effect is not good for them. The effect upon me is even worse. Only when the desire crept in to make money or to put on the sensational did the work fail. When that was attempted, my health failed, my conscience was rent, and I could no longer even attempt the work."⁴

Cayce's life path came to a significant turn in 1923, after he had moved to Texas three years before. At this point it had been thirteen years since he had discovered his ability to provide "readings" to individuals who visited or simply asked him questions from a distance. These queries were initially geared towards health issues. In 1923 Cayce decided to make his readings a professional priority, and at that date he inaugurated "life readings," which provided people with information about their previous lives. In 1926 Cayce moved to Virginia Beach, where two years later his hospital was inaugurated, using alter-

native therapies that Cayce derived from information provided by the readings. The hospital was short lived and closed its doors in 1931. Soon after, the Association for Research and Enlightenment was founded, whose task was the preservation and classification of Cayce's readings. At the seer's death there was a legacy of more than 14,000 sessions he had given.

Cayce himself told us what was at work during his readings. The information, he said, "is not the object itself but what is reflected." The source of it was the knowledge received from other souls, incarnated or excarnated.⁵ Conscious experiences towards the end of the seer's life reveal the nature of his trance state. In an initial experience on April 12, 1938, Cayce simply witnessed the nature of his out-of-body experiences by becoming conscious outside his body and beholding his inert physical body as something foreign. He was conscious of reentering and reanimating it progressively.

Two weeks later he revealed that before going into the realm of the unconscious, he had to wait for the Light—"usually it is a shaft of light-blue white light, or streaks of light." These two are very likely the first steps that accompanied his revelations—steps for which he did not retain consciousness most of the time. That Cayce was outside his body was obvious. While in a trance he would not feel the pain of needles that unscrupulous scientists stuck into his body. When someone stuck the blade of a knife under his fingernail, there was no blood or pain until Cayce returned to normal consciousness.

Other fragments of Cayce's recollections allow us to deepen our understanding of the trance state. From a particular recurring dream and from impressions lingering after the readings, Cayce could complete the picture of his unconscious experience.⁶ It all started, it seems, out of his body, in a place that was surrounded by darkness. At that point he felt the need to follow a light that came towards him in order not to be lost in this darkness that oppressed him. He then moved through so-called lower astral realms at first, witnessing grotesque forms and shapes of souls tied to their earthly desires. Further up, the soul-spiritual landscape acquired progressively more light, motion, and sound. Finally, he reached a place where only a tapestry and weaving of light and sound existed. It is here that he reached the "hall of records" and was given information about the individual for whom he was giving the reading. Much of this experience resembles, in a muted

form, a near-death experience, of which much more will be said in the next chapter.

From all we know from other facets of Cayce's personality, unconsciousness during the readings achieved an important result. In the way Cayce presented knowledge of the spiritual world, he was protected against his lower nature. His recurrent dream shows that he needed the light in order not to get lost in the lower realms of life after death.

We will now turn to some general guidelines from Cayce's investigations into the realm of karma and reincarnation, which opened a new interest in the American continent. We will remain in the larger and outer reaches of this investigation, knowing that, at closer range, problems surge in the interpretation of the details in Cayce's readings. The seer himself was conscious of these.

The chief difficulty in translating information from its supersensible source is one of interpretation. This is a problem known to all who want to convey supersensible knowledge through the limitations of earthly means, unless a consistent methodology is developed. Dates and names are vulnerable to the problem of interpretation. An example will appear in Cayce's Persian incarnation, most often dated at about 6000 BC, but in a couple of readings at around 600 BC. In most of the readings Cayce's incarnation at the time of Christ is given as Lucius of Cyrene, identified as the nephew of Luke—the physician and gospel writer—whereas in Reading 1598–2, the two are said to be one and the same. The former is the one to which biographers refer.

Cayce's physical and mental well-being played an important part in the clarity of the communication and quality of the readings. On "bad" days, W. H. Church mentions that the phrasing could be "exasperatingly indistinct and ambiguous and even self-contradictory here and there."⁷

The accuracy of the information also depended on the quality of the interaction between the seer and the seeker of information. Simple curiosity, self-centered interest, or careless questions yielded very literal responses, leading to confusion or misunderstandings; clear spiritual purposes produced readings whose quality was clearly above average.

Part of the errors might also have been mistakes on the part of those who took down information from the sleeping Cayce. In addi-

tion, there is also the difficulty of clearly understanding some expressions in the readings, unless one carefully checks the context and avails oneself of additional knowledge. Thus, when the reading says “this period,” it could either refer to the time in question or to the present; eighteen could be misunderstood for eighty, and so on.

Finally, some mistakes are only *apparently* such, for lack of better “earthly knowledge.” One reading speaks of a Gamaliel who lived at the time of Christ, whereas the Gamaliel known to history lived before our era. It took a certain amount of historical research in order to find information about a second Gamaliel, son of the known Gamaliel. Cayce gave readings concerning both individuals, but without knowing the facts, much confusion could ensue from a cursory study of the readings that did not distinguish between the two. The same is true of names that were handed down through lines of initiates. Thus, history only knows one Zoroaster, the last of a line of initiates. Tradition or spiritual research, however, speaks of various initiates with the same name.

For all the above reasons, integrating the results of the readings requires a thorough double-checking of sources, complementing one reading with supplementary ones, and sound historical research—in short, all the elements of thorough scholarship.

However, in what follows we will not look at the details of the readings, but rather at the larger picture of the conclusions reached by Cayce in regard to the nature of reincarnation and what we can learn from them for our life on Earth.

A Seer’s Understanding of Karma

From 1925 to 1944 Cayce gave about 4,500 readings about karma, which are called *life readings*. The readings confirm the findings of Stevenson and Bowman in cases of unfinished lives. In the case of a child’s violent death, Cayce says that the “entity” reincarnated in nine months.⁸ The four-year-old child presented symptoms of hysteria due to nightmares. The terror, Cayce says, was very real. The child could not distinguish between one life and the other. The noise of New York City was mixed up in his mind with the loud behavior of Nazi hooligans. In this case, Cayce recommended that the child avoid anything frightening (for example, witch stories) and that his caretakers provide patience and love. He added that souls undergoing tragic death may

wander in bewilderment in the afterlife, and come back to Earth prematurely “for the sake of the temporary sanctuary of a womb.”⁹

Cayce paints a philosophy of reincarnation that shares similarities with the older Eastern view, but also demonstrates radical departures. Karma, he believed, was generated after humanity became separate from the womb of the Godhead in the famous episode of the Fall. What was an unconscious union in the bosom of God had to evolve in such a way that humanity would return to the realm of the divine—but, this time, freely and consciously. Free will is the cosmic grain of sand and the cause of all karma. Human beings can refuse to learn and bring upon themselves the consequences of their acts—the necessary adjustments from one lifetime to the other—to overcome the limitations they have set for themselves on their path.

“Conquest of self” is the ultimate goal of karma and reincarnation. In a reading, Cayce says: “He that conquers self is more than he that taketh a city.”¹⁰ In another reading he expresses the sovereignty of the individual over and above his environment:

There is no urge in the astrological, or in the environmental which surpasses the will or determination of the entity. For the entity finds it is true, there is nothing that can separate the entity from the knowledge, or from the love of Creative Force called God, but self. And that the entity should determine in self to apply, rather than mere knowledge and surmise, but apply and listen to the still, small voice within, and the entity will find that the promises are true which have been made... (Reading 5023–2).

Incarnation on Earth introduces elements in human life that cannot be experienced in the spiritual world. Will and emotions have their place only on Earth. By taking hold of and transforming them, we wrest from Earth the experiences we cannot undergo in the spiritual world. The reality of Earth requires, in effect, that we hold the balance between getting too absorbed in its pleasures and being held aloof in the realm of spirit. Neither of these excesses will constructively further our evolution.

Karma is a long path of evolution. A quality developed in one life may be the obstacle to overcome in a following life, in order to gain a complementary perspective. A sense of justice gained in one lifetime may need to yield to the soul's experience of mercy in a following life. Boldness may need to be tempered with prudence, wisdom with compassion, and so on. Perfection cannot be achieved in one lifetime. Just as there is no way out of karma, so there is no standing still. Karma and the process of incarnation require that we move forward; by refusing to do so, we fall backwards. Thus, the cycle of incarnations becomes a constant education.

Karma, Cayce stressed, should not be seen as a retributive and punitive idea. The limits imposed by karma are the tools that temper human beings and lead them to see further aspects of reality that they could not grasp in their earlier stages of evolution. Even an illness or a debilitating situation can be a way for the soul to gain more focus on experiences it has neglected, and so restore balance where previous lifetimes brought excesses or one-sidedness. The ultimate goal of karma and reincarnation is love. Cayce never tired of saying: "Love is Law as Law is Love." Overcoming karma is equivalent to attaining a state of "Christ consciousness," which enables us to make His will our own will.

Cayce's readings had an eminently practical aspect. Understanding ideas about karma is only a first step, which must be followed by action. Action, undertaken with earnestness, is more helpful than simple avoidance of evil. Only when we actively engage do we receive help from the spirit. Although the imperative "Judge not, that ye be not judged" often returns in his readings, refraining from judging is not the equivalent of inaction. Rather, it is a call to take responsibility for our own actions rather than blaming others for our own predicament. Furthermore, non-judgment is not the equivalent of resignation or fatalism. Cayce's recurring, complementary call to "change the environs" is the idea that we need to realize when it is time to move out of degrading, counterproductive or destructive personal entanglements. Action is the way to transform ourselves. Our weaknesses can become our greatest strengths if our will is rightly engaged. Anger and aggressiveness can be transformed gradually into courage and boldness. Our pride in knowledge can give way to compassionate understanding.

“Start with what you have and the next step will be given” was a fitting conclusion for many readings.

Edgar Cayce was not specifically bent on trying to understand the laws of karma. Nevertheless, over many years, together with people around him, he came to develop an understanding of the tendencies at work, amid the data collected from more than 4,000 readings.

Karma is a path of schooling. The individuals we associate with in any given lifetime provide us the means for coming to know ourselves and to continue evolving. Situations where we have created imbalance or generated debt keep presenting themselves. However, the hidden architecture of karma does not present us with schemes we can apprehend with our intellect. Some manifestations of karma in this present life may be the result of deeds done many incarnations ago. In Cayce’s Reading 275–19, we see an example of an individual who had laughed at a young Christian woman being persecuted and injured in the Roman arena. In this life she developed an incurable form of disease on her hip bone. Cayce explained that the atonement could not have been brought on earlier, although the individual had incarnated twice before.

Reading 3633–1 illustrates the complexity of interactions of successive lives. In this reading, Cayce outlines alternatives the young man in question can achieve. He indicates that unless he cultivates a correct assessment of his abilities, he is in danger of losing his sanity. Otherwise, his genius can lead him to great heights in the realm of music and poetry. Later in life, the young man was the cause of a series of tragic events and consequently developed schizophrenia. Not having heeded Cayce’s call, he brought upon himself the consequences of an earlier life in which he had been using spiritual forces to gratify earthly desires.

In the working of karma we can observe general tendencies. We have seen one example of disease resulting from past karma. Many other examples are present in the ARE files. In these, one kind of disease does not necessarily result from similar kinds of past causes. Karma is eminently individual. Although it can be apprehended gradually, it forces us to look at the whole individual. Even accidents may have karmic origins, according to Cayce’s readings. Such is the case of a young girl who had fallen from a horse at age fourteen and sustained a spinal cord injury. Cayce’s reading says: “There are rather serious

disturbances here. Portions of these, if the body will accept it, are karmic” (Reading 5191–1).

Many of the modern catchphrases of reincarnation can find sobering explanations in Cayce’s readings. What about old souls? What about soul mates? Cayce did refer to “old souls,” or individuals who had been incarnating on Earth for a long time. In Reading 276–2, he makes a fine distinction: “for in the experiences in the Earth plane, though few in number, old indeed in Earth’s experience is the entity or soul” (Reading 276–2). This refers to the time of the first incarnation rather than the frequency of incarnation. In another reading about a three-year-old he called an old soul, he had this comment: “It will be found that very few people will be found as strangers to the entity, yet some will remain strangers ever, no matter how often or in what manner they are thrown together.”

There are indeed souls who have known each other and have been close through many incarnations. We all instinctively know of one such area where karma is often very concentrated—the family unit. Those who have been husband and wife in other lives or in the present often have had other very close relationships—perhaps as lovers, but also as parent and child, as siblings, or as teacher and pupil in other incarnations. The idea of a soul mate, as Cayce communicates it, takes on a different dimension than we know from a certain vein of “spiritual romance.” Soul mates are those who have repeatedly embraced an ideal in their following incarnations. “And such as have in an experience found an ideal may be said to be soul mates, and no marriages made in heaven nor by the Father save as each do His bid-dings” (Reading 452). In fact, such soul mates can be whole groups of people who come to Earth with the intent of furthering a task: bringing a new educational method, developing scientific research, or building communities.

It should be kept in mind that karma cannot explain or condition everything. There are other distinctions to be made. In two readings, when asked about a certain relationship, Cayce would say that two individuals had no previous karmic association (Readings 2030–1 and 5241–1). Individuals often will face problems in life due to a wholly new situation that has no counterpart in previous lives. Another important distinction appears in the readings between karmic retribu-

tion and prenatal resolve. In one reading the differences appear in regard to one soul: “The emotions come from sojourns on Earth. The innate influences come from sojourns in the environs about the Earth—the interims between incarnations” (Reading 1523–4). The soul does not cease its own evolution once it leaves the Earth. Some dispositions may be brought to work on Earth by the influences received in the life on the spiritual plane, between incarnations. In a reading about a three-year-old, who had been spastic since birth, Cayce specified that this was not a karmic condition (Reading 5151–1). The three-year-old freely took on the physical condition as a means to work favorably on her environment.

The implications of Cayce’s views on karma alter many accepted paradigms of common thinking. What Stevenson intuited about inheritance and individuality Cayce affirms without hesitation. To the question “From which side of my family do I inherit most?” he answers, “You inherit most from yourself, not from family! The family is only a river through which it (the entity soul) flows” (Reading 1233–1). We can now begin to fathom the truly far-reaching implications that understanding of the laws of karma holds in store.

Individuality is what puts the human being at the level of co-creator with God, through the use of free will. “The Creator intended man to be a companion with Him. Whether in heaven or in the Earth or in whatever consciousness, a companion with the Creator” (Reading 416–18). This naturally touches on the matter of good and evil. That *spiritual* is not synonymous with *good* is clear to Cayce: “And getting outside of the realm of the material does not mean necessarily angelic, or angelic influence” (Reading 314–1). Recognizing good and evil does not mean adopting a dualistic view of the world. Cayce’s view of things was much more dynamic. “For anything good can also be dangerous. I could mention nothing good that does not also have its misapplications, its misuse.”¹¹ He further elaborates the point: “When we use the forces within to serve the Creative Forces and God, then we are using them correctly. If we use them for our own selfish interests, they are being abused.”¹² What, then, can help us draw the difference between positive and negative choices? In this realm it is our thinking that gives us the power of mind over matter. Cayce expresses this notion in a variety of ways. Knowledge, as the correct interpretation of our experiences from a larger perspective than the materialis-

tic/scientific, is the ladder that leads us to true individual freedom. Much of this knowledge can be gained only on Earth. Passing by the experience of knowledge on Earth may deprive us of further experiences on the spiritual plane. The insistence on the importance of knowledge is a return to the source, for “knowledge is the primal cause” in Cayce’s terminology, a reminder of the Biblical: “In the beginning was the Word.”

Knowledge, as expressed above, does not reach us via the printed word. It can only be gained from higher sources—the Bible was a recurrent theme for Cayce—and experience. In setting the basis of ARE and the handling of his readings, the psychic says something in this direction: “Hence the preparation and handling, then, must be from the material angle, and presented from the material as well as the spiritual angle—and that the organization is an ecclesiastical research, as well as a scientific organization, not a sect or a set, but as the Law of One” (Reading 254–89).

In order to be *true*, knowledge needs to become selfless. It needs to be allied with our will in a selfless way. The sleeping prophet differentiated between the purely intellectual, resulting in ideas, and the selfless will, giving rise to ideals. To accomplish this last step he exhorted us to relinquish the results of our actions. And his final exhortation could be summed up in his own words: “I am my brother’s keeper!” That should be the cry in the heart of every member, every individual. “I am my brother’s keeper!” (Reading 254–91).

**RUDOLF STEINER, HERALD OF A NEW
SCIENCE OF KARMA**

*Thus the seer, with vision clear,
Sees forms appear and disappear
In the perpetual round of strange
Mysterious change,
From birth to death, from death to birth,
From Earth to heaven, from heaven to Earth.*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Rudolf Steiner has contributed an understanding of the spiritual world and of the ideas of karma and reincarnation that fits the scientific spirit of modern times. These ideas are no longer considered solely the domain of religious or spiritual tradition. If such is the case, Steiner's own life should place this claim in its proper perspective.

All the stages of Steiner's life indicate that he was deeply steeped in the spirit of Middle Europe. This seems clear from looking at the evolution of his thinking and career. The course of his life itself shows a geographical progression of great interest. His early days exposed him to the racial diversity of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, introducing him primarily to German, Croatian, and Hungarian nationalities. In the first stage of his life, he moved from the periphery of the empire to its capital, Vienna. In the second stage, he arrived in the old cultural capital of Germany, Weimar. From there his destiny took him to Berlin, the German political capital. When World War I broke out, Steiner was directing a growing international movement from a neutral country, Switzerland, a land of many people. Dornach became the center of a movement that looked beyond race, religion, and dogma to the universally human.

Let us walk these steps in succession. Kraljevak (or Krajlevec) is the name of a Croat village on the eastern border of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, now Croatia. Here, Steiner was born in 1861, to an Austrian family of peasant origin. His parents' life had taken a new turn when their mutual landlord did not authorize them to marry, forcing them to experience homelessness. Steiner's father worked for the railways and his career required frequent moves.

In his early youth, Steiner lived close to nature, near the Alps and forests. In contrast, during this time the latest technological innovations, such as the telegraph and railway, were rapidly coming to the fore, and he lived in their immediate proximity as well. Mechanical devices, electricity, and factories were also close at hand, and these elicited the child's curiosity. Religion played practically no part in the family education owing to his father's proud, free-thinker stance.

The child grew up as a lonely boy. He could not share many of his daily experiences with anyone in his immediate environment. His first inner recognition came at age seven when he discovered a geometry book owned by his assistant teacher. For weeks he completely absorbed himself in it. In his autobiography, he remembers this as an inner awakening and a source of great joy. He felt that knowledge of the soul would have to be of the nature of geometrical science—in other words, independent of sense perception.

In his biography, Steiner relates that he felt the direct reality of thinking, whereas he could not fully experience the physical world. He was immersed in a world of nature beings and other beings who live beyond the physical world. He expresses it thus in his biography: "I would have experienced the sensory world as a surrounding spiritual darkness if it had not received the light from that other world."¹³ This is reiterated even more clearly thus: "To me the external world really appeared somewhat shadowy or like images. It moved past me like pictures, whereas the connection with the spiritual world always had the character of concrete reality."¹⁴ This led him to express the image of being separated from the outer world by a thin veil, a condition that continued roughly until his thirty-fifth year. This unusual soul constitution explains many of the experiences that Steiner had to face.

When Steiner passed his entrance examination for middle school successfully, his father wanted him to move on directly to what was called *Realschule*, in Wiener-Neustadt. He wanted to direct his son toward his own profession—therefore choosing a scientific and technical education, rather than one in the humanities of the *Gymnasium* towards which the youth was inclined.

Steiner's thirst for knowledge knew no bounds. Through it he hoped to bring answers about a wealth of inner experiences that no one could otherwise explain to him. The choice of the technical education

of the Realschule left Steiner yearning for the liberal arts. He decided to complete his classical education on his own, and bought Greek and Latin textbooks. Learning Latin and Greek later enabled him to earn a doctorate. Along with these studies, he felt the need to deepen his knowledge of philosophy and undertook the systematic study of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, not because he felt a strong affinity for the philosopher, but because he wanted to discipline his thinking. He pursued this endeavor further with more of Kant's books, and works by Krug, Thilb, Schelling, Hegel, and Fichte. The distillation of all philosophy and natural science left him with the feeling of hitting a wall. How could he reconcile these teachings with his experiences of the spiritual world?

It was at the *Technische Hochschule* that Steiner had the opportunity to listen to Karl Julius Schröer, a very important personality in this first phase of his life. He was spellbound by Schröer's personality, by the way he gave life to what he lectured about, and by his love for the work of Goethe.

It was Schröer who introduced him to Goethe's scientific work. It seems that both Steiner's philosophic and scientific studies were starting to converge. Through his mentor, Steiner was invited to edit Goethe's scientific work in Weimar, where he first visited in 1889. The next year he moved to the city and started a new, deeply fruitful chapter of his life.

Steiner's residence in Weimar between 1890 and 1897 was almost completely framed by his work at the Goethe archives. These years are characterized by the effort of bringing Goethe's views to the world. This work had started even before the Weimar period with the publication, in 1886, of Steiner's *Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World Conception*.

For Steiner, the study of Goethe was an enlargement of the study of science from purely physical laws to the laws of the natural world. He was fond of saying that Goethe was the Galileo of organic science. Just as Galileo had laid a foundation for an understanding of the inanimate world, it will one day be recognized that Goethe established the basis for understanding the world of the living. Goetheanism is, in essence, what some may call a pure phenomenology. For Goethe, facts were all that was needed to understand reality—there was no

need to work with theories. Thinking can let itself be guided by following facts from complex, secondary phenomena to simple, primary phenomena. One phenomenon can be seen as a mystery, while another would provide a solution, and the act of human thinking would provide the link between them all. We are following a very similar approach in this book.

Steiner understood that Goethe had reached an apex of thought that had not evolved since his time. It was no doubt this experience with the worldview of Goethe that determined his path of expression and formulation of his own worldview. It could be defined as the next step of Goetheanism. Later, with good reason, it would be called *spiritual science*. Whereas Goethe had satisfied himself by sensing the activity of spirit in nature, Steiner wanted to think of himself and the world as *within* the spirit. Steiner was standing at the crossroads of science and mysticism. However, although he was interested in the inner experience of mysticism, he could not subscribe to it as a path to knowledge. He felt that mysticism deepened the dichotomy between an outer and inner world. It left the world of concepts and ideas to science and sought to penetrate the inner world via enhanced feeling. Steiner felt instead that he could reach a “mystical experience of ideas.”

Steiner's inner life, as it had developed through Goetheanism first, led to another important step. Steiner learned the deeper nature of meditation in the experience of it. Although he had long held a regular meditative life before then, at that moment it became an absolute necessity for his being, like eating would be for the body. Through meditation he achieved a third kind of knowledge. Moving beyond conceptual knowledge, his *Philosophy of Freedom* had established a premise of knowledge based on sense-free thinking. Now he realized that there was a third kind of knowledge, one we attain by meditating on a mental picture, for example the human “I.” This knowledge can be reached only when the human being can free himself completely from the influence of the physical body, in other words in an advanced state of meditation.

Steiner entered the third phase of his life in Berlin, where he had been invited to be the editor of the *Literary Review*. The crisis Steiner experienced further justified his perception that meditation was now an inner, indispensable need for his soul. To this end he further

needed to turn toward the contemplation of Christianity in spirit. He explains: "At that time, I had to rescue my spiritual worldview through inner storms that took place behind the scenes of my everyday experience. I was able to make progress during that period of testing only by contemplating, through spiritual perception, the evolution of Christianity." It was in 1899, according to Robert Powell and Paul M. Allen, that the inner storm found a temporary haven in a deep experience of Christ.¹⁵ Steiner, very private about the matter, describes it with just a few words: "It was decisive for my soul's development that I stood before the Mystery of Golgotha in a deep and solemn celebration of knowledge."¹⁶ This enlightenment also led him to a personal soul abyss. His marriage to Anna Eunicke in 1899 provided a much-welcomed anchor to a tumultuous soul life.

Steiner experienced yet another external abyss of society. He was perhaps one of the last great minds to be able to bridge the gap between bourgeoisie and proletariat. Through his individual study and his friendship with scholar and editor J. H. Mackay, Steiner immersed himself into the social question from which he hitherto had kept himself aloof, given his little interest in politics. The Socialist Workers' Educational School of Berlin asked Steiner to teach history. He accepted, emphasizing that he would be able to offer only his view of things and taught from 1899 to 1904. For the workers the teacher had to devise a completely different way of reaching his pupils. Steiner experienced firsthand the proletariat's thirst for knowledge, the kind usually offered from the most materialistic angles. His work was successful and expanded into the teaching of natural science, at the school's request. He was invited by numerous trade unions to provide lectures and eventually delivered an address to 7,000 typesetters at the Gutenberg Jubilee in Berlin, in June of 1900. Later, despite his popularity, he felt increasingly ill at ease with the school's management, which neither understood nor approved of his ethical individualism that was odd company for Marxism's scientific materialism.

The bourgeoisie was living at best in a world of past glories that it could not or would not share with less-privileged social classes. From that time onward, the proletariat further identified its cause with deeper forms of materialism that denied any access to the world of the spirit. This abyss of existence was felt very keenly by Steiner: "This is how an era arrived that, through its very existence, should have devel-

oped toward spirit; but it denied its own essential nature. That time began to make the impossibility of life a reality.”¹⁷

Steiner had to experience the tragic dimension of our time in order to make the unprecedented decision to divulge esoteric knowledge. He had seen the pressing need for it. Furthermore, he had no tradition of secrecy to follow since he did not belong to any esoteric society. His knowledge did not derive from these channels or any other tradition, but from his own spiritual scientific research. It was finally through a group at the Theosophical Society that Steiner was invited to talk publicly about his spiritual research. Later on he founded the Anthroposophical Society, and continued to deliver lectures derived from his own research and to give life to new initiatives in all practical domains until the year 1924.

The year 1923 signaled the beginning of Cayce’s life readings. From both sides of the Atlantic came the sign that humanity urgently needed to perceive the reality of repeated earthly lives.

THE SOUL’S JOURNEY AFTER DEATH

*Serenely let us move to distant places
And let no sentiments of home detain us.
The cosmic spirit seeks not to restrain us
But lift us stage by stage to wider spaces.*

Hermann Hesse

Exploring karma and reincarnation based upon Steiner’s spiritual-scientific inquiries, one begins to discover that his idea of karma is noticeably different from the familiar concept of repetition of the same. It is not a spiritually deterministic view of things, through which we can possibly refer everything in our present to our past. Thus, a disgrace that an individual goes through in this life may very well be the result of choices in a previous life, but it can also result from free will, such as the soul’s acceptance of a sacrifice for its own and other people’s evolution, or a step that will only have later karmic repercussions.

This view of things is far from fatalistic. Although the human being places himself in an environment that he has, to a great degree, predetermined, he is still an agent of free will, able to determine his

actions from within. Karma allows us then to acquire wisdom built upon our accumulated experience and this, in turn, leads us to become masters of our future. Thus, the more an individual evolves, the more he emancipates himself from the universal spiritual laws that act upon his life. This has another corollary. Many of the things that will be said here about the laws of reincarnation and karma apply in the majority of cases; they are *tendencies*. In order to be able to ascertain the reality in particular instances, we need to turn to a certain amount of direct inner spiritual knowledge. The rest is pure speculation. Nobody is entitled to cast judgment upon his fellow human being on the basis of knowledge of these general tendencies.

Steiner carried Goethe's principle of metamorphosis in the animal and plant realm a step forward. Over time, the idea of metamorphosis has acquired various connotations, and it is helpful to qualify the different approaches. In the first case, metamorphosis has been adapted to prevailing scientific thought—although it did not originate from it. From this perspective, the steps of metamorphosis are seen as links in a chain of causes of a purely material nature, although they cannot in any way be predicted through this kind of thinking. When we use a plant as an example, this perspective says that the leaf metamorphoses into the petal, later into the sepal and stamen, through physical forces—no matter how little these processes can be concretely explained. In the same way, Goethe saw in metamorphosis the work of spiritual forces having formative power over physical reality. He trained himself, through heightened physical observation, to perceive the working of these forces behind the physical world. For Goethe, the changes that occur at each step of metamorphosis are new creations of the spirit. Steiner further studied the phenomenon of metamorphosis by following, in the spirit, the changes a human being undergoes in the journey from one life to the next.

We will look at some small examples of metamorphosis at the end of this chapter. It is necessary first to look at the human experience that shapes our future incarnation, the life that we live in the spiritual world after death. Science and religion have different opinions on this subject. Either one of them can simply deny or accept this reality on the basis of preestablished ideas. Science, because it simply cannot penetrate this realm of existence, most often denies it. At the same time, it cannot explain a host of so-called paranormal phenomena, and

has to either deny this reality or relegate these phenomena to curious exceptions to the norm. Religion, in most cases, accepts life after death. In other words, it accepts the living revelations of the spiritual world that tradition has transmitted to humanity, but cannot elaborate an understanding of this realm of existence. To Steiner, neither choice was satisfying, and he began inquiring into the realm of the afterlife.

Evolution of Consciousness

Our life between incarnations can be likened to an expansion from Earth into the whole of the cosmos. In it we move first from Earth to the Moon, then to the closest planets (Venus and Mercury), to the Sun and furthest planets (Mars, Jupiter and Saturn), and culminating in the region of the fixed stars. At its furthest degree of expansion, the human being initiates its stage of descent and condensation, a reverse of the previous journey. The planets form the signposts of a spiritual reality that is much more encompassing than the physical. This is why we indicate Sun, Moon, and planets with capital letters: this denotes a whole sphere of spiritual activity that goes beyond the physical planet itself.

In the first part of the journey after death, the thoughts of the human soul long to expand into the whole of the cosmos, but must first pass through a process of retrospection that still binds the soul to the just-passed Earth life (we will explore this review process in greater detail later in the chapter). After the completion of this process of review, the individual is released from the soul world into the spiritual world proper. Upon entering the spiritual world, the soul leaves behind all subjective levels of experience and takes along only an essence, an extract of its life experience, and forgets the painful process undergone in the soul world. After the so-called Cosmic Midnight, marking the midpoint of the soul's journey, the human being longs again for incarnation, the process of concentration into a body. This period is devoted to a process of prospect or preview of the coming incarnation.

Although we portray this odyssey as a journey in movement, we should keep in mind that it is more of an evolution or expansion of consciousness. The different spheres of influence that we describe interpenetrate each other. The soul and spirit are immersed in a spiritual world of which they can perceive only certain qualities at certain stages of their journey. However, all the other stages of the planetary expansion are present at the same time and are revealed to the human

being only when the required maturity has been achieved. We perceive something new when we acquire the new spiritual organs of perception.

The whole process of planetary expansion is marked by two important gateways—first the Moon Sphere, then the Sun Sphere. The Moon Sphere forms the threshold of the soul world; the Sun Sphere forms the transition into the pure spiritual sphere. After we complete the expansion of consciousness in the Sun Sphere, our activity and interest turn away from the people and things of Earth, in order to be completely devoted to beings and events of the spiritual world.

Life in the spiritual world is both a journey of purification of our lower self, and a journey of consciousness. However, ready-made ideas cannot prepare our minds, just as they did not help Steiner's, to receive revelations that are quite surprising. We live in the spiritual world with a new relation to space. Whereas on Earth the space we occupy with our physical being excludes all other beings and objects, in the spiritual world the contrary is true. Our being expands to everything around us. However, this expansion and inclusion do not automatically signify participation in the being of others. For this to happen, another element is indispensable—consciousness. Steiner's most startling discovery is the interconnection of life on Earth with life on the spiritual plane. In fact it is only on Earth that we can act upon our previous deeds and correct the effect of our mistakes. This does not happen afterward in the spiritual world. There, on the contrary, we become painfully conscious of the limitations we have imposed upon ourselves.

It may appear even more surprising that it is on Earth that we acquire spiritual knowledge, not in the worlds beyond. It is our earthly spiritual journey that allows us to penetrate into the experience of the spiritual world. If we have not penetrated these truths beforehand, we live in the spiritual world without being able to recognize the beings around us. We may be a little like sleepwalkers—our consciousness will simply not sustain us in a world we cannot relate to. The more materialistic our outlook in life, the harder it will be to keep our consciousness awake in the spiritual world. The previous analogy of expansion of consciousness will be all the more true. The spiritual world surrounds each person in the same way. If consciousness has not prepared a receptacle for it, the same experience that is perceived and un-

derstood by one is completely ignored by another. A distinction is very important here: accepting materialism as our worldview does not mean that we have subscribed to entirely materialistic values in our lives. Those who have offered their work and deeds in love of others have a very different experience in the spiritual world than those who have turned their pursuits to purely materialistic aims.

Before turning to the journey after death, let us turn to the time immediately preceding and following death and the realm of interaction between the dead and the living.

Connections Between the Living and the Dead¹⁸

Just as we understand that the way we are born influences much of what follows in our early years and the rest of our lives, it should not be surprising to learn that the way we die has an influence on the way we enter the spiritual world and act therein. Part of this was already surmised in looking at modern experiences of previous lives.

Our earthly connections with those we knew, who have left Earth before us, continue in the spiritual world, at least for a time. These links are very real, but they cannot evolve further than they have done on Earth. The experience of this limitation feels like a burden for the soul after death.

The souls who have remained immersed in totally materialistic pursuits remain in what is called an “Earth-bound state” after death. They remain attracted by the sphere of life on Earth for a considerable time rather than moving on to other planetary spheres. These are the souls most often contacted by mediums in spiritual séances. Many souls also remain earthbound due to the concerns they have for others still living. The same is true in the case of intentions that have been left unfulfilled. The living can help these souls, especially in the last two instances, by bringing to completion or resolving what the deceased has left uncompleted or unresolved. We have seen how Jenny Cockell carried this yearning, even in her following life, and this urge continued in the need to find her previous-life children.

The souls who cross the threshold of death in readiness, but prematurely, will have different experiences, according to the destiny on Earth that preceded their death. Once the attachments to Earth have been overcome, death by accident will bring a strengthening of ego consciousness. This stronger resolve continues in the next life on

Earth. Seen through the lens of karma and reincarnation, accidents serve a higher purpose. All souls who have died early carry with themselves unused forces from Earth. In the other world, they may be compared to young idealists. They can help the souls on their way to incarnation by inspiring them to move toward the goals of their coming incarnation. Souls who have died prematurely can offer their forces to the spiritual beings who would otherwise be unable to reach all of those whose materialistic mindset cuts them off from the reality of the spirit. Children represent a special case. Not having engaged yet in their path of individuation, they readily reconnect with the spiritual world after death and have a stronger perception of it than adults. However, they tend to keep a connection to their family and participate closely to things on this side of existence.

Ascent to Further Worlds of the Spirit

The dead and the living are separated, but not completely isolated. This isolation is not the same in one direction as in the other. The degree of union depends in great part on the degree to which the living have turned their thoughts to the spiritual world while on Earth.

After death we live in a world that has been turned inside out. What was our inner world becomes now our outer reality. The world of our thoughts and feelings is spread out in front of us: what was our subjective life on Earth turns out to be our objective world in life after death. This is what makes possible the apprehension of the life tableau and the moral life review, both of which we will see later in this chapter. Therefore, all our impulses towards action, all our intentions, form our inner world. This new perspective makes our knowledge of other souls far more intimate than we can imagine on Earth. In effect, we live within other souls with whom we have formed connections on Earth—in this life or in previous ones—or completely outside it if we haven't reached the necessary level of consciousness. Lack of connection is experienced in the spiritual world as loneliness. It is a soul loneliness of a depth that has no equivalent in the material world. Even though we may know that there are others around us, we are not able to connect with them.

Time after death seems to turn into space. After death, the soul can turn to events in its destiny much like we can look at progressively more distant places on Earth. Time lives simultaneously, just as differ-

ent places in space are apprehended simultaneously in our reality. Time is, in fact, apprehended as space. Soon after death, the soul seems to be blinded by a dimension of consciousness that is overwhelming, as we will see later in the instances of near-death experiences. To orient itself, the soul needs the self-knowledge that it has gained on Earth. Consciousness must be restrained, damped down, in order for the soul to reach a stage of illumination and the ability to orient itself to the new world. Within this perspective, the moment of death acquires particular importance for the soul, who keeps returning to it in order to strengthen its self-consciousness and use it as a point of reference in its ascent to further worlds of the spirit.

Paradoxically, as we pointed out before, everything is tied to inner activity in the world after death. A soul cannot apprehend another soul unless it exerts inner activity to connect with it. However, less inner activity is needed in order to turn to the world of the living from the other side of the threshold. In fact, soon after death, the departed feel the loss of their loved ones and want to be close to them. Their loved ones often feel their nearness. The dead can, at this stage, read our thoughts, but only if we turn them to the spirit, and they can permeate our feelings. A materialistic soul cannot be perceived by the dead; they are unable to form a connection.

The dead will perceive the souls of the living in the measure that these turn to the spiritual world, since this is the reality that surrounds the departed souls. A regular life of prayers and meditation is, according to Steiner, "spiritual nourishment for the dead." The living can also turn to the dead by creating vivid memories of some episode of their life on Earth. Training ourselves to overcome our lower nature is a prerequisite for those who want to communicate more actively and consciously with the dead. Those who reach a high sensitivity can avail themselves of tools that allow them to direct their intentions toward the departed one. They can avail themselves of some handwritten piece, a photograph or anything in which clues of the personality are offered. In addition, great help is given to those who share sympathy with survivors and partake in their grief.

The dead are not blind to the egotism we harbor in our souls. However, they hold an untarnished image of our eternal self. They cannot follow us in our egotistic pursuits and can approach us in our states of hatred and antipathy only at great expense of energy. We can

become aware of their presence, especially at turning points in our lives, at times when we are facing important decisions.

Let us turn now to the form in which departed souls choose to reach us. Most often, surprisingly, the dead reach us in the form of another person, and at times in their own form. They often choose the form of someone we are close to. Thus, the form itself is not of paramount importance; it is simply something that speaks to the way we see, think, and feel at that particular point in our lives. It is important to look at the literal element of the vision, but even more important to look at what is expressed through the images. We should look carefully at what the person does, the feelings that arise in us as well as desires. We may then realize that what the person in the vision does is out of character with the outer form, but in keeping with the soul being of the departed one. Thus, by looking dispassionately at all the elements of the dream image or vision, we can move from the form to the inner being who is drawing our attention.

As we look at the evolution of our communication with departed souls, Steiner's following predictions will be of particular interest to us: "In the future it will occur quite normally that a person will feel that the dead has spoken to his soul. Gradually he will realize from whom the communication comes, that is, who has spoken to him."¹⁹ And further: "A time will come when man will converse spiritually with the dead. People will speak with the dead, and they will listen to the dead.... In fact, conditions, which in a sense obtain only for the seer, will gradually become the common heritage of all humanity."

The Journey Through the Planetary Spheres

The first stage of our afterlife experience has been indirectly hinted at before and has been made popular by the reports of near-death experiences (to which we will return later). It is called the life tableau. By virtue of the metamorphosis of time and space, the soul perceives all its life spread out in front of it simultaneously. Near-death survivors describe it as seeing their whole life spread out before their eyes at once. The seer can perceive that this process occurs in an average Earth time of three days. This tableau expands further and further from us and at the same time becomes more removed from our perception; by the end, we faintly sense what we clearly saw at first.

In order to look in more detail at the further steps of the soul's journey after death, we need to introduce a few more essential notions about the way our soul operates in life on Earth. The soul has basically two polar attitudes toward everything it meets in life: sympathy and antipathy. These concepts are larger than the usual meaning of these words. Sympathy signifies acceptance of what comes toward the soul. It is what allows us to live within the other being or object. Antipathy is necessary in order to experience oneself in separation from the world. It is the motion of the pendulum that awakens self-consciousness. We need antipathy no less than sympathy in order to develop faculties of understanding and acceptance.

According to whether we operate from sympathy or antipathy, we will orient our lives more toward knowledge or toward action. The region we traverse first after death lies between Earth and Moon. It initiates what old Hindu tradition calls the stage of purification known as *kamaloca*. In this trying time immediately following our life tableau, we experience the effects of our deeds upon our fellow human beings and upon all other dimensions of creation, whether the plant and animal realms or other spiritual dimensions. Different from the previous life tableau, *kamaloca* occurs in reverse order; we first review events closer to our death, then move toward our birth. This process occurs throughout our Moon phase of consciousness.²⁰

After leaving the Earth and expanding into the Moon sphere, we enter a process of purification. Antipathy is purified by the forces of sympathy, and sympathy itself is further refined. In the last region of the Moon sphere, the individual soul becomes one with the soul world. With the help of the beings that live in the Moon sphere, the soul passes through a stage of stern self-assessment. The passage through diverse phases of the soul world existence consists in the purification of cravings that the soul still has but cannot satisfy. The soul will dwell in these regions according to the measure of its earthly desires; therefore, it may spend relatively little time in one and more time in another.

Between the Moon and the Sun lie what spiritual science knows as the "inner planets," those planets that, from a geocentric perspective, describe a closer orbit to the Earth than the Sun, such as Mercury and Venus. It is in the first sphere of Mercury that we encounter the spiritual archetypes of all things on Earth. It may serve to

define the notion of “archetype” from a spiritual scientific perspective—very close to what Carl Jung has defined in his work. In the spiritual world, everything is in a state of continuous flux or becoming. The archetypes are creative beings in perpetual creative activity. No spiritual archetype works alone; each takes on innumerable forms and works in evolving relationships with other archetypes.

On Mercury we perceive that our physical body is a thought being. In other words, we see beyond the physical to the spiritual forces that have formative power on Earth; we may call them *formative forces*. On Mercury we reconnect with those whom we loved on Earth: friends and family and all our connections. We re-enliven from within what connects us to them. It is also in this sphere that the effects of all illnesses and diseases are removed from our souls. We can connect to other souls and to spiritual beings in the measure of the moral disposition we had on Earth. Immoral deeds in our life cause us torment, because we know that we cannot immediately rectify their consequences.

In the Venus sphere, we move a step further in connecting with other souls. Venus is the source of what on Earth takes the form of love. In this area we no longer experience thought beings but, instead, the element of life that unites us with all other living beings. Steiner calls this life the “fluid element of the spiritual world.” Our religious disposition in life unites us with this unity of life. Therefore, our community of life in Venus is shared with all those people with whom we shared on Earth a common religious life—a common religious creed. An atheistic soul will be aware of nearby souls but will be unable to reach them.

After Venus we reach the Sun, a region that takes a great part of our permanence in the planetary spheres. In the Sun region, there are only pure moral relationships. Here goodness bestows blessings, and evil has no place. The entrance into the realm of the Sun is therefore accompanied by a feeling of bliss due to the fact that we have left behind everything that was connected with our lower nature on Earth, everything of an egotistic nature. We connect now with other human beings, from spirit to spirit, and are now completely surrounded by spiritual beings. This feeling of bliss is what people experience in an NDE when they have at least a glimpse of what existence in the Sun will look like. More about this will be said in the next chapters.

It is in the Sun region that we find the “archetypes of the soul world”—everything that gives rise to wishes, aspirations, resolves for life on Earth, and all of the soul’s desires that make us universally human. In the Sun sphere everything that previously differentiated one human being from another ceases. We can live in this feeling on Earth inasmuch as we have striven to see the truly human in all human beings, regardless of race, religion, creed, social classes, and other sources of differences in a way that goes much deeper than our intellectual stances. Recognizing all that makes us truly human means uniting ourselves with Christ, a being who has to be understood as the central reality in the evolution of the Earth, not the particular possession of any creed or dogma.

Christ has the faculty of uniting us with all other human beings. All of the religions of the world can be understood as a stage of revelation of the Christ being in its descent to the physical world. All truly Christ-imbued persons, whether Christian or not, are the ones who perceive the brotherhood in all human beings, because they consciously know Christ or implicitly intuit that a universal principle dwells in all human beings. They may know that Christ came to Earth not so much as a teacher but to perform deeds that were of benefit for all human beings. Christ—as Jung intuited—stands as the archetype of all selves on Earth, in his words as the “central archetype of the soul.” This corresponds to his esoteric name of *I Am*. Carrying the Christ-consciousness within also means having the connection with our higher self, the I Am, which is recognizable in the way we carry our inner convictions, independent of all associations with any organized groups, social class, nationalistic ties, or race—everything through which we embody the ideal “to thine own self be true.” Last but not least, Christ expresses the universal power of love in the human soul and is, therefore, most recognizable in those souls who can give of themselves freely for the good of others. Connecting with Christ cannot be done in the spiritual world. It has to be initiated on Earth through knowledge and/or action. More about the essence of the Christ will be added in the exploration of the soul’s meeting with the double, following this section.

In the Sun sphere’s first half, we shape, with the spiritual beings, our next incarnation on Earth. In the second part of our sojourn, we start gathering experiences from the cosmos. The Sun region is

where we spend the longest time among all planetary spheres. Those who have not recognized the universally human in their fellow human beings and have not recognized—implicitly or explicitly—the Christ principle, live a life of complete isolation in this sphere.

Words and concepts can hardly grasp the reality of the spiritual world beyond the Sun. It becomes harder to draw analogies and pictures from the physical world. The regions of the outer planets—Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn—have been described as the “Harmony of the Spheres” in the wisdom language of old times. In these planetary realms we have a preview in the spiritual realm of how our karma will be fulfilled in the coming life; we see how our karmic connections will meet us again in order to bring our karma to further fulfillment. To express it in an image, the harmony of the spheres evolves in stages from one planetary sphere to the next just as orchestral music would evolve into choral music. Steiner says that “it becomes increasingly tone, filled with meaning, expressive of its actual being.” In Mars, we experience the harmony of the spheres in images, as if we are immersed in an “ocean of tones.” These tones, however, stream within us from our inner self, not without, and we experience them almost as we would our speaking and singing on Earth.

In Jupiter, the human being learns that the forces of the outer planets are active in all the phenomena of the physical world. He can cultivate the devotion for the interconnection of all living beings to which we give expression on Earth in our deeper religious and spiritual life. In Saturn, the harmony expresses itself through the Cosmic Word, out of which creation issued forth.

Let us now review the three spheres in succession. Beyond the area of the Sun we start to understand how single religions relate to one another. In Mars, we encounter the archetypes of human creation in arts, science and technology, and government. These are all the archetypes that nourish artists, scientists, scholars, and politicians. They express an area of concern that goes beyond the daily and the personal and benefits material needs on Earth. Steiner’s example of an individual who was given his intentions from this sphere is Voltaire, who applied his gifts through a sharp intellect and a devotion to fight against injustices and to promote the needs of his fellow men.

In the next spheres, those of Jupiter and Saturn, the human spirit experiences intentions and goals for life on Earth. Here we also

experience the reality of the Higher Self, the one that goes from one incarnation to the next. In Jupiter, what can evolve further are our efforts to grasp spiritual ideas, cultivate spiritual thinking, and offer assistance to others that is permeated with true love. It is from this sphere that Goethe further evolved the intentions that he developed on Earth with the offer of his literary and scientific gifts to the world.

In Saturn, we can seek only what serves further progress of the whole of humanity. We do not only behold our last incarnation, but also somehow see its spiritual “blueprint.” In the contrast between actual life and its blueprint, we perceive all our shortcomings. A person who has received inspiration from this sphere will have a natural inclination in the next life for all spiritual reality. We can intuit the action of this sphere in individuals like Steiner and Cayce. Another characteristic of human beings inspired from this realm is that they are able to receive intimations of future evolution on Earth and plant the seeds for its realization. From this sphere comes the inspiration of all those who can walk the paths ahead of their time for the benefit of future generations.

Beyond Saturn we penetrate the “realm of the fixed stars” and complete our process of cosmic expansion at the Cosmic Midnight. Each individual will experience it according to one’s state of consciousness. Most souls will pass through it as a state of rest and regeneration that offers the capacity to forget. Our consciousness will be dimmed and we will receive restorative influences of the farthest regions of the cosmos. Some will be able to retain consciousness.

The Return to Earth: A Profound Metamorphosis of Consciousness

In the stage of expansion into the cosmos, the human being feels the spiritual cosmos as forces of his own being. At the Cosmic Midnight, we behold the abyss between the perfection of the universe and the shortcomings of individual evolution, and we set in motion forces that will determine the next incarnation. We are offered a glimpse of what the human being will look like in the far future of human evolution. Knowing that this can only be attained through life on Earth offers a further stimulus to the returning journey to incarnation.

We also have the opportunity to survey, as an external manifestation, all the previous incarnations and intervening times, much like

we beheld our last life in the life tableau. The pain and sorrow we have experienced in life so permeate our soul that they generate new forces in our will. As we experience, outside ourselves, a panorama of our past lives and intervening lives, within us arises an intense longing to unite again with life on Earth. With our will expanding, we come in contact with those forces that operate in nature, intervening in the line of heredity throughout the generations.

Before approaching Earth via the inner planets, a profound metamorphosis of consciousness needs to occur. This corresponds to a gradual, progressive reduction of the all-encompassing consciousness achieved at the Cosmic Midnight. During this metamorphosis of consciousness occurs the formation of the “spirit germ,” which will unite at birth with the physical germ provided by heredity. The spirit germ is at first a mighty being as wide as the universe. During its movement from the spiritual world into the succession of generations, the spirit germ undergoes a reduction.

The transition to the lower spheres closer to Earth brings about a more subjectively colored inner life. The returning entity separates more and more from the creative beings and forces of the spiritual world. The individual gradually loses the intimate state of communion with spiritual beings and merely perceives their revelation—the way they affect his inner and outer world. The soul is aware of the spiritual world surrounding it, but now perceives it as a whole rather than in its manifold diversity. This shrinking consciousness forms the basis for what becomes desire in our physical incarnation.

The individual now starts to feel like a self, separate from the surrounding world. As such the soul returns to experience sympathy or antipathy towards its surroundings and thus goes through the later planetary spheres in a strongly individual fashion. Together with this contraction of consciousness appear the first glimmers of alienation from the cosmos. During the passage through the spheres of the inner planets, an orientation of consciousness towards definite life settings sets in—settings such as life tasks and groupings of karma of the future Earth life. Here are woven the first relationships with those whom the soul will be associated with most closely in earthly life. The Mercury region has more influence on the shaping of racial relationships; the Venus region, in the formation of family relationships. These ties

can be either strong or weak, determining to what extent the individual will be closely associated with and shaped by race, culture, and family.

In our descent from the cosmos, we develop a deep interest in the circumstances of future Earth life from the perspective of the spiritual world—from decades to centuries before incarnating. We do this at a time when not only our grandparents, but even earlier generations are alive on Earth. We follow the development of generations into which we intend to incarnate with the deepest interest.

In the final stage, the soul now draws towards the Moon sphere. Here the most intense prospect of the coming life occurs—the reverse movement of the retrospect that occurred after death. It is this sphere that determines our future sexuality as well as the determination of physical characteristics—shape of head, color of hair, color and shape of eyes, and other features. The very way in which we pass through this sphere determines these characteristics. Now, even memory of the spiritual world fades. It is as if the soul is searching for memories but is unable to hold on to them. Our feeling and will have intensified but our thinking has not.

At the moment of conception, it is as if we were giving over the spirit germ to the stream of heredity. It is as if it falls away from us, leaving us with a very intense feeling of deprivation. The individual has completed the molding of a soul/spiritual configuration from earlier lives and in-between lives. This configuration meets with what Steiner calls the *model*. This is the physical organization that meets the spirit germ from the forces of the earthly world. The latter can never perfectly match our deeper intentions, and thus the first years of life consist of adaptation and integration between the two sets of impulses. Something of the model remains even later in life, no matter how strong the individual may be.

The sojourn in the planetary spheres after death is the source of many of the metamorphoses that human beings undergo between one life and the next. Let us look at some of them, pertaining to the dispositions of our soul life.

What is the karma of love and hatred?²¹ Steiner indicates that, for karma, it is of great significance whether we do something out of love or out of a sense of duty. Let us follow someone who has given love to others in his life. In the next life people he loved will rouse in

his soul the feeling of joy. In fact, meeting someone who gives us joy is a great indication of the likelihood of bonds of love in a previous life. This joy will be manifested in the second incarnation as a general inclination of the soul toward life. In the following third life, this joy reappears as a natural capacity for a broad interest in other living beings, phenomena of the natural or manmade worlds.

Let us now look at the second instance—hatred. First of all, hatred does not manifest simply in the raw, overt manifestation that we all know with this word. Every disposition or pleasure taken in criticizing our fellow being, as in gossiping or pleasure in causing hardship, stems from a hidden propensity to hate, hidden by the pleasure the soul feels in the outcome of its hateful deeds. The consequences of hatred in one life appear in the next with the disposition to being hurt and carrying a grudge. It is accompanied by a hypersensitivity to the deeds of others, and a propensity to see evil intents even when they are not present. In other words, we experience the opposite of joy. In the third life, hatred manifests with a certain dullness of soul, an inability to manifest interest in the world that surrounds us and interest in our fellow human beings. A word of caution should be added here: Not all pain that meets us in life has its origin in hatred from a previous life. It may be a new, original pain generated in the present lifetime. Moreover, love freely given by a devoted individual or corrective educational measures can mitigate lack of love manifested in one incarnation.

Now, let us examine the karma of religious fanaticism.²² The fanatic person is the one who lives a religious egotistical soul life. This person uncritically accepts everything that comes from upbringing or from a particular marked life experience, and rejects everything that does not agree with the ideas that color the person's perception of the world. Any belief in the otherworld stems from an egotistical concern for the individual's soul. After time in the spiritual world, the fanatic returns to a life where nothing seems to fit. The individual may become hypochondriac, or depressive, and on the whole have a constant dissatisfaction, causing feelings of being continuously attacked and the object of injustice. The soul is constantly wounded. Once again the soul goes through the spiritual world and then returns to life on Earth. In this next life the person will be unable to look at the world in an ob-

jective way, and will be unable to detect the consequences that are the obvious result of the beliefs the person now holds to be true.

Finally, let us look at an example we visited at the beginning of the book. What happens to those people who have died prematurely, who have died before the time of their thirty-fifth year?²³ These are the people who leave an unfinished life and take with them to the spirit world the forces that have sustained them in life. They stand in a different position than that of the souls who died at a later age. They still have available those forces that would have been available for their physical growth on Earth. They can make these forces available to the souls that have cut themselves off from the spiritual world. Through their help, the spiritual beings can offer their assistance to the latter for their further evolution. Here an element of balance is brought about between two groups of souls. There are laws at work here that offer a wider perspective in a realm where the working of karma would otherwise be completely shrouded. Steiner offers us a way to see how karmic justice is reestablished in a place where we could hardly sense it. We will encounter confirmation of these laws in examples offered in the section on after-death communications (chapter 4).

The movement from this world through the next involves a stage of purification of the soul that has been called the *life review*. Ancient traditions knew it as kamaloca or purgatory, although its meaning was often lost, particularly in the idea of purgatory. The process of life review can already be initiated in our daily life in the “education” of our lower self by our higher self. Jung characterized it as the “process of individuation” and the “meeting with the shadow.” We turn next to the exploration of this stage and those that follow it.

MEETING OUR SHADOW WITH COMPASSION

*I sent my soul through the invisible
Some letter of that after-life to spell,
And by and by my soul returned to me
And answered, “I myself am heaven and hell.*

Omar Khayyam

Neurosis is a medical/psychological term that has become common parlance in modern vocabulary. We all have direct or indirect knowledge of this phenomenon. We experience it firsthand at times when we feel utterly incapable of bringing change into our lives without outside help; hence the spectacular rise, since the last century, of specialists of the inner life and other helping professions. An unheeded neurosis is a first stage that can lead to psychosis, which can be reversible or become irreversible. We are exposed to this latter phenomenon in increasing numbers. Psychoses manifest in the vaguely defined states of chronic depression or manic depression, schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, paranoid delusions, and hallucinations. All of the above bear witness to a new malaise of civilization. It is as if the "enemy" that was traditionally sought and fought outwardly now threatens us from within.

In a most symptomatic way, this social illness is made outwardly manifest by a rise in the rate of suicide in industrialized countries since the second half of the twentieth century. What is this phenomenon pointing to? The psychologist Carl Jung was a champion of the exploration of the inner world. He fought his inner battles and experienced what he called "the descent into hell." He left us testimonials in his books, accompanied by diaries and drawings of his inner experiences.

Rudolf Steiner defined the basis of all these phenomena as "humanity's encounter at the threshold." What he calls the threshold is the veil that is drawn between the inner and outer world, between the physical and spiritual worlds. This veil is growing thinner. Due to increasing circumstances of stress, growing numbers of individuals experience difficulty in separating both levels of reality. The subconscious at times impinges upon our ability to deal with the outer world. When a psychosis is reached, the individual is no longer able to separate these levels of existence.

The encounter at the threshold is accompanied by feelings of fear (both general and specific), shame, self-loathing, embarrassment, disgust, and depression. What lies at the basis of these feelings can be sought in an individual's biography. Here we find, generally beneath the level of consciousness, all our wishes and aspirations that we have not heeded, as well as mistakes or shortcomings that weigh on us, and dreams we have not pursued.

In this chapter we will look at how this encounter at the threshold develops from the perspective of a consciously undertaken path of inner development—as Steiner outlines it and as he pursued it himself—or from the perspective of an “initiation” through life’s tribulations. The two differ inasmuch as the first is a more complete and archetypal “crossing of the threshold” than the second. Only separate elements of what appears in the conscious encounter at the threshold will manifest in the “initiation through life” that is the common lot of present-day humanity, hence the advantage of looking at the phenomenon from a more encompassing perspective. The encounter at the threshold sheds light and adds further dimension to the trials that all of humanity is facing and, in one way or another, learning to overcome. The encounter with the double is a parallel of the journey of the soul after death that we previously explored. Initiation, consciously undertaken, or offered through life’s experience, is a process of dying to ourselves and experiencing the reality of the spirit before the time of our death. That is why in old times initiation was attained in the mystical “temple death.”

Jung called the encounter at the threshold the “meeting with the shadow,” leading us onto the “path of individuation.” His whole psychology stresses that this encounter cannot be avoided or pushed aside. To transform what he calls the shadow we must learn to see ourselves dispassionately, and seek to transform this being with compassion. He specified: “No one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance.”²⁴ This is why a great part of the psychology of a true inner path emphasizes encouragement of the individual.

The encounter with the shadow—henceforth called the *double*—has been portrayed throughout the centuries in myths and legends and is now often portrayed in the media. Tolkien has given us vivid imaginative portrayals of the encounter with the double and its dangers in the cycle of *The Lord of the Rings*. Suffice it to think of the two central figures of Gandalf and his antithesis Saruman.

Evil: A Reality of the Inner World?

As tradition and literature amply portray, meeting with our double is centered on the problem of evil. It is relatively easier to accept evil when it is presented to us in the rich allegory of *The Lord of the Rings*, in myths or novels, than it is to accept evil as a reality of the inner world. However, myths of old were intended as images of the soul's inner path of development. In our time, evil is a concept we can hardly reconcile with what we call scientific knowledge. In fact, scientific knowledge is most often assumed to be morally neutral. And yet, many observations leading to an understanding of good and evil fall within our daily experience. We all have had the opportunity to realize that at times we have exerted too much restraint when action was necessary, or rushed into action before understanding all the necessary background to a certain situation. At other times we may realize that we were trying to promote a particular idea at a time when others could not receive it and have therefore limited its possibility of success in the immediate future. At other times we may realize that we acted out of impatience, anger, or depression—and that if we had delayed our reaction we would not be having regrets later. Other obvious mistakes are all our omissions and failures to act upon the deeper urges of our soul. Finally, at times we may have committed acts that may cause us lifetime regret. We can therefore reach the conclusion that, to one degree or another, we could have done better. What these experiences tell us is that there is a measure between too little and too much, too early and too late, any single standpoint and its complement. In between the extremes lies an ideal that can be reached only in a life that would truly be lived in a conscious and almost artistic fashion. Assimilating our shadow or double means learning to accept our limitations, in the daily struggle of learning to modify, however little, those habits, tendencies, and dispositions that lead us to do too little or too much, act too soon or too late, omit, neglect, or deny.

The above leads to an understanding of the problem of evil, as Steiner saw it. Usually, evil is seen as the contrary of good; somehow two equal powers stand opposite each other. In this view—the one prevailing in the media—we live in a world of good guys and bad guys, reward and punishment, right and wrong—in brief, among irreconcilable dualities. A spiritual scientific view of things offers a more elaborate perspective, but one that more fully reconciles with reality.

From this perspective, good is something that can be attained in a state of balance between the two directions that relative evil can take. The balance lies in the middle—in a way that cannot be described once and for all, but is eminently bound to situation and context. Another important aspect of this view is that there is no primary evil, no evil that we could define as a creative power, corresponding to the powers of good at work in creation. Evil is merely the result of those powers acting outside the right time or right area of consciousness. So-called evil offers us a perspective of the world in which the spirit is dissociated from matter, or their mutual interaction is thoroughly misunderstood.

In one direction, we can be led to believe that there are two separate levels of existence: the physical and the spiritual. The spiritual would have in itself all that is noble, beautiful, and worthy, whereas the physical is seen as degraded, vile, and merely necessary to our existence on Earth. An opposite worldview, perhaps the more prevalent, ascribes all reality to the physical world and treats all reference to the spiritual world as speculation, fancy, and ultimately as ungrounded delusion. In one direction we move toward a false spirituality of asceticism; in the other we altogether deny the spirit. These are two very real tendencies of the soul, at both individual and historical levels. Excesses in one direction are most often followed by the other extreme.

Thus we see that evil is what moves us, even helps us to seek balance. Furthermore, evil is relative. What is considered a virtue, up to a certain point of our development, can later become a fault. Different times of our lives call for different qualities. The courage of youth can become foolhardiness in old age; restraint exerted beyond a certain point can turn into inability to act.

From the perspective of spiritual science, good is a matter of balance that depends on the context and personal phase of development. The Christ consciousness is what allows us find spiritual grounding in the reality of the here and now. Through the power of Christ, evil need not be denied nor fought against but rather educated and transformed into good.

Christ: The Central Archetype of the Soul

Between the two opposing tendencies lies the power that Jung and many neo-Jungians have intuited as the “central archetype” of the soul:

the Christ. Here, admittedly, Jung had to venture outside the parameters of scientific psychology to what he called an essential postulate. He puts it this way: "I will admit that such visualizations are only an attempt of the clumsy intellect to formulate inexpressible and hard-to-describe psychological facts. I could perhaps express the same concept with the words of St. Paul: Now not I live but the Christ lives in me. Or I could quote Lao Tsu and make his Tao my own, the way of the middle and center of all things. In every case the meaning is the same."²⁵

It is interesting to note in passing Jung's intuition of the self or the Christ as the "way of the middle." For spiritual science, the Christ is more than a symbol or a teacher. He is a spiritual being present in the soul of all human beings. Through him we can find the balance between extremes. Recognition of the Christ does not entail the need for religious conversion. A clear understanding of the human soul is a gateway for our acknowledgement of the Christ, as was the case with Jung and many of those who followed him. We can understand the Christ by accepting all that is universally human, by seeing Him in other human beings. The Christ is that being who approaches us in freedom. The seemingly unfortunate possibility to err on one side or the other is a prerequisite for the development of human freedom and for a recognition of the Christ within us.

We will now proceed to a phenomenological approach of the double, the term Steiner uses that corresponds to the idea of shadow. We will use *double* both for the part as well as for the whole; thus, most of the time the term double will refer to a limited, partial expression of the larger double. Keep in mind, as for everything else in this book, that this approach is merely a preliminary step in our analysis. We cannot find the causes of spiritual phenomena in the physical world, but only in the spirit through the revelations of the phenomena that lie beyond the veil of the senses. We will try to characterize the double outwardly by describing its manifestations. These are only some of the possible manifestations. We refer the reader interested in this matter to Lievegoed's work.²⁶

The following classification of manifestations of the double is not intended as a taxonomy; it is merely a functional way to recognize aspects of a reality that is all-encompassing. These aspects should not

be thought of as separate parts, but rather as complementary views of a total picture. The double, as it is understood from Steiner's perspective, is a being that the person has built over one's previous incarnations. In this lies a further difference from Jung's idea of the shadow. In his worldview, shadow is something that we either were born with or have built in our current lifetime.

In recent times psychology has come to grapple with the matter of heautoscopy. This is the phenomenon in which we meet ourselves—not as a mere image but as a three-dimensional figure—outside ourselves. This figure can appear just as we are in life, but also smaller, larger, younger, or older. The being can remain immobile or move, and has even been known to speak. However, to the person who has this experience, there is no doubt that the meeting occurs with oneself. W. Priefer, who describes the phenomenon, says that recipients “feel as if something had stepped outside of themselves, leaving them empty and hollow.”²⁷ The reaction accompanying the vision ranges from fright and shock to loss of speech and even fainting. However, if the person musters the courage to move toward and even try to touch the figure, it will disappear. This resolution often results from having undergone previous experiences and developed in stages the necessary inner courage to reach such a step.

The above is a dramatic and rather rare experience of encounter with the double, one that is hardly possible to shake off as delusion. All scientific explanations fall short of doing anything other than explaining away or merely offering abstract definitions for a reality that deeply touches the inner core of the human being. This and other extreme appearances of the double often occur to people who have neglected to work on themselves, to the point that this being has acquired an independent existence in the soul—an extreme form of what psychology calls a complex. The appearance of the double in heautoscopy, or paranoid delusions, is often preceded by a serious life crisis, loneliness and isolation, long depressions, and a tendency toward self-observation that resembles self-pity. To an extreme, it can lead to a split personality. Such an encounter with the double is depicted in novels where the protagonist fights against a personification of his double, which leads him to an attempt to eliminate it, ending with the person's own death or suicide.

Let us look at the double where it appears as our inseparable companion in daily life. This is what Lievegoed calls the *cultural double*, parallel in some degree to the idea that Jung expressed with the term *persona*.²⁸ We are all influenced by the physical environment in which we live—through climate, topography, and other components of our physical surroundings. They make us citizens of a certain part of the world. To these are added cultural influences that manifest in the race and nation in which we are born, the social milieu of our family and ancestors, the profession we choose, and so on. From the compound of environmental, social, and cultural influences, we receive an imprint in our soul that defines much of who we are. We take for granted our place in the world according to all these factors. If we are totally identified with them we will lack the strength to strive for self-knowledge. By gradually creating distance from them, we may become aware of how we interact with people from other constellations of physical and cultural influences.

Our first meeting with another person may give us an impression that is not matched by subsequent reactions. We may encounter the person with initial interest, only to react in a certain way to the tone of voice, accent, or language spoken, the way the person dresses, moves, or thinks. These unconscious reactions form the root of all sorts of discrimination based on race, nationality, religion, culture, class, and/or particularities of behavior. The conscious, intellectual recognition of the facts forms the first step required to overcome them. As we have said, Jung calls this aspect of the double the *persona*—the mask or façade of the self. Identifying with this layer of personality can lead to unrealistic self-evaluations. The habits of the cultural double live below our consciousness, and therefore require a gradual transformation through repeated efforts. An intellectual understanding of racism, classism, sexism, and all other kinds of discrimination is only a first step in our inner transformation.

Another group of doubles are previous-life doubles. Contrary to the cultural doubles, whose manifestations lie within our realm of experience, these doubles defy all easy characterization. Previous-life doubles manifest in our ways of thinking, emotions, and associated behaviors that express themselves in our lives, provoking all sorts of outcomes that most often cause us sorrow. We may realize that they act in ways that form certain sets of automatic reactions we express in

our lives. However, even though we know that they are there, we cannot prevent them from acting in predetermined ways. Often we cannot see how they fit into our earthly biography, and therefore may feel that they are both “us” and “not us.” Others tend to identify us from this outer layer of the personality, just as we identify them. Until we understand and begin to transform these doubles, all encounters are, in large part, encounters between doubles rather than between real human beings.

We can understand the function of these doubles when we start to transform them. Inner work puts us in touch with the universal experience of grief. Transforming our double allows us to feel the pain we usually push down, beneath the level of consciousness. Developing compassion for our double connects us with the experience of grief in such a universal way as to make us able to relate to the universal human experience. Grief, therefore, acts as the gateway for a true human encounter. Without it, such an encounter would occur only on the superficial level of immediate sympathy or antipathy.

In some instances, when reincarnation occurs quickly, undigested karmic doubles appear with added strength, causing serious psychological disorders. In this case, little transformation or metamorphosis has occurred between one life and the next. We have seen this phenomenon in examples from our previous exploration of reincarnation. We can understand now why, no matter how clearly they point to the reality of reincarnation, these phobias or extreme behaviors only form the tip of the iceberg, not the deepest essence of the experience of repeated earthly lives.

We can further characterize the double according to prevalent existential modalities in relation to the spirit, the ones that we have called false spirituality and spirit denial. The first double manifests in all deep-seated tendencies towards delusions of the soul. It pervades us with egotistic self-love and guides us towards the escapism of drugs, romantic illusions, and in general towards avoidance of earthly obligations and self-development. The double of spirit denial tends to entrench us in earthly pursuits alone. It may manifest in endless surges of energy and/or in a clever, dominating mind that wants to control others. Workaholism and the drive to power have their sources in this kind of double.

The Lower and Higher Guardians of the Threshold

There are two cardinal experiences that the path of inner development leads all individuals to experience in present or future incarnations. They are meetings with the Lower Guardian of the Threshold and the Higher Guardian of the Threshold. For the purpose of our analysis, we will provide a few of the signposts of the experiences of these meetings. A deeper understanding can be found in Steiner's work.²⁹

The Lower Guardian is the one we have been referring to in this chapter in the meeting with the double. It is the "primary" spiritual phenomenon beyond most of the outer phenomena that have been described in the recovering of memories from previous lifetimes. It now becomes clear why recovery of previous earthly lives—occurring in rather extraordinary circumstances—is often initiated by traumatic events and in borderline states of consciousness—often during illness. The Lower Guardian meets us on the way inward and through this meeting we receive revelations about many deeper truths of existence. The Lower Guardian reminds us of the need to work at redeeming our double before we attempt to move further into the perception of the spiritual world.

Another meeting is possible, with the Higher Guardian of the Threshold. This is the meeting we can experience in a movement of expansion toward the cosmos, rather than contraction into the inner soul. This meeting requires a far deeper level of inner maturity.

Both thresholds, inner and outer, are attained in increasing proportion in modern times. However, many of these meetings occur prematurely and are accompanied by all the dangers that psychopathology knows well. It is for this reason that the individual human being is "guarded"—protected from encountering levels of reality before the person is ready to face them. All healthy spiritual development will emphasize that moral development should precede perception of the spiritual world in order to be kept safe from harmful effects. Let us look at the effects of a path of spiritual development, such as the one that Steiner has outlined in his two major books, *Knowledge of the Higher World* and *Theosophy*.

The first precondition for healthy development of the faculties of the soul is a strengthening of our humility and reverence. Impatience and arrogance must be subdued. Another support to healthy spiritual development is the right amount of stress. The striving indi-

vidual needs to avoid undue stress, unrealistic pursuits, damaging practices for the body (e.g., drugs), and sleep deprivation. One of the first steps of spiritual development leads to the freeing of our thinking, feeling, and need to act. Whereas in daily life a certain thought automatically leads to a certain reaction, after a short while on the path, this connection is severed. We learn to bring action, rather than reaction, out of our deeper self, and thereby become able to stand back with detachment in situations that previously would have filled us with fear, anger, or dread.

If a moral strengthening does not accompany our thirst for deeper knowledge, we can stray in three basic directions. If our thinking predominates, we may become reclusive, avoid our involvement in the world, seek knowledge in an addictive way, and lead a life that separates spirit and matter. If we live predominantly in our feelings, we may become completely dependent on outer circumstances and people, have great difficulty making decisions, or, at another end of the spectrum, seek security in a spiritual pursuit of an illusory nature. If we live predominantly in the world of action, we will experience great surges of energy that we will apply to endeavors that do not necessarily further our true being. In the extreme, all this energy can manifest in violence. The discomfort experienced by the soul can be confronted and owned, denied in drugs, delusions, and the like, or finally projected in an outer cause that is a catalyst for violent action.

The influence of the Lower Guardian is intuitively known in many ways in modern life. Unless we tend towards a certain pathological soul condition, our everyday consciousness only wishes to penetrate the spiritual world inasmuch as we have a healthy relationship with and assurance on the material plane of existence. Once we undertake to know the spiritual world, all the hindrances that make up our personality are magnified and strengthened. This is another way in which the Guardian protects us. It is as if the soul senses what inner sacrifice it has to accept in order to reach the goal, and shrinks from these requests. Subconsciously, it often reaches the resolve to abandon any further pursuit.

Meeting the Guardian is a stage of spiritual development that occurs relatively soon on the path of spiritual development, if not at the very first stage. Although it is a being that is in us, we meet him seemingly from the outside. If a person has spiritual experiences be-

fore meeting the Guardian, the individual will either be unable to understand their true meaning, or, having been pushed back by the Guardian towards the physical world, will clothe these experiences with concepts that only apply to the physical world. The experience is impoverished and hardened. If the person repeatedly attempts to cross the threshold prematurely, there are dangers of psychosis. In fact, we could say that many mental illnesses are actually failed initiations at a time when humanity as a whole experiences the proximity of the spiritual world through the thin veil that separates it from the physical world.

Besides undertaking moral strengthening, the interested individual needs to develop and strengthen his or her faculties of judgment. To understand spiritual reality, we must be able to differentiate between beings and experiences that face us in the spiritual world. The world of matter is the best place for this schooling. Inaccurate observation or inaccurate thinking inevitably leads to disillusion in this world, just as they lead to confusion in the other world. However, this would only be a one-sided development of the personality that strengthens our earthly ego. The force that tempers this one-sidedness is interest, concern, and ultimately love for our fellow human beings and all other physical beings. In the first levels of the spiritual world, which Steiner called the soul world, the soul alternates between a state of surrender toward the experiences it encounters and a stage of separation. The state of surrender also alternates with a stage of returning to experience oneself and shutting off experiences of the spiritual world. Self-surrender to the spiritual world is first experienced, although in a very different way, in the experience of love upon Earth. In the spiritual world, an overly strong ego carries the inability to connect with its beings and experiences. Thoughts become spiritual "beingness" in the spiritual world; although we need to be able to surrender to them, we can only grasp them through the strength of our consciousness. Otherwise they pass us by, as we have seen in the description of the soul's journey through the planetary spheres.

In order to cross the threshold, we need to be able to reach a stage of freedom from fear and complete acceptance of our earthly responsibilities. We need that strength in order to withstand the ugliness of the figure that faces us, with the acknowledgement that we have built this through all our previous incarnations. It takes an enormous

amount of courage to take responsibility for all that we tended to project on the world before coming to self-knowledge. The previously described experience of heautoscopy illustrates, in a graphic manner, how traumatic this cardinal encounter can be for the unprepared. Seeing ourselves truly is a tremendously humbling experience; therefore, humility and devotion need to form a foundation for the inner life previous to the meeting. Nothing can be as distressing in the meeting at the threshold than the failure to develop love.

When we meet the Guardian, fully and consciously, this being shows us the root causes of all our habits, inclinations, dispositions, patterns of behavior, and even propensity to illness. After we meet the Guardian, its figure stands as a reproach to our actions whenever we stray from our intended path or forget the resolves to which we have committed.

After meeting the Guardian, we live in two worlds. We know that the world of death is a world of eternal life. In fact, having met the Guardian while alive, death becomes a conscious experience. This is why the Guardian is also called the Angel of Death. Another accompanying factor is the ability for those who have consciously crossed the threshold to act independently of all the connections that previously determined their lives—race, nation, class, and culture.

In modern times, this meeting at the threshold occurs subconsciously throughout life with many of the single traits described above, only with lesser intensity. Marilyn Sunderman's life (see Chapter 2; "Trauma and Liberation") led her to experience the fatal shortcomings of three previous incarnations with the accompanying recognition that she needed to take responsibility for what she projected onto other people. She realized she needed to develop forgiveness toward the person who "wronged" her in this life, and whom she had wronged in a previous one. A very similar experience is described by Barbro Karlen in the same chapter.

Other faculties accompany the awakening experienced at the entrance to the spiritual world. Our newly acquired freedom puts us in the position of accepting responsibilities in a new way. Whereas before we mostly carried our responsibilities out of a sense of duty, more and more we can face the same necessities from inner resolve and, ultimately, love for the task. Meeting the Guardian leads the human being to realize that not only is the physical world incomplete without

the spiritual world, but also that the reverse is also true. The transformation of our double can only occur on the physical side of existence. Knowing that we are both mortal in this world and immortal in the spiritual is an experience that renews our appreciation for the world of the senses as an indispensable and unique stage of schooling.

The Greater Guardian

What has been secured through this first meeting is just the first stage on the path of spiritual development. Another step awaits us on the path toward higher consciousness. Here, more than in the first instance, human experience fails to find words that match the experience. Steiner describes the Greater Guardian as the being who works toward the transformation of all humanity and the whole of nature. In him we can recognize the essence of the Christ. The second threshold can also be crossed prematurely, and this is done either consciously or unconsciously in modern times. Here, too, lie great, if not greater, dangers. This path, felt as an “excarnation”—the inner equivalent of death—releases a feeling of bliss. In it, as in death, the soul is released through a loosening of the forces that normally hold it within the body. A clear instance of this excarnation process is experienced by those who have a near-death experience (NDE). The soul reaches what we have called the Sun sphere in the journey after death, hence the well-known feeling of bliss reported by all those who experience an NDE. We will return to this landmark experience of modern time in the following chapter.

The journey out can be attained in a distorted fashion and prematurely through any of the following in different combinations: sensory hyper-stimulation or depravation, extreme exhaustion or hunger, or endless rhythmical repetition in movement or dance. These practices are, incidentally, used for mass indoctrination or brainwashing. Their result offers a temporary feeling of bliss and ecstasy. The person may have an enhanced sense perception of color, sound, and form, an experience hardly possible in everyday consciousness. The danger of premature experiences, however, lies in reversible or irreversible changes of personality that are attained in all forms of psychosis.

The experience of the meeting of the Higher Guardian of the Threshold will be looked at in the two following chapters. Steiner helps us understand the ultimate phenomenon beyond the manifold

phenomena that we encounter in the world of human experience. He describes this as a meeting with a magnificent form of light, whose beauty is difficult to express in ordinary language. This is a stage at which the human being can live in a purely spiritual consciousness, detached from sensory experience. It was described in Steiner's biography in the decisive experience he had in the year 1899.

Accepting the requests of this Guardian means committing to work for the furtherance of all that the Christ stands for—all of humanity. In a depiction of what the Guardian may say to the human soul, these were the words used by Steiner: "Until now, you have worked only to free yourself, but now that you are free, you can help free all your fellow beings in the sense world. Up to now, you have striven as an individual. Now you must join yourself to the whole, so that you may bring with you into the supersensible realm not only yourself, but also all else that exists in the sensible world."³⁰ By accepting what the Guardian expects of us, we renounce all benefits that may accrue for us from spiritual development, by putting it all at the disposal and advantage of our fellow human beings. There is no outer incentive to meeting the Guardian of the Threshold, whereas the temptation to avoid this meeting is the greatest imaginable. Tolkien described the difference between the first and second stage of spiritual development in the depiction of Gandalf: he first calls him Gandalf the Grey, then later Gandalf the White. The temptation to keep the experiences of the first meeting with the Lesser Guardian for ourselves and turn them to our personal benefit is deftly depicted in the character of Saruman.

In the physical world, our true ego or higher self is, according to Steiner, a being more foreign than any other person on Earth. We encounter it in the spiritual world through our meeting with the Higher Guardian. The prelude to this encounter entails the experience of becoming small and insignificant. In the spirit we become as if condensed into a point. We carry with us all our past with a feeling of not having a present or future. It takes much inner strength and faith to trust that out of the encounter with the spiritual world that surrounds us our higher self comes to us when all memory of what we have been is blotted out.

In our encounter with the higher self, we start to behold our eternal individuality in which are woven the results of all our previous

incarnations. In the spirit and over time, the domain of our previous lives is presented to us in its objectivity. What is thought of as the most subjective remains an individual occurrence, but acquires objective value through a level of “cause and effect” of a higher order. We can then apprehend what led us, in our life, to want to face certain difficult, uncomfortable, or tragic situations in order to compensate for karmic debts contracted in the past. We realize we have set in motion learning opportunities that allow us to correct one-sided tendencies in our character or develop abilities that we lack. Beholding our true self in the spirit leads us to the similar feeling we have at the midpoint of our journey after death—of wanting to set conditions for our coming life in which we will be given the opportunity to compensate for wrongs we have caused.

What is incomprehensible to our ordinary self in the physical world acquires a completely new perspective when our ordinary self is illuminated by the light of the true self. It is in this sense that the higher self—intended as a spiritual being and not an idea—inspires what happens to us in the world and leads us to the key events and encounters of our biography. It is ultimately the shaper of our destiny—meaning that in a higher sense we are the very same shapers of it. This is the ultimate extension of the idea of “taking responsibility for our lives” that is becoming more and more widespread at present.

Some basic exercises were recommended by Steiner in order to help form the attitude of mind that can facilitate a meeting with the higher self. They will give us an idea of what it means to take these ideas seriously. In a first exercise, Steiner asks that we imagine an event we have not wanted and depict it in such a way that it manifests as the object of our will. In the example of a tile that falls from a roof, we will represent in great detail how we ourselves have loosened the tile from the roof and then run to the place where it would subsequently fall.³¹ The object of the exercise is to come nearer to a perception of how our higher self guides our destiny in the world. A similar exercise will be given here in Steiner’s words: “I will think back over the last three to four weeks—or better still, months—letting all the important happenings in which I was involved pass before my inner eye. I will deliberately disregard whatever injustice may have been done to me. I will omit the excuses for my difficulties that I have expressed so frequently, such as, for instance: it was someone else’s fault. I will not

for a moment consider that any other person could have been to blame but myself.”³² From this exercise, repeated over time, arises a completely new personal relationship with the spirit.

With the help of the concepts that emerge from our exploration on the basis of reincarnation knowledge, we can now turn to other aspects of the human experience on Earth. This will help us to gain orientation in another realm of spiritual experiences that no longer concern life before birth, but life after death. In the previous chapters we have discovered many experiences that fall primarily within the category of encounters with the Lesser Guardian of the Threshold. We will see further in the next chapter how it is possible to have glimmers, premature or mature experiences, of the Higher Guardian of the Threshold, and in some instances how both encounters occur in sequence.

Chapter 4

OF LIFE AFTER DEATH

*And cast the load of anguish from thine heart;
From the cold shell of his great soul arise,
And look beyond, thou native of the skies;
There fix thy view where fleeter than the wind
Thy Leonard mounts, and leaves the Earth behind.*

Phillys Wheatley

In the second chapter we presented new spontaneous experiences pointing to reincarnation and pre-birth existence. They range from the unconscious level of phobias and recurring dreams to a clear awareness of many elements of a previous life. Firsthand knowledge of the laws of karma did not appear in modern times in a vacuum. It is only one manifestation of an expansion of consciousness that points in many directions.

It is the scope of this chapter to look at as many phenomena as possible. From these seemingly unrelated new expressions of consciousness, we will try to focus on the common, most fundamental elements. In keeping with the procedure we have outlined for this study, could there be underlying phenomena that act like ocean currents in relation to waves and tides, capable of supporting various expressions of the whole? Could there be a common reason for these many facets of an expanding human consciousness, the growing experience of new dimensions of the spiritual world? We will move from the individual expressions of knowledge of life after death to the largest social implications of the new spiritual framework that affects all of humanity at present. We will start with the now famous near-death experiences, the most important symptomatic event pointing the way towards what forms the center of this book's exploration.

AFTER-DEATH COMMUNICATIONS

Death is the end of a lifetime, not the end of a relationship.

Mitch Albom

From time immemorial a large part of the role of religion was concern for the souls of the dead and their destiny in the afterlife, and the idea of an ongoing relationship between the living and the dead. These two aspects were present in burial rites and in the worship of ancestors. Modern Western consciousness has severed the links between the living and the dead since, over time, all living experience of the spiritual world has completely faded from humanity's memory. The modern human being is cut off from the spiritual world. It is one of the most arduous yet most fulfilling endeavors to regain a conscious knowledge of the spiritual world, no longer from tradition and dogma, but through experience and personal understanding.

In this century, more and more people have experienced communication with departed souls, here called after-death communication (ADC). These experiences are differentiated in many ways. Some rare individuals have, in this life, carried natural faculties of clairvoyance. They may have experienced the nearness of departed souls even before knowing who they were. Others have trained new faculties of awareness and clairvoyance through continued meditative practices and have eventually been able to communicate with departed souls. Finally, the large majority of reports of ADC come from the "layman." At times in their lives—particularly but not exclusively at times of deep crisis—more and more people have been touched by a moving experience revealing to them that their loved ones are still part of their lives.

As we discuss this subject, we will look at naturally occurring phenomena and disregard any information obtained through hypnosis, spiritualistic séances, or similar practices. Before moving into the topic, however, let us explore briefly a borderline state of consciousness that affects the dying themselves, and their loved ones, at the time of death.

The studies of physicist Sir William Barrett report a variety of phenomena surrounding death.¹ The most common of these is the dying person's perception of departed souls, which can be easily con-

fused with a state of delirium. However, case after case shows that the dying person retains a clear perception of the surrounding environment and continues to carry on conversations with the living at their side while simultaneously perceiving the presence of departed souls. What adds weight to this observation is the fact that dying patients can perceive the presence of departed souls whose death has been hidden from them in order to spare them additional grief.

This was the case of Jennie, age eight, and Edith, a little older, both ill from diphtheria. Edith did not know of her sister's death until, before dying, she perceived her sister's soul beckoning to her. Other similar examples are offered in the chapter "Visions by the Dying of Persons by Them Unknown to Be Dead" in Sir Barrett's book. In some instances, the dying report the presence of another family member, often living far away, whose death was not yet known. Barrett reports three such examples in the same chapter quoted above.

Death loosens the threshold between the worlds—not only for the dying, but also for their loved ones. This phenomenon is admittedly more rare than the previous one. Barrett tells of a mother perceiving the soul of her husband at the same time as her child did, fifteen days before her death. But is it really the exact same vision? Observations indicate that the visions, although referring to the same perceived reality, differ according to the individuals. Thus, a mother only heard the voices that accompanied her dying daughter's vision of her sister come to lead her to the other side. At his death, the poet Horace Traubel was able to see and hear the voice of Walt Whitman, to whom he had been very close in life. The dead poet's presence was also felt and seen, although differently, by Colonel Cosgrave, a friend of both poets.

Finally, in rather rare instances a person is able to witness the spirit of the dying person in the transition from one life to the next. Various accounts are given from the experiences of a nurse in the case of a girl she knew well, of a personal friend, and of a woman whom she was tending as nurse. More observations about these phenomena will be offered in the discussion of hospice in Chapter 6.

That the book *Hello from Heaven*² has been a bestseller for seven years bears witness to the interest that the topic of after-death communication raises in the US and throughout the North American

continent. Bill and Judy Guggenheim's book was the culmination of seven years of research, sorting through 3,300 testimonials from about 2,000 people throughout the US and Canada. They quote a 1987 survey that concluded that 42% of American adults believe that they have been contacted by a deceased loved one; in the case of widows, the percentage is as high as 67%.

A large part of their research was an effort to find patterns within a mass of information, and to allow the deeper meaning of the experiences to arise as a phenomenon from the accounts themselves. Little effort went into proposing theories and hypotheses. The interest in ADC lies in the effect it has on the lives of the recipients.

ADCs are classified by the Guggenheims according to various criteria. Classifying these experiences has value as a visual tool for the intellect. All the experiences have much more in common than they have differences. The first is the sensory component; the simplest experiences come from a sub-sensory or "sentient" level. Individuals in this group feel an enveloping presence of a loved one, and recognize the essence of their being. The experience is generally brief, lasting a few minutes at most. It has a clear beginning and ending, providing recipients with feelings of warmth, love, and peace that are hardly the norm in daily life.

The following is an example taken from the Guggenheims' book. Sandy is a forty-nine-year-old nurse in Washington. Her life was changed forever five years after her father died of cancer:

I was an operating room nurse in Vietnam. This happened two or three weeks after I arrived there in 1968. Shortly after I got into bed, the hospital was attacked by a barrage of rocket fire. The Earth was shaking and the noise was deafening!

I crawled under my bed onto the concrete floor. I was very cold, uncomfortable, and frightened. All of a sudden, my father was within! I felt his presence and his emotional warmth—my father's caring and love enveloped me.

I felt wrapped in the security of his strength and had an overwhelming sense of peace. He assured me that it was going to be all right. He was there several minutes,

and then he left. This experience strengthened my spirituality and took away my fear of death.

Throughout my tour, I dealt with a lot of young men who were severely wounded and others who went on to die. The war didn't stop—the casualties just kept coming.

I sat with many who were dying because I couldn't imagine them dying alone in a foreign country. My experience with my father contributed to my ability to do that.³

Although a sentient ADC would seem to fit the lowest level of sensory experience, the outcome shows that it is as potent as any other kind of similar experience. Other ADCs may involve the sense of hearing. Auditory ADC, for the majority, involves an inner hearing; in others, the phenomenon does not differ from daily sensory experience. The voices have all the characteristic tempo, pitch, and intonation of the familiar voice that is communicating. Messages are brief and to the point, and communication of thoughts of the living to the deceased occurs telepathically. The sense of touch is more rarely involved, and apparently implies a very close relationship with the departed soul. Tactile experiences are most often associated with other sense perceptions. The authors also distinguish between partial and full visual appearances. The difference between the two goes beyond the obvious. In a partial appearance, either a portion of the body appears, or the body appears as a mist, in a transparent or not quite solid state.

The other element that distinguishes these communications is the state of consciousness of the recipient. The first of these is the vision. Different from an appearance, the vision is more limited in space. It can appear to be two-dimensional or three-dimensional, and can be experienced inwardly or outwardly. A vision can be compared to a stained glass window illuminated from behind. Internal visions are often experienced in conjunction with telepathic messages. The state of mind that makes communication with departed souls easier is the twilight consciousness that accompanies waking up and falling asleep.

Deeper in the unconscious mind, we can be met by a deceased loved one and experience their presence in what has been called a lucid or vivid dream. Compared to regular dreams, these experiences are

more vivid, orderly, colorful, and logical in terms of plot. They are also easily recognized for their feeling of being “more real than life.”

Finally, ADCs will occur when an individual is experiencing a shift of consciousness, as in out-of-body states. Recipients may feel pulled out of their body and see their body lying still below them; travel through space at near-infinite speed, and have the experience of moving through a tunnel before reaching the light. The following is an example of an out-of-body ADC. Shirley, a nurse in Wisconsin, had this mystical encounter with her five-month-old daughter, Amanda, who died of a congenital heart defect:

About three or four weeks after Amanda died, I was lying in bed, but I wasn't asleep. All of a sudden, I felt myself being pulled out of my body. I felt I was higher up in the bedroom, near the ceiling, looking out the window.

The entire window became filled with the brightest golden light that I could ever imagine! It was like someone coming at you in a car with their high beams on. I felt absorbed by the light, and I felt the presence of my daughter.

Then I saw Amanda! I saw her spirit in that light! And I heard her—it was a telepathic communication. She said, “Thank you very much for all that you gave me. I love you very much.”

Suddenly, I felt a very, very powerful presence—the presence of God. I felt the most incredible sense of love and understanding that I've ever experienced in my life. And at that moment, I understood everything!

I remember being so overwhelmed by the whole thing. It was like being in a state of wonder. It was a feeling of total acceptance and total love for who I am. It was a spiritual love with no strings attached. And after that, I fell into a deep sleep.

This was a lot more than just a dream. I really feel it was a communication with my daughter. And I feel it was a gift that was given to me.⁴

A different type of communication does not occur directly with the deceased ones, but involves outer phenomena—naturally, mechanically, or otherwise induced. The Guggenheims identify three such types of ADCs: symbolic ADCs, ADCs of physical phenomena, and telephone ADCs. Symbolic ADCs involve natural phenomena. They are fairly common and involve butterflies, rainbows, flowers, animals, or inanimate objects. The butterfly is the most common, followed by the rainbow. Both of them have a symbolic meaning tied to death and rebirth. The appearances can be recognized by their perfect timing in association with an important event, (a memorial service, anniversary, Mother's Day, or birthday, for example), setting, and/or highly unusual behavior of plants and animals. Most people recognize the signs immediately and inwardly know that they are related to their loved one.

The next two types involve unusual physical occurrences. Often a departed soul will manifest through mechanical or electrical devices that are activated, shut off, or repeatedly turned on and off with no outer physical cause. In other instances, objects will be moved with no outer physical causation. These phenomena often happen with perfect timing and may actually involve clocks and watches. Light plays a role just as it does in other ADCs. It is a different kind of light than the one we experience every day. This light surrounds inanimate objects rather than the deceased.

Telephone ADCs are simply a sub-group of the last type of experience. They are the least common and can occur both in day consciousness and in sleep. In either one, the phone rings and the recipient hears the voice of the deceased, either very clearly or seeming to come from far off. The messages are very short and to the point. The conversation ends without hanging up and the phone just goes silent, as if the line had been cut. Interestingly, this experience occurs regardless of whether the phone lines are functional or disconnected (this was reported before the use of cell phones).

It is important to mention that not all ADCs are accompanied by the kind of positive feelings we have met in all of the quoted experiences. Some can have a "negative" connotation or reveal different aspects of the spiritual world. We will return to these when we touch upon all types of negative experiences. Ulti-

mately this is just a functional way of distinguishing experiences since, from the perspective and intention of the deceased, such an appearance always has a forward-moving goal.

To better understand the larger dimensions behind ADCs, let us look at the phenomena that accompany them. Even from the limited sampling we have offered the reader, we have seen that it is not necessary to believe in God in the conventional religious sense in order to be visited by a departed soul. It is easier to establish contact when we are in a state of meditation, relaxation, or openness of mind. Prolonged grief is a barrier to experiencing ADC, whereas prayer, meditation, and the ability to forgive constitute major gateways. As could be expected on the basis of the above, children are more receptive to these experiences than adults, and animals sense the presence of departed souls before humans do.

Departed souls appear in what is, at all levels, a real sensory experience. As we have noted, recipients call it “more real than life” and preserve a vivid memory of it. The memory does not fade with time. Individuals with such experiences do not feel the need to write down what they have experienced. When they recall them, the experiences feel as vivid as they did at the time of their occurrence.

Departed souls appear accompanied by an otherworldly bright light—very intense and yet not as overpowering as a very bright physical light would be. The light either shines directly from the individual or illuminates that person from behind. No matter the state in which the soul experienced death, in visual ADCs, the souls appear whole and healed. Additionally, they show a kind of serenity rarely possible on Earth and communicate unconditional love and acceptance. There are exceptions. Abusive individuals seeking forgiveness will appear repentant; suicides also show a different picture, one that we will look at more closely later.

Age has no bearing on departed souls. They may appear at the age they were at the time of death, younger, or older. They may be dressed in white or multicolored ethereal robes, or wear the clothes that make them immediately recognizable to their survivors. Deceased souls will often make themselves recognizable by a gesture, such as a tap on the head, a kiss, a smile, a short colloquial sentence, or a joke known only by the loved one. Also of interest is

the fact that those who receive these experiences may be driving, or may be engaged in other domestic or professional pursuits. When that happens they are able to maintain control of their physical activity quite easily. When more than one person experiences an ADC, although the timing and setting coincide, the extent and type of perception varies. For example, one witness may sense and hear, while another may hear and see. However both will agree as to the contacting soul, the time of occurrence, and the tenor of the message received.

Let us now look at ADCs in a more contextual setting. Cynthia Bourgeault, an Episcopalian priest, has devoted her book *Love is Stronger Than Death: The Mystical Union of Two Souls* to her spiritual friendship with the Trappist hermit Rafe (Louis Numa Robin, Jr.) in her five-year friendship before the latter's death and in the years that followed.⁵ Their first meeting in 1990 gave Cynthia an immediate feeling of familiarity. It did not lead, however, to any immediate closeness. In the years that followed, a very close friendship and committed spiritual friendship ensued.

Before Rafe's death they had worked at establishing a mode of communication with the other world. The communications after death took a variety of forms enumerated in the Guggenheims' research. At Rafe's wake in December of 1995, Cynthia experienced an outpouring of love and heard a voice distinctly saying: "I will meet you ... in the body of hope." In the fall of 1996, while in British Columbia, feeling homesick and drained, upon walking by the shore, she heard Rafe's voice as an inner impression: "I love to see the water through you!" and then: "You don't have to come all the way to me, because I am also coming to you."

That same year, on the first anniversary of his death, five minutes after the time it occurred, Cynthia found herself reliving Rafe's death experience. The question that had been haunting her (How did Rafe die?) was put to rest. Other general experiences in those years involved mostly the sense of touch. She knew Rafe was there by "the sense of enfolding and encircling presence, often a distinct pressure." She met him also through words "which rang in (her) heart." Cynthia took it upon herself to continue Rafe's mission. She took on his lifestyle, but received a clear indication from him (while writing in her journal) that she did not need to do it in that way. She was asked to

accept who Rafe was growing into being, hence the necessity of letting go of everything he had been before. A year and a half after his death, Cynthia went to Waunita Hot Springs, Colorado, to the tiny cabin that Rafe had inhabited during his early days as a hermit. There she experienced, although not fully consciously, the deep sadness and loneliness of Rafe in that place. This experience gave her the feeling that it had somehow alleviated the heaviness of Rafe's soul.

We have completed the first part of a phenomenological overview of what is known as ADC. The unanimous conclusion of these experiences is a newly acquired feeling that the soul continues its journey after death. Consequently, fear of death is lessened. Feelings of grief are also alleviated, although the departed soul most likely will still be missed. The overall picture is one of great fluidity between the two worlds. The deceased want to both reassure the living and receive our help for their continued journey. They may help us surmount trials in our lives or enlist us to help others. Apart from the fact that these communications occur beyond the physical threshold, they are reminiscent of actions we carry out every day of our lives.

Has the boundary between the living and the dead become more permeable in our time? This is an issue that we will continue exploring with abundant information, so that we will be able to lift ourselves out of the phenomena in order to see the symptoms that lie beyond them.

In addition to the examples given above, although more rare, departed souls sometimes want to enter into communication for the sake of a third party. For example, there is the case of Valerie, an office manager in Massachusetts. She was called upon to assist another person after her only child, John, died of cystic fibrosis when he was eighteen years old:

I continued to go to the cemetery even though I always felt that John wasn't there. But it was an outlet for me to be there once in a while and reflect. I never interacted with other people at the cemetery—I just went to put a flower down. Usually I was in my own thoughts. But this particular time I felt John was talking to me.

He came through to me suddenly and said, “Mom, somebody needs you.” This intense feeling that kept coming over me—something was pushing me away from his grave.

It was John, and he kept saying, “Mom, you don’t need to be here. There’s somebody that needs you.” It was very brief, it was telepathic, and I was being pushed and led.

I walked away from my son’s grave and came upon a man who was kneeling by another grave. Led by John, I said, “Excuse me, I’m sure you are planting flowers here because somebody special in your life has passed away.”

The man turned around, stood up, and said, “Yes, it’s my son.” He looked at me like “Who are you?” And I said, “I’m sorry to bother you, but I saw the pretty flowers and just wanted to say hello, and I’m very sorry.” I could still feel John standing nearby. And there was another soul with him, but I didn’t know who it was until the man started to talk about his son.

He said, “My son, Troy, was murdered. He had muscular dystrophy and was on crutches to help him walk. He was very smart and intelligent.”

The father talked about how angry and hurt he was and the pain he had about his son’s death. He kept elaborating on the men who had killed his boy. He was so upset he wasn’t with his son when he died. Finally, he put his arms around me and started to cry.

Then I heard John say, “That’s why you’re here, Mom! You’ve got to tell him that when those men were strangling his son, when they were in the act of killing him, Troy left his body. There was no suffering. The pain was gone. Mom, the only ones who are suffering are the people down there who are alive. You are the sufferers! Troy is with us and he’s okay. And he feels sorry for the men who killed him.”

I repeated everything John told me. The man just looked at me and asked, “How do you know this?” I

said, “Because my son who died just told me” And I shared with him other experiences that John had given me, showing me there’s a life after death. Troy’s father was so elated that he hugged me and kissed me.

John was right! Somebody needed me—somebody needed both of us. I’m so glad we were able to help this bereaved father.⁶

With this example of ADC we have moved into a new dimension. Without necessarily knowing it, the person in the last example was acting as a “psychic.” The communication she was receiving concerned another soul—not herself. A psychic may be a person born with natural clairvoyance, and that clairvoyance can resemble, at first, a lack of definite boundaries between the material and spiritual worlds. In their work they will be able to contact departed souls who want to reach their beloved ones but probably would not be able to do it without the help of a third person. In this sense, the communication remains essentially the same in nature as other ADCs, with the added dimension of the experience of the psychic person.

Most Conscious ADCs

In 1969, Helen Greaves released transcripts of communications after death with her deceased friend, the Anglican nun Frances Banks.⁷ In a very moving way, Frances relates to Helen the reality of the spiritual world that she is beginning to experience—a view that is all but static. Frances is living and evolving on the other side of the threshold, undergoing tests and putting to use what she has learned on Earth.

The two women had worked closely for many years and were well attuned to each other. For years before her death the two had explored deep levels of meditation. They did so within a group of men and women and called their practice “Group Meditation for World Goodwill.” It was during that work that the group received communications from the Mother Superior of their order, Mother Florence, and later those of Father Joseph White, a priest of the Society of the Sacred Mission.

On Earth there had been previous steps leading to the day when communications would be possible. In 1965, upon dying, Frances beheld the souls of her departed friends in the room. At Frances’s memo-

rial, Helen clairvoyantly beheld Frances, appearing in her nun's habit. The communications with Frances were laid out in stages. Three weeks after the nun's death, Helen had a sentient ADC of a very particular nature with Frances. This is how she related it in her own words:

I gradually became aware of a Presence. The air seemed to take on a great stillness and a hush of expectancy. I switched off the radio and allowed myself to relax into this peace. No thought of a possible communicator from another world occurred to me. No word was spoken in my mind. I was very still and quiescent. Slowly my whole being seemed to be caught up into a peace and beauty that I cannot describe. This beauty was both around me and within me. Almost imperceptibly I passed into a state of deep meditation in which I was conscious of being immersed in light. I was part of the Light, yet the Light issued from beyond me. I felt a One-ness with all that was highest and best and with the eternal Self within me. I felt the nearness of spiritual Presences. I was swept into a meditation in which Frances and I had participated years before.... Gently, and with great reverence, it was borne in upon me that I was not only in touch with my own immortal soul, but also with the soul of Frances Banks.⁸

This is how the communication began. Frances revealed later that she was able to communicate with the help of Helen's deceased husband and from that time also telepathically with Helen. At first, Helen would write down what Frances was dictating. It was not an "automatic dictation," since Helen retained full consciousness. Later in the communications, Helen was able to ask questions and have a two-way conversation with her friend. Even so, she was never aware of what she would be writing about.

The communications went on from early December 1965 until mid-April 1966. Frances communicated about the steps she was taking in the spiritual world. At first there was a "life-review." Frances saw all of her life and had the opportunity to be the judge of her own ac-

tions, realizing when she had often fallen short of her goals. She depicts it as being “the accused, the judge and the jury,” all at the same time. Later, the soul arrived at the Halls of Learning, a University of the Spirit for deceased souls. With the help of more highly evolved souls, she was able to visit the Lower Regions of gloom and despair, of the souls that cannot yet see the Light. By degrees, Frances was released into a progressively more spiritual world. She communicated to her friend the experience of participating in a Festival of Light, where celestial music culminated in an intimate experience of Light. Progressively her soul ascended and Frances likened her experience of evolving to the progressive shedding of skins.

As Frances evolved to the closeness of the spiritual world, the communications stopped for seventeen months. In the meantime, Helen had a vision of Frances. This time she wore a robe of soft blue, looked amazingly beautiful, and emanated light all around her. Helen felt that Frances had attained her real self. Therefore, it was a total surprise to her that her friend resumed communications for a short period in September of 1967. In the spiritual world, Frances says, she lived in a realm where “talk is food.” At this stage Frances recognized the souls of her karmic grouping, in other words the souls who have attained similar levels of development and are working together on an earthly goal. Finally, the transcripts ended when Frances entered a new realm: “Light (here) is literally the substance and matter of our thought life. Thus, as our thoughts become attuned to the vibration of Creative Divinity, so the substance of our bodies changes, becoming less dense and reflecting more light.”⁹

Reports of communications of this tenor and clarity are rare. Another example was recorded at the time of the First World War. Sigwart (no last name given) was a promising German musician, born in 1884. He was already writing songs at the age of eight, and composed an opera before going to the front to fight for his country. After death he tried to communicate to his sister, with whom he was very close. This sister, who was present at the hour of his death, had been a great source of comfort to him. After two months of attempts, Sigwart managed to contact her on July 28, 1915. The communications went on for five months, much in the same way that they had between Frances and Helen.¹⁰

Sigwart relates his progress in the spiritual world in a way reminiscent of the communications between the two Anglican women. Of interest for our study are further elements revealed in this instance. Once again, it is the very strong love bond that allows the two individuals to remain in communication. Sigwart is grateful for his own interest in esoteric knowledge during the last two years of his life. That, together with the fact that his passing was not sudden, played an important role in allowing him to accept his death. Even so, at the beginning, he had thought he was still alive.

Since his sister is very skeptical at first about the reality of the communications, Sigwart gives her a series of directions on how to communicate more clearly and gain assurance about the contacts. He explains to her that he can best reach her during the day, when she turns her thoughts to the spiritual world and when she manages to be courageous. Her grieving, at least in the beginning, forms an obstacle to their contact. Music (the sister plays piano), on the contrary, is a channel for bringing them together, since it is a love they both share. Personal restlessness or disharmony within the circles that his sister is a part of makes contact more difficult. What is remarkable about this communication is the nature of the siblings' relationship. Although the ADCs are primarily a way to help his sister in her grieving, they also benefit Sigwart in his soul journey.

We have looked fully at relationships between the dead and the living as they have been made visible under very exceptional circumstances. From the above exploration, it appears that departed souls have a keen interest in our own development. They still want to be part of our lives and show the love they had on Earth that works even more strongly from the spiritual world. Departed souls are not the only ones we can contact. We turn now to another experience that has received a lot of attention in recent time—the so-called near-death experiences.

MEETING WITH THE LIGHT

*Afraid? Of whom am I afraid?
 Not death; for who is he?
 The porter of my father's lodge
 As much abasheth me.
 Of life? T'were odd I fear a thing
 That comprehendeth me
 In one or more existences
 At deity's decree.
 Of resurrection? Is the east
 Afraid to trust the morn?*

Emily Dickinson

Ever since the famous books *Life After Life* and *Return from Tomorrow*, we have all heard, in one way or another, of near-death experiences (NDEs). The typical experience of those who reach the other side during a “clinical death” roughly entails the following sequence. At first they realize that death isn’t what they imagined. They float in spirit above their body and see everything being done to it, as if from the outside. The whole of their lives passes quickly in review in front of their sight. Then, they travel at infinite speed through a tunnel and, on the other side, meet a being of light, of a radiance much brighter than the sun yet neither burning nor blinding. The being envelops them in an all-encompassing love and acceptance. This is the basic pattern, although the sequence is not always complete, and other stages can also follow.

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross was one of the pioneers in the study of these phenomena, beginning as early as 1977. Some of her observations are of interest here. A first experience is reported even from patients who had been blind for at least ten years: they could describe all the details and colors of the operating room in which they were, a first indication that they are not seeing with their physical eyes. The Swiss doctor also reports that the tunnel is not as universal an experience as has been made popular in more recent days. However, in one form or another, the step after death is represented as a threshold: if not a tunnel, then a bridge, river, or gate. In one of her own NDEs, Kübler-

Ross had to go through a mountain pass covered with wildflowers, an image most likely culturally bound to her upbringing.¹¹

While all of the above has been abundantly described elsewhere, there is another part to the story. Not all near-death experiences are alike. Some are decidedly different in pattern and, for lack of better word, “negative” or mixed (negative with positive) to contrast them with classical, “positive” experiences. What the percentages are remains arguable, as is whether or not we could really determine them. The problem may lie beyond science or methodological issues. It is important, however, to be aware of these other possibilities, so as not to have a schematic or sensationalistic view of the facts. We will return to them later in the chapter.

In order to classify the experiences, I will assume P. M. H. Atwater’s standpoint.¹² Her approach is new in the field; she looks at the experience in relation to the person. There is no such thing as a universal standard experience; there is always a concrete person behind it. In order to understand the “purpose” of the experience, we have to look at the person’s whole life prior to the experience. Atwater believes that we should also look at life after the experience.

In reality we cannot explain the “why” of something so vast, beyond human comprehension; but we can start feeling and sensing how it fits into the context, how it can provide meaning to the person’s life and how easy or difficult it may be for the person to integrate the experience. Atwater’s methodology may derive in part from the different kinds of NDEs (positive and negative) she has personally experienced.¹³

The way I classify the experiences is simpler than Atwater’s, but very similar. Like Atwater, I define them according to whether you can call them positive or negative from the standpoint of the person concerned. In a strictly phenomenological process, there would be no such negative or positive approach. There can be a positive or negative outcome, however, depending on whether the individual makes use of the experience no matter how hard this may be, or undergoes a deep crisis and is not able to assimilate the new content.

The positive experiences correspond to the general profile that we have given at the introduction of the topic. The transcendent experiences are more complex or dramatic than that of the basic NDE.

They include additional parts and could easily be the subject of an entire book.

Positive Experiences: Meeting the Light

Let us first look at some of the more common experiences, those we can call positive. We will look at children's experiences from seventeen cases mentioned in *Closer to the Light*,¹⁴ and four cases that appear in *Transformed by the Light*.¹⁵ All these experiences stop at encountering the Light. All of the individuals, except one, experience the presence of the Light, either by seeing it from afar or by coming into contact with it. Except in one case, the Light is not identified or it is simply called God. All of these experiences are positive, except one undergone by a child who has committed suicide.¹⁶ We will return to the issue of suicide later. Children's encounters entail no life review and no judgments or feelings about deeds performed in life. Among all the examples there is only one child wanting to stay in the Light. The others want to go back to their lives.

The following is the near-death experience of Spencer Christian (the weatherman on the television show *Good Morning America* in 1992), at age five:

I had a near-death experience when I was five years old. I was living in Newport News, Virginia, and I had gone into the hospital for what was thought to be a routine tonsillectomy.

They knocked me out with ether. While I was in surgery I began to hemorrhage severely and lost a great deal of blood. I know this because I was told, not because I really recall the loss of blood. I was told later that my loss of blood became so severe and I became so weak that I was near dying. The doctors thought they were going to lose me on the operating table. However, my memory of what happened while I was on the table is that I regained consciousness while the surgery was going on. I remember seeing the doctors and nurses working furiously over me and I could feel the pulling and tugging of things in my throat.

The next thing I remember is the sensation of being outside my body and being able to see from some point above the operating table. I was up in a position near the ceiling, looking down.

I recall feeling a complete loss of fear and panic. I just had a feeling of the most complete comfort and security that I have ever felt. I guess I liken it to the feeling of your mother holding you in her arms and rocking you.

I don't recall actually encountering a being that I would define as God. But I do recall the sense of having an option as to whether I wanted to go back or not. Somehow I do recall choosing to go back and reenter my body.¹⁷

Aftereffects of NDEs have been generally overestimated by a wave of enthusiastic commentators on the near-death phenomena. The truth of the matter is that there is no absolutely positive experience—even a positive experience can be interpreted negatively in some instances. An initial positive reaction can be followed by tormenting doubts about one's sanity. The person's knowledge and frame of reference, as well as the degree to which the experience is accepted by others make a drastic difference in the outcome. Context, as we mentioned above, plays an important part in defining what is positive or negative. Dannion Brinkley, who had a very elaborate NDE, mentions that a turning point in his recovery was a talk given by Raymond Moody that helped him reorient his life. Later, his personal friendship played an important role.¹⁸

One key symptom of the experience is found in a common reaction of the adult undergoing the encounter with the Light. At that stage the soul, gripped by an intuition of being home, wants to remain in the Light. A forerunner of these experiences, Benjamin Franklin, said after his own NDE, "I suffered a good deal, gave up the point in my mind, and was rather disappointed when I found myself recovering; regretting in some degree that I must now some time or other have all that disagreeable work to do over again."

What is it that makes even the most hardened materialist look at earthly experience with new eyes? Once again we will refer mostly

to Atwater's results, since they include the context factor in their analysis. As we will see, nothing is black and white. The spiritual experience acts as an awakening, but the result of it in our own lives depends on our own exertion of will. There is no doubt, however, that many people look at an NDE as a major turning point in their life.

The most discussed aftereffect is a different view of body and self. Those who have left their body know, beyond doubt, that they are souls living beyond the physical. They acquire a different view about death and consequently a lower amount of anxiety and concern with the matter. It is life in the body that may cause problems. If we are much more than our body, the next burning question may be "Why do we have to deal with the limitations of it?"

Receiving unconditional love in the other world makes recipients of NDEs more accepting of everyone in their environment. They look at the miracle of each individuality with a true sense of wonder. With this new attitude comes a possible inability to discriminate and direct this love. The person may lend little credence to old codes of behavior and give them up entirely. The new behavior, on the other hand, may be very naïve. Proper discernment and a healthy sense of caution might not be utilized. Because of this the person becomes vulnerable to ill intentions. NDE recipients have been attacked, cheated, robbed, or otherwise mistreated for this very reason.

Another change occurs, not only in relationship to others, but in relation to the inner faculties. The near-death survivor is almost always more psychic, and may intuit future events. In telling of these experiences, the person may lose discernment of what is appropriate to reveal and what is not. A feeling that time does not flow in the usual way may also emerge. Survivors live more easily in the present. This may lead toward their wish to live without clocks and watches, or refusing to make plans for the future. It is, in other words, an overall reversal of values that occurs after a near-death experience. Survivors may have difficulty relating to mundane concepts; on the other hand, they may feel at home in a world of newly acquired ideas.

Since a reversal of old paradigms seems to take place in those who have experienced an NDE, it comes as no surprise that the personality itself is altered. NDEs, rather than set a norm, seem to bring what is most needed in terms of personality integration. A quiet person can turn into an energetic, convincing leader, or a "take charge" indi-

vidual may all of a sudden experience the need to let things flow without exerting control.

All these changes can create a strain in relationships that surround survivors. New behaviors and all-out trusting attitudes may cause concern over the mental health of the person, or simply be misconstrued. New psychic gifts may be simply odd or downright frightening. The new way of relating to time can ease previous tensions or cause major irritations. Of all these alterations, personality changes can be the most frightening. NDE survivors have been assigned to psychiatric wards, although this is less the case these days with our increased understanding of the phenomenon. Quite often the families have been sorely tested in accepting the “new person.”

For some individuals and families this has been an opportunity for a concurrent change of heart. For many others, the challenge has ended in divorce and other separations. Integrating the life-altering perspective of an NDE is an ongoing process. It takes, at the very least, a number of years, sometimes as long as five, seven—even more. In the chapter discussing Alcoholics Anonymous, the NDE of Bill Wilson will be looked at within the overall context of his biography. Integrating his experience against the background of and damage caused by his alcoholic past was the task of a lifetime.

The following is an example of an NDE that gives us the benefit of context both before and after the fact. It is taken from *Transformed by the Light*:

Suzanne, a 53-year-old mother of two, had a near-death experience twenty years ago ... hers is an example of an NDE that led to an immediate and very visible transformation.

For nearly fifteen years Suzanne was married to an abusive husband. To the outside world, her husband seemed like the perfect man. In the privacy of their home, Suzanne suffered through almost daily sessions of slapping and shouting. She wanted to divorce him, but her religious parents told her to stay married and maybe things would change.

After fourteen years of miserable marriage, Suzanne experienced what she now calls “a stroke of luck.”

While reaching into the glove compartment of her car, she failed to notice that the traffic ahead had come to a stop. She slammed into the rear of a stopped car while going approximately thirty-five miles an hour. She was taken to the hospital with internal bleeding. While her injuries were being assessed she had a cardiac arrest.

“In the midst of all this hospital chaos, I just zoomed out of my body and into a tunnel. I was walking down a tunnel with the most beautiful light at the end that was enveloping and warm. I could feel myself being surrounded by the most loving arms and my cheek could feel the warmth of being against someone whose chest I seemed to be leaning on. There were people in the distance and I wanted to go greet them.

A man’s voice, very warm and caring, held me back from going to the people. The voice seemed to be coming from whoever or whatever was holding me in that wonderful loving warmth. The voice said, ‘Suzanne, turn around.’ I turned around and I saw my children standing in mid-air. Then the voice said: ‘Go back and be a good mother.’”¹⁹

Suzanne’s life changed dramatically and immediately as a result of that message. She left her abusive husband and stopped going to the church where he was a mainstay. She went back to school and struggled, as many late-in-life students do, to get a degree. After a few years, she remarried and now has a healthy marriage and home.

Her faith is still intact, although in a different form. “I don’t go to church anymore, but I have a deep personal faith. For the longest time I thought that the warm entity that held me was Jesus and I was sure that the experience was a testimony to my faith. But I can never be a part of organized religion again. After standing so close to the light, I can’t bear bureaucracy in religion anymore.”

Near-death experiences affect people even at the physiological level. While studies are not exhaustive on this account, the following are observations made by those who have undergone such experiences or those who have accompanied people who have.

Survivors on the whole look and act younger. The ability to handle stress more easily may be one of the main causes of this change. They also become more sensitive to light and sound levels. People who previously liked rock and roll music most often grow to dislike it for this reason. This heightened sensory perception extends to the other senses. Survivors feel that they can better perceive odors, textures, and tastes. This new sensitivity is accompanied by a heightened perception of electric or magnetic fields. Many anecdotes report that lights, clocks, or other electrical fixtures suddenly stop working around many of the survivors of NDEs. A last effect is the ability to more readily attract birds, animals, and small children.

Transcendental Experiences

We can now briefly cast a glance at the most developed and unusual NDEs, those that Atwater calls *transcendental*. In her book, a few lengthy examples are given. We will refer to experiences that have appeared in a book written by those who personally experienced these trials.

In *Beyond the Mirror*, Henri J. Nouwen, a Catholic priest and widely read author, provides a superb description of an experience of the cosmic and personal dimensions of the near-death experience.²⁰ During the period from December 1987 to June 1988, Nouwen experienced an extreme and deep anguish as a consequence of having to separate from a friend upon whom he had become very dependent. The irony did not escape Nouwen's self-analysis. In a book published almost ten years later, he recalls that during this time he was in a state of extreme anguish and wondered whether he would be able to hold on to life:

Everything came crashing down—my self-esteem, my energy to live and work, my sense of being loved, my hope for healing, my trust in God ... everything. Here I was, a writer about the spiritual life, known as someone who loves God and gives hope to people, flat on the ground and in total darkness. What had happened? I had come face to face with my own nothingness. It was as if all that had given my life meaning was pulled away and

I could see nothing in front of me but a bottomless abyss.²¹

The crisis culminated in a car accident, where Nouwen, who was walking along frozen paved road, was hit by the side mirror of a van. For a while his life hung in the balance. The turning point was cleansing, healing, and powerful. About it, Nouwen says: “It was not a warm light, a rainbow, or an open door that I saw, but a human yet divine presence that I felt, inviting me to come closer and to let go of all fears.” And further: “I knew that he was there for me, but also that he was embracing the universe.²² As he reflected on this experience of divine love, Nouwen realized he needed new theological language to convey the depth and breadth of his new outlook on life. A diary he kept at the time holds this short entry entitled “Work Around Your Abyss”:

There is a deep hole in your being, like an abyss. You will never succeed in filling that hole, because your needs are inexhaustible. You have to work around it so that gradually the abyss closes. Since the hole is so enormous and your anguish so deep, you will be tempted to flee from it. There are two extremes to avoid: being completely absorbed in your pain and being distracted by so many things that you stay away from the wound that you want to heal.²³

These words graphically express Nouwen’s challenge of integrating his spiritual experience. Like others, he felt at home on the other side and wished to remain in the Light. Coming back, he felt, was the chance to express theological knowledge gained directly from experience of the other world. The challenge lay in finding the words to convey the otherworldly reality he had known firsthand.

The two following experiences are the most well known of all the literature on NDEs. We will look at what made them unique.

Betty Eadie clinically died in a hospital the night before undergoing a hysterectomy. Her experience of the tunnel is thus conveyed:

“I felt as if I had been swallowed up by an enormous tornado. I could see nothing but the intense, almost tangible darkness. The darkness was more than a lack of light; it was a dense blackness, unlike anything I had known before.”²⁴

What her experience adds to other experiences is the extensive “spiritual training” she received. She remembers experiencing the creation of the Earth as if it were re-enacted before her eyes. She experienced the power of the Word and the importance of a living “imagination” as the key to reality. She was given insight into the role of death in human evolution. She also witnessed shining examples of how souls decide to enter their bodies. In two instances she saw how the souls of a developmentally disabled person and of a homeless alcoholic actually belonged to very evolved individualities, happily undertaking the sacrifice of that existence for the progress of other souls.

George Ritchie’s well-known experience blazed the trail for the recognition of NDEs. His was almost a complete opposite experience to that of Betty Eadie. He was given a vivid introduction to the world of souls who live chained to their desires, the lower rungs of the spiritual world. His first encounter with the Light is followed with a closer approach that he describes in terms very similar to those of Nouwen: “He would be too bright to look at. For now I saw that it was not light but a Man who had entered the room, a Man made out of light, though this seemed no more possible to my mind than the incredible intensity of the brightness that made up His form.”²⁵

A similar experience is told by Eadie: “I saw a pinpoint of light in the distance.... As I approached it, I noticed the figure of a man standing in it, with the light radiating all around him. As I looked closer the light became brilliant.”²⁶

Something similar happens also to Howard Storm: “Soon the light was upon me. I knew that while it was indescribably brilliant, it wasn’t just light. This was a living being, a luminous being approximately eight feet tall and surrounded by an oval of radiance. The brilliant intensity of the light penetrated my body. Ecstasy swept away the agony.”²⁷

A final example, from the many in the specialized literature, comes from Sarah Hinze, whom we have already met in chapter 2 in relation to the Pre-birth Experiences. Sarah, the mother of nine, recalls the experiences that preceded a difficult birth. Her fifth pregnancy had

ended in a miscarriage. In a dream, less than two months later, she was showed that the baby girl was only temporarily delayed in her home-coming. She also saw that the child was reluctant in leaving her heavenly home. After conceiving again, she was hemorrhaging and on the verge of miscarrying again. She prayed fervently and had a vision in which she seems to have experienced anew her own sense of loss in descending to incarnation. This was accompanied with fear and a sense of loneliness. The vision ended with the sense of the promise that incarnation offers. She soon returned to her senses and in full consciousness she recalls: "I sensed a being of power enter the room. I felt compelled to rise. I cannot explain how, but I knew it was Jesus Christ. I was totally immersed in His love. I begged Him to heal my body for the sake of the child within me. In answer, he conveyed these words to my mind: 'I am the Great Physician. I will heal your body, and this baby will be born whole and well, for I have so decreed it.' The promise delivered, His presence gently withdrew. I rested upon the bed, enveloped in a peaceful, healing power. Soon, the pain and hemorrhaging stopped entirely. I was whole. And, above all, my baby was safe."²⁸

We have covered a vast array of the most vivid experiences of the meeting with the Light. Rudolf Steiner first described what we can describe as the new Christ encounter – in a more conscious experience – in his first Mystery Drama, *The Portal of Initiation* in terms that are reminiscent of much that has been said in the most transcendental experiences above. In scene 1 of the play the seeress Theodora first says: "Before my spirit stands a Form in shining light. And from it words sound forth to me..." Later in the same dialogue she adds: "A human being emerges from the radiant light. It speaks to me: ...The Christ once lived upon the earth, and from this life it follows that He encompasses as Soul men's growth on earth."²⁹ This statement introduces us to further aspects of the Light experience that we will discuss in the next chapter.

In many of the above experiences the Light weaves with the darkness. In fact, before reaching the Light, many souls experience their own darkness. George Ritchie found himself traveling outside his body towards an earthly city. He was in a place where the living and the dead existed side by side. In it he witnessed the presence of other

departed souls, who could neither contact the souls next to them nor come out of their own darkness. Among these he noticed a group of other souls. Ritchie learned that these were the souls of suicides. In another scene he found himself surveying from above the scene of a bar. Together with the living he could perceive the souls of the dead chained to their alcohol craving. Fights broke out between the souls for a desired glass of alcohol. Leaving the place of the living, Ritchie entered more deeply into this limbo-like scenario. Here were souls persisting in their negative earthly habits of hatred, lust, and destructive emotions. They were all unaware of the Beings of Light that hovered above the scene. Like them, Ritchie was unaware of these Beings for a while. The realization of their presence took him to a whole other dimension of spiritual existence, into experiences much more similar to those described by Betty Eadie.

The most vivid example among experiences of the “light filled” NDEs is that of Dannion Brinkley. Since his experience covers much of the territory we have already explored, we will look in some detail at his moral life. According to the author, “I was faced with the sickening reality that I had been an unpleasant person, someone who was self-centered and mean.”³⁰ Dannion Brinkley relived every action of his life from the perspective of the victims of his violence or those who had died from the consequences of his actions. At the end of his experience Brinkley concludes:

I looked at the Being of Light and felt a deep sense of sorrow and shame. I expected a rebuke, some kind of cosmic shaking of my soul. I had looked at my life and what I had seen was a truly worthless person. As I gazed at the Being of Light I felt as though he was touching me. From that contact I felt a love and joy that could only be compared to the nonjudgmental compassion that a grandfather has for a grandchild. “Who you are is the difference that God makes,” said the Being. “And that difference is love.” There were no actual words spoken, but this thought was communicated to me through some form of telepathy.³¹

Brinkley experienced clinical death once more later, as he relates in his book. It is very instructive to know that he relived his moral life review, and that the first part of it (the first twenty-five years) was equivalent to what we have just described. He concludes: "Watching these early years again was painful, I won't deny that, but the agony was tempered by viewing the years since the first experience."³² It would appear that this experience has a lawful, objective place in Brinkley's life and that it will still be there awaiting him at his final, real death.

We have been introduced to many dimensions of spiritual existence, what spiritual literature calls the "lower astral" and what organized religion would call hell or purgatory. It is to this realm of existence that we now turn to look at "negative" experiences, keeping in mind that this is only a relative term. Let us keep looking at this from a phenomenological perspective. To do this we turn once again to the direct experience of souls who have been vouchsafed knowledge that usually lies within the unconscious mind.

IS IT ALWAYS THE LIGHT?

*O fools (said I) this to prefer dark night
 Before true light,
 To live in grotts, and caves, and hate the day
 Because it shews the way,
 The way which from this dead and dark abode
 Leads up to God,
 A way where you might tread the Sun, and be
 More bright than he.*

Henry Vaughan

After referring to the host of psychic experiences we have characterized as ADCs, PBEs, and NDEs, perhaps we ought to address a question that has arisen many times. Do these experiences exclusively uncover blissful and generally speaking positive aspects of the spiritual world? We have mostly discounted this view by adopting a phenomenological approach that finds an answer in the biography of each individual. The experiences of recalled previous lives quoted earlier are

sufficient to underline that “negative” experiences have a forward-moving role in an individual’s life. Let us return more specifically to this matter.

Based on the research of the Guggenheims, a premature death by suicide will create suffering for both the subject and the survivors. They offer the example of a woman’s vivid dream of her boyfriend, who had committed suicide, surrounded by a fog in a desert wasteland. He appeared forlorn and restless, and communicated this verbally.³³ The Guggenheims conclude that the suicide victim takes his problems with him in the intervening life. In two other ADCs the individuals who committed suicide appeared sad, confused, and regretful of their action and the consequences for their loved ones. Another suicide victim communicated being in a “holding place” for the time his life would have lasted on Earth. The consequences, however, are tempered in the case of those who end their lives by committing suicide during a terminal illness.

Other examples come from those who express regret for the way they lived their lives or some particular event that they wish to atone for, and the desire for forgiveness. An alcoholic, a very distressed man, reappeared to his forty-three-year-old daughter to ask for her and the family’s forgiveness. She could sense his improvement when she finally managed to forgive him after the others had already done so. And in a final case, a father-in-law appeared to a thirty-five-year-old woman, also very distraught. To her response of not knowing what to do for him he told her, “Oh, yes, there is [something you can do]! You can pray for me.... Tell everybody to pray for me.... Don’t forget, tell everyone to pray for me.”³⁴

George Ritchie’s famous life story has introduced us to a different dimension possible in NDEs. Howard Storm takes us a step further into the “negative” dimensions of the other side. His book, *My Descent into Death and the Message of Love Which Brought Me Back*, emphasizes that his was a “positive” experience after all. The author returned a changed man and was able to integrate his experience in a positive manner. Storm’s experience shows that even during the NDE, he had free choice. It was his response that turned the scenario around.

Storm’s life, previous to his brush with death, sets the tone for the subsequent experience. All his life he had fought to repress fear, angst, and dread. He felt anger toward his father and toward injustice

in general, and a certain blind inner rage. He was afraid of this rage, because he knew that it could come out unbidden and catch him by surprise. In a fit of rage he could destroy things and experience the desire to hit people. He lived a life with no faith or hope. A few acquired behaviors helped him contain this tension. He developed a belief in survival of the fittest, and repressed all his feelings, mostly with the help of alcohol. With alcohol he could feel “on top”; without it, he tended to be depressed. His life was devoted to his work with little social interaction and few friendships.

Beacons in Storm’s life were his career as an artist and his wife. He was starting to gain a reputation and placing all his hopes on future fame. Just then, a mysterious duodenum perforation created an emergency that sent him to a hospital in Paris. He was in the operating room of the hospital when he separated from his body. He felt that his sense perceptions were extremely vivid. It took him a while to realize that he was dying. People around him weren’t responding to his calls, and later he discovered, with shock, his body lying under the sheets.

His experience began when he heard voices calling him in the distance, voices that people around him could not hear. Although the beings persuaded him to follow them, they would not respond to his inquiries but would urge him to move further. He was now moving in a hazy landscape, following human beings clothed in gray. They were pale, but not identifiable as male or female. There was a feeling of timelessness.

The scenario deepened. Progressively the place became darker, and he had the feeling of walking on a cold, damp floor. More and more souls gathered around him. As he started to question their presence, their attitude became more overtly hostile and authoritarian. They first insulted him and shouted at him to hurry along. They derived pleasure from his pain. Storm’s misgivings grew as did the flow of abuse and insult. Finally he was in a completely dark place and the situation escalated to a climax. More and more souls pressed against the newcomer, becoming overtly violent and abusive. They screamed and kicked and soon started to eat him alive, tearing pieces of his flesh.

Storm remembers details of their grotesque figures, particularly the sharp fingernails and long teeth. He knew that they felt no pain while fighting and acted out of a most gratuitous cruelty. At last, com-

pletely wrecked, he lay in the darkness. In this state he heard a voice coming from his chest enjoining him to pray. Not knowing how to do that, he made a first awkward attempt. He was encouraged by the success of his efforts. The beings began to recede, while still trying to convince him that there is no God. Progressively the landscape around him began to change and he started to notice a pinpoint of light getting larger. This is how he was called into the Light, and at this point his experience resembles those of many other people.

Are there more experiences like those of Howard Storm? If so, why don't we hear more about them? P.M.H. Atwater first heard the immediate report of these hellish experiences in a hospital where she visited a woman who had just suffered a heart attack. The woman had experienced the presence of very similar, disincarnate entities. In her case the dread of their presence had been enough; there had not been any aggression. Two other patients hospitalized for heart attacks also reported the same kind of experience to Atwater. Before leaving, she was told by the nurse that there was another patient who reported similar experiences, although he refused to expand upon them. Atwater herself reports a difficult NDE that traumatized her for years and probably played an important part in the interest she developed in the phenomenon. It was a rude awakening for her, but with a positive outcome.

Atwater hypothesizes that many experiences on the verge of death may actually start with a traumatic situation, and then may or may not evolve toward the better-known scenario. The cases of Howard Storm and George Ritchie add credence to the hypothesis. In the individuals she has interviewed, she noticed that repressed anger, guilt, and fear seemed to play a very important part in the development of the negative scenario. On the other hand, the religious background did not seem to influence the outcome. Confirming previous findings of others, she also acknowledges that children do not have hellish experiences. Individuals undergoing similar experiences may take them as an opportunity to do a house cleaning of the soul, while others may become despondent and bring themselves down. There is no implicit power in the experience, but rather in the individual's response.

What is most revealing in Atwater's conclusions is the quality of perception, similar to what has emerged in ADCs and NDEs. As the literature has proven and will further prove in the case of suicide, ei-

ther experience feels extremely real to the senses. The feelings associated with it and the environment are what create variation.

Friendly beings appear in the most acclaimed NDEs; hostile apparitions, in the others. Colorful and beautiful environments, on the one hand, contrast with desolate, chilling, and dark surroundings on the other. Warmth and a feeling of total acceptance and love accompany the heavenly experiences, whereas cold, violence, and danger characterize hellish experiences. Conversation and dialogue stand in contrast with screams and insults.

Had it not been for her own life path, Atwater may have missed the impact of negative NDEs. Whereas other researchers (such as Moody and Ring) estimate that less than 1% of experiences are negative, Atwater places the proportion at one out of seven, but gives a different value to the term *negative*. By a chance encounter with a patient who had a heart attack, Atwater was brought to the hospital at just the right time.

Death and Resuscitation in the Emergency Room

Dr. Rawlings sheds more light on the phenomenon of negative NDEs. It was a terrified patient who sent Rawlings on the path of inquiry about hellish NDEs—a patient on whom he was performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). The man in turn conveyed that he was having visions of hell and encourage the doctor to revive him. A final request came from the patient: “Pray for me.” Even though he was taken aback by the tone of command, the doctor tried as best he could. Returning home, the experience lingered in his soul and he was moved to look in the Bible for some answers. Pursuing the question further, he returned to the man in order to get information he could not ask for on the operating table. Much to his surprise, the individual could not recall anything that he had mentioned a couple of days earlier.³⁵

The above kind of experience is the result of resuscitation techniques that have drastically reduced deaths by heart attack. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation was introduced in the 1970s. Before that time, negative experiences were most often experienced in protracted illnesses and comas. Now, half the people who receive CPR in time will recover from a heart attack. Resuscitated people most likely to report a negative NDE are those interviewed just after being revived by CPR. The irony is that doctors are not trained to offer spiritual sol-

ace to their patients, while counselors and priests are not present in the operating room. Of those people who have had an experience, only an estimated 20%, according to Rawlings, will volunteer information. In a later interview, the proportions become much lower. In successive resuscitation experiences people may move into positive NDEs. Rawlings never recorded the contrary movement from positive to negative, confirming a pattern we have already detected. The same is apparent from a single experience like Howard Storm's: at first he experienced the darkness, then the Light. The reverse has not been reported in the literature.

There are many reasons for not wanting to report negative experiences. Recipients may harbor a sense of failure and consequently be embarrassed. The weight of the experience may trigger repression and oblivion mechanisms. Howard's Storm's testimonial is very much appropriate here. At the end of his "descent" he concludes: "I haven't described everything that happened. There are things that I don't care to remember. In fact, much that occurred was simply too gruesome and disturbing to recall. I've spent years trying to suppress a lot of it. After the experience, whenever I did remember those details, I would become traumatized."³⁶

Many of Rawlings's observations confirm Atwater's work and add dimension to negative experiences. Hellish NDEs offer sense experiences that, to all appearances, are real. Darkness may be accompanied by a feeling of sensory deprivation, a sort of vacuum. Associated feelings vary from despondency to loneliness, dread, and despair. Contrary to positive NDE recipients, who often question why they have been given such an overwhelming experience, recipients of negative NDEs do not entertain the same question. Another element of hellish experiences is the appearance of the Angel of Death. One of these happened to German actor Curt Jurgens. He had this experience after his heart repeatedly stopped during the four hours it took a Houston doctor to replace part of his aorta.

Soon I had a feeling that life was ebbing from me. I felt powerful sensations of dread. I had been looking up into the big glass cupola over the operating room. This cupola now began to change. Suddenly it turned a

glowing red. I saw twisted faces grimacing as they stared down at me.

I tried to struggle upright and defend myself against these ghosts who were moving closer to me. Then it seemed as if the glass cupola had turned into a transparent dome that was slowly sinking down over me. A fiery rain was now falling, but though the drops were enormous, none of them touched me. They splattered down around me, and out of them grew menacing tongues of flames licking up about me.

I could no longer shut out the frightful truth: beyond the faces dominating this fiery world were faces of the damned. I had a feeling of despair ... the sensation of horror was so great it choked me. Obviously I was in Hell itself, and the glowing tongues of fire could be reaching me any minute. In this situation, the black silhouette of a human figure suddenly materialized and began to draw near. It was a woman in a black veil, a slender woman with a lip-less mouth and in her eyes an expression that sent icy shudders down my back.

She stretched out her arms toward me and, pulled by an irresistible force, I followed her. An icy breath touched me and I came into a world filled with faint sounds of lamentation, though there was not a person in sight. Then and there I asked the figure to tell me who she was. A voice answered: "I am death."

I summoned all my strength and thought: "I'll not follow her any more, for I want to live."³⁷

Suicide: Light from the Other Side

The issue of suicide is more tragic than all the previous ones and presents a more pervasively dark atmosphere. Two books have appeared at nearly the same time, with strikingly similar titles as well: *Beyond the Darkness* by Angie Fenimore³⁸ and *Light Beyond the Darkness*³⁹ by Doré Deverell. The former is a firsthand account of a failed suicide attempt, whose victim saw enough of the consequences of her own choice before meeting the Being of Light and decided to return to her body. Doré Deverell, on the other hand, is the mother of Richard, who

committed suicide. Her son's life was plagued by seizure disorder; a chronic, severe schizophrenia; an almost complete inability to establish social contact; and a life of utter poverty that pushed him to the margin of society, towards total despair. Deverell managed to establish contact with her son after death, through a discipline of reading spiritual material to him. The son reached the mother mostly in the dream state. Tentatively at first, and with progressing certainty later, Deverell could establish how happy her son was and how he was evolving in his new life.

Fenimore's life shared some of Richard's sources of stress. Growing up in a very unsettled family, she experienced her mother's remoteness and her father's alcoholism. Before their divorce, the mother left and the father went through a succession of short, rather unstable relationships. Fenimore came to experience her father's girlfriends' antagonism and open enmity, as well as a series of situations leading to sexual abuse. In short, she felt totally betrayed and began to experiment with alcohol and drugs. During her adolescence she had acquired a temporary grounding in religion, through her participation in church services and Sunday school. After a marriage and two children, unable to cling to her faith, she fell into a psychotic condition and longed for death as the only escape from her reality.

Reading the biographies of Richard and Angie Fenimore is a harrowing experience. We realize that they experienced their own hell on Earth before moving to the other side. Of the two books, Fenimore's contains more detail since hers is a personal account. On all levels we should keep in mind that the two descriptions of life after suicide are remarkably similar.

Fenimore describes the place where she dwells after "death" as a purgatory. She has little doubt that it is every bit as real as the physical world. Her own words are the most eloquent here: "The darkness continued in all directions and seemed to have no end, but it wasn't just blackness, it was an endless void, an absence of light. I knew that it had its own life and purpose."⁴⁰ She goes on to describe more accurately what this darkness looks and feels like: "The place was filled with a crackling energy ... a state of molecules of intense darkness, and it was purely negative, even evil." In this purgatory Fenimore meets other souls who appear to bear physical traits. Most of them wear dark suits and eventually dark make-up. Their sexual differences

seem to fade. They are too self-absorbed to be able to engage in any mental or emotional exchange.

The final outcome of this purgatory was a place of light. Light and darkness are both very real. Darkness has its own reality; it is not just the absence of light. Both of them can be transmitted through thought, telepathically. The most interesting conclusion in Fenimore's words is the following: "Light is light and darkness is darkness; and like oil and water, darkness and light repel each other. Sometimes the two are tightly intertwined and it is difficult to see them separately, but they never occupy the same space."⁴¹

In relation to her suicide, Fenimore's concludes: "This purgatory, this hell-like state, had a different kind of suffering—pointless, redundant and stifling. This was the agony—useless, never-ending torment—that awaited me for taking my own life."⁴² Fenimore's scenario resolved into a heavenly scenario just as real as that of any we have heard before. It is a life-changing event, setting in motion a different future.

What in Fenimore's case took a matter of minutes or hours, went on for six years of Earth time with Richard, Doré Deverell's son. During these years, he felt his mother's help as a desperate necessity to be able to move away from the darkness surrounding him. Deverell kept trying to remain in contact with him through the help of spiritual revelations in the form of lectures she would read aloud to him.

There are many aspects of suicide. The psychic Van Praagh communicates that when a person commits suicide, the ties to Earth are still present for as long as the person would have otherwise lived on Earth.⁴³ This feeling accompanies the soul with great heaviness, together with the perception of all the sadness, anger, and other feelings of survivors. In contacting the souls of suicide victims, Rosemary Altea notices that they are the most reluctant to take first steps.⁴⁴ She needs to offer much more patience and love to them than to others. They obviously need to revisit their death, although they may have the greatest difficulty looking at it. Rawlings confirms that suicide and euthanasia victims harbor the same feelings, and that 85% of those who attempt suicide are actually glad to be back when they recover.

Affecting Destiny Between the Living and the Dead

Doré Deverell provides an example of how the threshold between the dead and the living is getting thinner in modern times. Her experiences have occurred in the realm of feeling and in dreams. It was because she took on an active path of spiritual development that she could actively follow and help her son further his own. We offer it here because this kind of experience offers potent insights into the workings of karma.

Richard died in July of 1982. His mother started reading to him in the fall of the following year. For the next five years, Deverell kept reading to her son and receiving dream intimations about her son's progress. The first contact happened in May of the following year. In a vivid dream she saw that her son's face was expressing happiness. She later realized that this was on Mother's Day. The next long communication with Richard occurred in September. He appeared to her in a sentient experience. He seemed agitated that his mother would change the time of the readings, because he still needed them greatly. This exchange occurred in feelings, not words. Deverell achieved a feeling of certainty that Richard was making progress and had stopped blaming others for his own situation.

In 1985, Deverell felt that she might be dying. She communicated the thought by actually asking the question, in writing, of Richard: "If I die, would you meet me?" Again she sensed her son's agitation and intuited the message that it wasn't her time to die. After three years of readings, he was still isolated in the spiritual world and had nobody but his mother to help him. To continue living, Deverell felt she also needed to take on additional soul exercises. In July of 1987, the fifth anniversary of his death, during a meditation, she felt her son had moved to a new important stage and was approaching the Light. However, the following December her son reappeared in a dream indicating that he was in a transition place of being "neither alive nor dead."

Richard's progress culminated the following year. At first he reappeared saying that he had been given the difficult task of helping other suicide victims. This caused him much pain, but also allowed him to work to further their progress via his mother's readings. A week before the sixth anniversary of his death, Richard appeared in another dream where he had moved into a place full of light. A short

time later, his mother gained assurance that her son had moved into a new realm.

We will now return to the scenario of the near-death experience in order to come closer to an understanding of its central essence—popularly known as “the Light.” This pivotal experience that progressively opens up for humanity, will help us to define the “spiritual atmosphere” of the coming millennium, and millennia! Everything that we have been reviewing since Chapter 2 has been building up to this central archetypal reality.

Chapter 5

A PARADIGM SHIFT FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Like anybody, I would like to live a long life; longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land.

Martin Luther King on April 3, 1968,
the day before his death.

From the wealth of first-hand reports in the literature, we have seen the emergence of recurrent patterns and motifs. After purposefully providing an overabundance of information and following many examples, we can begin elucidating laws that show themselves at work on the other side of the threshold of the physical world.

We have looked at experiences of reincarnation, pre-birth experiences, and finally near-death experiences. We have lifted the veil of two realms of experience normally barred from everyday consciousness: the realms of life before birth and life after death. In the language of ancient traditions we have opened the “gate of birth” and the “gate of death”—or rather, they have been opened for us. Reincarnation, pre-birth experiences, and the uninterrupted stream of memory look at existence before birth. Near-death experiences allow us a peek at the reality of life after death.

As different as they are, the numerous examples we have studied have shown remarkable consistency. All the experiences have strong sensory elements and provide the feeling of being “more real than life.” Is this heaven, the great beyond, the spiritual world? Is this all of it or just part of it?

**ANOTHER WORLD IMMEDIATELY
BEYOND THE PHYSICAL?**

Nature conceals God! But not from everyone.

J. W. Goethe

Individuals who have had a previous life experience can look at their bodies and experience them in the present, or relive a tragic event in all its detail. Those who have had an NDE do not need to keep an account of their experience. Calling it back to mind is akin to reliving it. Memory survives uninterrupted. A pre-birth communication or a near-death experience lives in the memory with the urgency and presence of their first moment. They live as if out of time. A siren, the uniform of a policeman, the sound of a trumpet may send a child who remembers a traumatic previous life into a panic, regardless of the present context.

Dreams of a previous life have the same concrete, recurring plot, which is to say a sequential logic. The same is true of a pre-birth communication dream. They are real and present in the moment. In these spiritual experiences, thoughts acquire more reality than they have in our world. They become objective reality that moves from one being to another through telepathy. The only restriction is the level of development of the soul. Self-absorbed souls for the most part shut themselves off from this possibility. People who have clinically died and come back to life communicate how another being had suffered at their hands, because they have experienced it in themselves.

What is this world that is in some aspects just as real as the physical, and in other aspects so completely opposite? It is a world where objects and beings interpenetrate, where it is possible to know things from the inside. Space does not exist there in the same way as we know it. It is a world where time does not exist—at least not as it does on Earth—a world where it is possible to go backward or forward in the continuum of time. Souls can appear younger or older than they are in life. In this world it is possible to know what happened in the far distant past and what is about to happen in the future. The states of mind that most easily lead into this other reality are relaxation, meditation, and dreaming—in short, those states of consciousness that lead beyond the sensory experience of time. This is the reason people who

cross this threshold of existence feel recharged with new vitality. They may look younger, and attract the forces of other living creatures: plants, animals, and children.

Another important quality of the other world is reflected in its vibrancy and energy. The light that appears and renews the soul is brilliant beyond any other light, yet not blinding. People who have been exposed to it carry the effects in a rejuvenated body. Traveling in this world occurs almost instantly, as if by the power of thought. There are often curious side effects. Why do NDE survivors affect electrical appliances? What is this energy that acts like electrical or magnetic energy and yet does not behave according to its laws?

We are touching upon what more and more people recognize as the etheric realm, in every respect the polar opposite of the physical realm. In terms of energy, it is the energy that sustains life, and operates in what Rupert Sheldrake calls the *morphogenetic fields*. Intuitively we know that this is the nature of the energy of the sun.

It would be a whole new field of discussion to prove what the etheric world is. In the present analysis of this book a few elements will suffice. Some mathematicians have approached this world and discussed its properties. We live in a world where a point is situated next to another point, and where only one point can be present in any given space at a given time. A line is a configuration of adjacent points. A plane is a configuration of endless succeeding lines, and so forth. The etheric world can be defined as *counter-space*, where these realities can be expressed in polar opposite terms. The line can be formed at the intersection of an infinite number of planes coming from the periphery, and likewise a point is the meeting place of infinite lines.¹ With these terms we give concrete reality to the principle of simultaneity, rather than to the concept of exclusivity that models the physical world.

In the physical world, infinity is found at the far periphery of our galaxy. In the etheric world, infinity is the place of origin of forces streaming into the physical world. The point becomes the place at which forces originating from the periphery incrementally converge. This point can be defined as an infinity *within*. Seen in that light, the bud of the plant is a never-ending, unfolding infinity for forces that act upon it from the farthest periphery of the universe.²

The etheric world exists in the realm of rhythms. It is created from the rhythm of the Sun, Moon, and planets, and impresses rhythms—periodicities, biorhythms—on all living beings. Working with the etheric means working with these rhythms.

Samuel Hahnemann, the founder of homeopathy, intuited this deep truth two centuries ago. He developed a medicine through which “like cures like”—again the polar opposite of the conventional approach in which opposites neutralize each other. Given a substance that at high doses causes a certain illness, Hahnemann developed a remedy for the illness derived from the very same substance. To do this he had to work with progressive dilutions; and to make them effective he had to add an element of periodicity (rhythm)—the famous *potentization*, or originally *succussion*, explained as follows. The substance to be used as a remedy is repeatedly diluted by a factor of 10 in a continuous sequence: dilution by 10, by 100, by 1000, and so on. It is an exponential dilution achieved through repeated potentizations. In between each dilution the solution extracted is potentized through ten vigorous shakings, or through other rhythmical shaking actions. At each progressive dilution, more matter disappears. If the process is repeated six times, only a millionth part of the original substance is present. After the tenth, or further dilution, matter is practically absent. The remedy is still active and is often more potent for its intended use. As matter is diluted in this process, the etheric energy associated with it is enhanced and loosened from its material support. It is as if matter and force were the equivalent of a horse and rider. The acting remedy is the rider, by necessity carried by the horse of matter. Homeopathy enhances the power of the rider—force—by progressively reducing the importance of the horse—matter. Interestingly, while we can make homeopathic remedies from naturally extracted substances, it is not possible to do the same with synthesized substances, no matter how similar or apparently identical both molecules may be.³ Etheric energy is present only in living organisms; it is what gives them the qualities of living beings.

The energy that we are talking about is different from electricity—in fact, its polar opposite. Electricity, or nuclear radioactivity are energies that come from the inanimate; they work in the sense of increased entropy, i.e., progressive dissipation. Etheric energy contrasts

with entropy and causes the living plant to grow upright, against the earthly force of gravity; it overcomes entropy.

A process similar to homeopathy happens during any psychic experience. Let us take an NDE as an example. As the physical body loosens its hold over us, we are able to move on the level of reality that constantly surrounds us, the etheric, or “envelope” of all living beings. The shock of death acts to potentize the subtle layers of our spiritual bodies. It is as if we are shaken loose of our physical body in a potentized fashion. This same process happens in sleep or at death, and during meditation, relaxation, and prayer.

The realm of the etheric can be fully apprehended in its objectivity, once we are freed from the fetters of personality as in the case of near-death experience. In our reach to a realm of spiritual reality we live at first in that world that lies qualitatively closer to the physical, the realm of the etheric, and then into other realms of spiritual reality. At the opposite end of the etheric we can experience the reality of our double, colored with the layers of our personality. We can all have a share of these experiences according to different states of consciousness. Lowered states of consciousness—such as stress, hyperventilation, drugs, or hypersensory exposure—open us, among other things, to the realm of the double and its compulsive nature. Examples of activities that open us more to the realm of the etheric are enhancing of the consciousness through prayer and meditation, cultivating a balanced rhythm of life, the practice of art, fostering a reverential mood. In this realm we are progressively transported into what appears to be an enhanced sensual experience, although it lacks the physical grounding of the material world. Drugs illustrate the most striking example of the opposite process. Hallucinogenic drugs have indeed offered many people their first insight into the spiritual dimension of life. However, no two people on drugs will experience the same objective reality, and no second experience can guarantee the results of the first! Moreover, attaining familiarity with the spiritual in this way binds us to the compulsive nature of our double that manifests first of all in addiction.

In meeting with the Lower Guardian (see Chapter 3), we are reminded of everything that still ties us to the dimension of Earth, through our double. We go through this experience and test in order to gain the strength to transform our human nature. It is very much the

path corresponding to Jung's process of individuation. It can be done only by lovingly transforming our shadow or double.

Steiner's concept of the double adds to the dimension of the shadow the idea of repeated earthly lives. What psychology seeks in upbringing, environment, and/or human nature, a spiritual understanding finds completely within the individual. The double is the creation that is the result, not only of present environment or culture, but also of the baggage we have created for ourselves over many incarnations, and that we meet in the present in order to transform. Differences notwithstanding in the understanding of the phenomena, the practical results are parallel. Whether we understand it as a shadow or envision it as a double, the path to personal self-development involves a courageous and committed process of acknowledgement of our shortcomings and character flaws. It is only through loving acceptance and progressive modification that we can transform this part of ourselves and acquire a better understanding of our true self and of the spiritual world.

If we do not acknowledge our double and allow it to be active in the unconscious, we fall victim to its compulsive nature, and our experiences become progressively more limited to the realm of the physical world and that of the senses. In the opposite experience we can educate our double so that its final transformation can lead us to break into the realm of objective perception of the etheric. It is this process that will gradually lead us to the types of experiences we have explored earlier. This breakthrough can be a gradually enhanced experience or can affect us dramatically, as in the cases already reported in near-death experiences and in what we will soon examine.

Looking at the body from the perspective of the double and the objective etheric realm leads us back to where we started this analysis with the example of homeopathy. An ultimate expression of the double appears in the human predisposition to certain kinds of diseases. Illness, especially more serious illness, can often be understood from the perspective of karma and consequently be seen and accepted as a necessary path of inner transformation. We have seen some of these instances in Chapter 2 in relation to previous-life recalls. Homeopathic medicine serves as support to the realm of the etheric in which we can seek true healing. On the contrary, illnesses can be seen as purely physical disturbances that simply need to be suppressed. Allopathic

medicine, notwithstanding its undeniable successes, does no more than suppress the symptoms without addressing the causes. The same alternatives that we face in meeting our doubles are present in illness: outer suppression or inner acceptance, suppression of symptoms or enhancement of inner vitality. Much is being done currently to show that the individual's attitude toward (and therefore acceptance of) illness is a major variable in the rate of recovery.⁴ Homeopathy is an alternative tool for healing because it calls upon forces that go beyond the merely physical and ultimately work at sustaining physical processes.

THE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

*Only those of us will remain who can smile
in the midst of death in full sunlight.
(Quedamos los que pueden sonreir
en medio de la muerte en plena luz.)*

Silvio Rodriguez

In her samples of near-death experiences, P. M. H. Atwater found that 37% of individuals interviewed had these episodes when their lives were not even remotely threatened.⁵ She coined the term NDLE, or near-death-like experiences, intuiting that they were of the same nature as NDEs, and that death is not a prerequisite for acquiring first-hand knowledge of the spirit. The following actually occurred in the midst of dramatic action:

Mark McDermott of New York City scaled a wall to rescue a man who was trying to commit suicide by hanging himself from a large tree. Police and rescue squads arrived after McDermott had safely lowered the man and had begun resuscitation. The whole event, risking his own life to save another, infused McDermott with such surges of energy that it was as if he had skyrocketed through a barrier of some kind and was flung into otherworldly realms of power and love and ecstatic bliss, the likes of which he had never known. Suddenly he was possessed of all knowledge, especially concern-

ing himself and the man he had just rescued. He also experienced merging into a brilliant light and had a past-life review. It took him several weeks to make sense of the Earth plane again, as he began to grapple with the typical aftereffects experienced by the near-death survivor.

Mark McDermott “re-entered” the workaday world so transfigured and transformed by his experience that anyone who knew him did a double take; overnight he no longer looked or acted the same. He displayed unusual degrees of wisdom and charisma as well as uncanny psychic abilities (although somewhat psychic before, he became more so afterward). Apparently, latent talents surfaced full-blown, and his intelligence increased above and beyond his previous IQ rating. He also found himself filled with a strong sense of being connected to all creation and all humankind. McDermott has since gone out of his way to initiate service-oriented projects.

This man did not simply alter his attitude afterward. He became a new man, completely and totally changed from the individual he once was.⁶

It is not necessary to have previous exposure to religion – although it may help – in order to be the recipient of an NDLE. In another example quoted by Atwater, a man from Montreal had a revelation in his own home. Upon walking across the living room and sitting in his chair, he found himself transported into a world of light. In it he recognized the figure of Jesus. He, too, came back to his daily life in such a transformed way that his friends hardly recognized him as the same person.

Atwater’s stories have their place in a book that is essentially devoted to encounters with death. The aspect of death is not directly visible in these NDLEs; yet, isn’t the total rebirth of an individual pointing to an experience similar to death? Could we possibly die to our old self, even in the middle of seemingly mundane events in our life?

In the book *I Am With You, Always*, G. Scott Sparrow, a Jungian analyst, has collected many anonymous stories of what he calls “Christ encounters.”⁷ He himself had such an experience on more than one occasion, which motivated him to inquire about the phenomenon and collect case stories. The witnesses he interviewed normally have many reasons for remaining silent. First of all, there is a certain natural reticence and humility about sharing this most deeply personal experience. On the other hand there is the fear of being perceived as a mentally disturbed egomaniac or intentional deceiver. No material benefit derives from these experiences—only the added responsibilities associated with personal growth.

What is the distinctive character of these encounters? Many of them occur to individuals who are active seekers on a spiritual path. The great majority of subjects have no high status in any spiritual group or organization, and most of them wonder why they were chosen. Finally these encounters do not presuppose an active religious life.

Christ encounters almost invariably occur in states of heightened consciousness. Thus Christ will appear in lucid dreams in which the dreamer remains aware and can to some degree influence the outcome of the experience (e.g., by accepting or refusing a painful experience). They can also occur in visions in which the subject is aware of the presence of a higher being, but still recognizes the physical environment around him. Finally, some of these experiences occur in heightened prayer or meditative states.

Christ appears in what seems a tangible sense experience: visual, tactile, auditory, olfactory, or kinesthetic. The sense perceptions received feel every bit as real as normal physical sense experiences—in fact, the subjects define them as “more real.” Finally, the experience remains engrained in the memory with the vividness of the first moment of its occurrence, a recurrent motif of our explorations. This encounter is likely to mark the life path of any of the recipients, although some may turn their back on it. The experiences often allow emotional healing and this, in turn, is the basis for cases of physical healing.

Confirmation of Sparrow’s work comes from northern Europe. Robert Powell mentions a book published in Stockholm in 1973, by Gunnar Hillerdal and Berndt Gustafsson, entitled *They Experienced Christ*.⁸ Most of the encounters portrayed are of a visual nature. But others experienced Christ as an unmistakable nearness, as a silent,

comforting presence. Others heard his words of consolation inwardly. Many experiences occurred at night or close to midnight, and most of them refer to the all-pervading Light and experience of all-encompassing love.

The encounter with Christ can be confined to the purely auditory level. In *Friend of My Heart*, Claire Blatchford describes how for years she had been receiving messages from Christ, which she wrote down.⁹ These are not so-called automatic writings. Instead, while hearing, she remains perfectly conscious of her environment and of the meaning of the words. The thoughts themselves are more than what she can conceive of with her day-to-day intellect, and they give her spiritual nourishment and inspiration.

The event of the encounter with Christ can occur at various stages of an individual's life. In what has come to be known as NDE, the meeting is brought on prematurely by an untimely death. The recipient often goes through a long phase (five, seven, or more years) of integration, a phase of harmonizing an all-too-obvious lower self with the intimations received from a higher self. And that is only a beginning!

The same can be true, to a lesser degree, of the more conscious encounters with Christ. Some of these are what recipients call warnings, a call for a change in direction of one's life. On the contrary, other experiences are a confirmation of the individual's maturity. Through such encounters, individuals may receive answers to spiritual questions, or be brought back in time (although strictly speaking they are in a realm outside time—the etheric realm) to important moments of history, such as the crucifixion at Golgotha. In some rare instances, new revelation pours in, similar in effect to the revelations shared by Steiner and other modern initiates. What many of the recipients of these encounters convey is a feeling of reciprocity in the relationship with Christ.

Helen Greaves describes an experience resembling an NDLE in a book that precedes the ones in which she describes her after-death communications with Frances Banks. At a time when she started to connect with the religious life, Helen was undergoing trials of the spirit. One morning she entered the church of a small village and soon became aware of a hazy, nebulous glow that seemed to emanate from

in front of the altar and spread to the roof of the chapel—a golden light radiating from its center and shimmering with many colored hues:

“Imperceptibly a Form grew in that Center, a Form and yet formless, a Shape and yet shapeless, a Person yet not of human personality, an Angel yet wingless, Beauty of no familiar symmetry, Beauty beyond imagining.... Into my mind came the words, ‘the Angel of Presence,’ and yet I saw no angel.” After falling on her knees she continues, “For one timeless second, Eternity had penetrated the Veil, and spirit, mind and body were at one with the Beauty of the Creator. All was timeless, past and present and future.”¹⁰

Let us move further in the understanding of the conscious near-death-like experience and turn to two instances accompanied by more documentation than others. This is the case of Rufus Moseley in 1910 and of Jacques Lusseyran’s in 1944, both of whom have left us autobiographies. These two examples also have in common the development of a new kind of perception, which could be called etheric perception.

Lusseyran (1924-1971), the author of *And There Was Light*, had been blinded at age seven in an accident in which his glasses went deep into the tissue of the right eye. Already at that time he went from an experience of complete inner darkness to a new experience of light. About this he wrote: “I found light and joy at the same moment, and I can say without hesitation that from that time on light and joy have never been separated in my experience. I have had them or lost them together.”⁽¹¹⁾

This threshold experience forestalled the development of new faculties of perception. Jacques became able to see the light inwardly in association with people and things. When outdoors he could point to trees or plants that he could not see physically, and knew what they looked like, their form or branching habits. Consequently, he could also orient himself in space and walk without hitting obstacles. He could also see people but in a much more alive and mobile way than physical sight affords. In this kind of vision a person is always changing from minute to minute. He was also able to “read voices,” to detect whether a person was telling

the truth or not. This is how he became very useful to the French underground resistance to Nazism. However – he recalls – all of these faculties came to an end with strong emotions. Fear turned him truly blind, but so did anger, impatience or jealousy. Likewise, this state of grace was sorely tested at the onset of puberty.

In his teenage years Jacques formed a youth underground resistance group to Nazi occupation of France. He was arrested in 1943 and sent to Buchenwald. Before the liberation he fell ill of what was probably a pleurisy, coupled to dysentery, and infection of both ears. While given for dead he started experiencing inwardly the stages of his illness, seeing his inner organs and seeing his body from above. After that the process reversed and he actually felt the influx of new life. In his words: "...life, and that was the unbelievable thing that had taken possession of me. I had never lived so fully before. Life had become a substance within me. It broke into my cage, pushed by a force stronger than I. It was certainly not made of flesh and blood, not even of ideas. It came to me like a shimmering wave, like the caress of light. I could see it beyond my eyes and my forehead and above my head. It touched me and filled me to overflowing."⁽¹²⁾ The author saw a link between this and the earlier experience, as if the second one were a repetition and enhancement of the first one. After the experience he had fully recovered and went on to be of help to his fellow prisoners until the liberation, eleven months later. The experience of Lusseyran presents striking aspects of physical healing, in some ways similar to what we will see about Bill Wilson, the founder of AA.

Moseley's life had the very unique characteristic of the striving for complete independence from creed and dogma, although he was declaredly Christian. He shared his faith first with the Baptists, then with Christian Scientists, loosely with the Pentecostals, and finally, especially after his direct experience, outside of any denomination.

His life was underscored by a complete dedication to his spiritual quest, although this did not proceed from an uninterrupted life in the faith following his family upbringing. The experience that was to mark his biography followed a seemingly minor accident. At one point in his life he had to reconsider his relationship with money, particularly money people gave him for healings that

he had helped to bring about in their lives. At a meeting where an otherwise perfectly legitimate collection was requested for a minister, he reacted in such a way as to effectively block the initiative. Reconsideration of the events in the same evening brought upon him a deep feeling of shame that he described as an experience of the “deepest death.” This inner experience gave way to a deep resolve to stop looking for the “best religion” and to “dedicate [his] life to moving among the needy, seeking to be loving and brotherly.”¹³

The very same night he awoke between 3:00 and 4:00 AM and found himself in what he described as “cosmic consciousness.” This is best described in his own words: “I was given the greatest clarification, understanding, happiness and bliss and put in an almost unbelievable light, revelation and glory.” During the experience Moseley could still hear the doorbell ring and had to consciously decide not to answer it in order to dwell in the revelations that he was receiving. In the days that followed, he understood that this was a revelation of the Christ to come, not just a revelation of the past. From all of the above, the experience of “feeling as if reborn” appears in a new light. Although Moseley did not undergo an experience of death, the “meeting with his double” that reached its apogee in the above-mentioned instance was for him equivalent to a death of the old self, and the meeting with Christ the rebirth of a new self. This new birth was not achieved immediately afterward, but still relatively soon. Before this rebirth, Moseley explains that he had to overcome a strong romantic illusion in which he saw the achievement of an otherworldly love, a “paradise where I would be loved after the manner of even the most perfect of human lovers.” And further: “I had glimpsed such wonders in the marriage relationship where both husband and wife with redeemed spirits, minds, souls and bodies were first of all married in Jesus.”¹⁴

Moseley developed a whole new understanding of nature and spirit in which we can detect the gifts of direct vision of the etheric. “Even the cattle and the chickens, to use a fine line of Browning, had learned the new law, so surpassing were they in form, movement, grace, and beauty” he wrote.¹⁵ More about this special perception appears below and in the condensed biography offered in Appendix 2.

Meeting with Christ in the Etheric World

Rufus Moseley experienced Christ in 1910, at a time when very few people could comprehend it. The same is true of Steiner, whose Christ experience in 1899 could easily be missed within the pages of his autobiography, where it is mentioned that he “stood before the Mystery of Golgotha in a deep and solemn celebration of knowledge” (see Steiner’s biography).

From the year 1910, Steiner spoke about the progressive change of consciousness that this encounter would mean. Many references to this event and its consequences appear throughout his legacy of books and lectures. It is what has been called the *Second Coming*, a term that may generate more confusion than clarity given the zealous or fanatical overtones it generates. It is the expectation of the Second Coming, rolled into one with the end of the world, which caused the frenetic expectation of the Apocalypse in the year AD 1000 in medieval Europe and subjugated many brilliant minds of the epoch. It is this same idea that turns all expectations toward outer catastrophes and Armageddon scenarios, and distracts us from turning our attention inward, where the real event occurs.

Steiner’s understanding of what is at stake with this new possibility for humankind is far more sobering than the doom and gloom scenarios that grip us into a paralyzing fear, only to bind us to the promise of a delivering divine superhero. In very prosaic terms he qualifies this event thus: “The event to which we refer is that human beings can acquire the new faculty of perception in the etheric realm, a certain number of human beings to begin with, followed gradually by others, because humanity will have 2,500 years in which to evolve these faculties increasingly.”¹⁶ And further defining the nature of this encounter: “A certain number of individuals will see the Christ and will themselves experience the event that took place at Damascus. This will depend, however, upon such human beings learning to observe the moment when Christ draws near to them. In only a few decades from now it will happen, particularly to those young in years—already preparation is being made for this—that some person here or there has certain experiences.”¹⁷ Finally, referring to what the faculties of perception in the etheric may be:

This faculty will consist in men being able to see in their environment something of the etheric world, which hitherto they have not normally been able to see. Man now sees only the human physical body, but then he will be able to see the etheric body at least as a shadowy picture and also to perceive the connection between deeper happenings in the etheric world. He will have pictures and premonitions of happenings in the spiritual world and find that in three or four days' time such happenings take place in the physical plane. We will see certain things in etheric pictures and know that tomorrow or in a few days' time this or that will happen.¹⁸

We have already seen some of these instances reported in chapters 2 and 3. We will look at more of these experiences in the lives of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and Agnes Sanford in Chapter 6.

Steiner offered us many inklings of what this experience may signify for humanity. Others have pursued this matter further. More than any other experience quoted so far, Jesaiah Ben-Aharon's description of the Christ event in the twentieth century stands as an example of the highest degree of conscious encounter.¹⁹ The Christ appears here not as Jesus or the historical figure of the gospels. He is a pure solar-earthly spirit. Within his sphere, Ben-Aharon tries to convey in words the experience of the Christ's presence in our times.

Through this new presence humanity can participate in co-creation with Christ. "For the first time in human evolution [since around 1933] the human race began to be a creative factor in cosmic and planetary evolution on which the gods themselves are counting in their future plans."²⁰ Everything we have described so far through all of the various spiritual experiences appears archetypally contained in the imagination he describes. The encounter with Christ opens for the individual, as for all humanity, what appears to be an apocalyptic rift between the forces that help evolution and those who hinder it.

Speaking of the event as it was experienced by souls before birth, Ben-Aharon says: "For them, the sublime Revelation showed itself to be the greatest wholeness on the one hand, yet on the other a tormenting split of self, mankind and the world." In the individual

awakens the apparently insoluble dilemma of the distance between the higher self in Christ and the lower self in the dimensions of space and time. This leads to what Ben-Aharon defines as the Great Demonstration, and the overcoming of the personal abyss. This split of self has already appeared in many ways in the examples that have been given throughout this analysis of spiritual experiences. It was defined clearly by Henri Nouwen in his diary entry on the abyss, and by the last examples of Helen Greaves, Jacques Lusseyran and Rufus Moseley. Another example will be given later from the life of Bill Wilson, who also had an experience that could either be called an NDE or an NDLE. This event showed him the most profound dichotomy between his higher self in the Light and his lower self subjugated by alcohol. Wilson worked for the rest of his life at joining the two extremes.

The experience of the meeting with Christ opens, for all the recipients, a degree of knowledge that rests within the shrine of individual consciousness and does not require outer proof of religious dogma. It ushers in completely new values and perspectives. Henri Nouwen, the theologian already introduced in the previous chapters, struggled to achieve completely new goals after his brush with death. In assessing his new task he tentatively expressed himself thus: "Until now I have been thinking and speaking from time into eternity... But after my having 'touched the other side,' it seems that a new witness is called for: a witness that speaks back into the world of ambiguities from the place of unconditional love." And further: "I must remain on the other side while being sent back. I have to live eternity while exploring the human search in time."²¹

Rufus Moseley pushed this perspective further and attained a wholly new perspective both of the divine and of the reality of the senses. He went a step further than Nouwen in articulating a new theology grounded in experience rather than theory, a theology that transcends the dominating dualistic thinking. Talking about the "fourth empire" or "human-divine realm" (the etheric) that is now accessible to human beings on Earth, he indicates:

It implies a resurrected man with a wholly new mode of thinking which our academic philosophy and theology do not provide....

To understand the fourth empire we need another dimension to our logic....

The old theology ... has achieved little more than compromise, for no true reconciliation is possible in the old mode of thought. In other words it is impossible to conceive of a union of nature and the spirit in which one or the other does not sacrifice something in its essential character....

Ordinary logic ... is hopelessly involved in the dialectic of “either...or” and can never fully grasp “both”....

In the world as we see it now nature is at war with itself—“red in tooth and claw”—and spirit is at war with nature in the historical conflict between natural and spiritual man, between the lusts of the flesh and the demands of the spirit. The fourth empire does not require the destruction and disappearance of the natural realm; it requires its transformation and sanctification, so that nothing which is beautiful and worthwhile in nature is lost.²²

The above words are echoed by Steiner’s own insights that he no doubt gained from his own experience in the year 1899, as we know from his biography. In relation to how the experience will be available to human beings, he adds: “They [the recipients] will not require documentary evidence in order to recognize Christ, but they will have direct knowledge, as is today possessed only by initiates. All the faculties that today can be acquired only by means of initiation will in the future be universal human faculties of humanity.”²³ Keep in mind that this applies to the *fully conscious* experience of the meeting with Christ. However, it is true to a far lesser degree for all of those premature experiences that literature knows as NDEs.

What has been described as the meeting with the Light or the Christ is a defining experience of the reality of our higher self and of “love that surpasses all understanding.” The ordinary ego, ensnared, defined, and imprisoned in the dimension of the double, both aspires to and dreads, as an ultimate annihilation, the step of recognition of our deeper essence in the spirit. The higher self—Steiner says provoca-

tively—is more foreign to us in our daily lives than any other human being on Earth.

To the ego, all other human beings stand as competitors that it tries to overcome or dim. This unspoken Darwinian struggle for the survival of the fittest, illusion though it may be, colors much of ordinary life, and the full recognition of our double is, as a rule, feared and avoided. Competition and fear are the grounds upon which the ego ordinarily operates, until it decides consciously to let the higher self educate it. The dramatic recognition of our higher self, which we have described from many experiences in this chapter, is accompanied by the realization of the divine love that supports us. People who have reached this stage, especially if consciously, can burn the “residues” of their lower ego in the light and love that emanates from the spirit. Consider the intensity and also the speed with which this happened in the life of Rufus Moseley (see more about in appendix 2). The attainment of this Christ consciousness is not a stationary end result either, but rather a further path of development that lies wholly outside the scope of this work.

To resume, we can say—although in a very schematic fashion—that the path of individuation spans the spectrum between fear and love. At one end the ego, wholly identified with the double, lives in a continuous state of fear. This fear is vanquished by degrees on the path of encounter with our double—in a first stage—and fully overcome in the full experience of our higher self in the spirit. However, all of us can let ourselves be guided and inspired to take the path of personal growth and love even before we reach this goal as a personal experience.

The ego that needs to be overcome and transformed is the essential instrument that ties us to life on Earth, that gives us certainty and assurance while we are more or less cut off from the spirit. Therefore it is a stage that cannot be bypassed in order to reach a higher consciousness. The matter of how to educate ourselves in an experiential way on the path to the realization of our higher self is the object of the next chapter.

What did the wealth of spiritual experiences we have reviewed indicate? Humanity has freed itself from old taboos and approached every matter concerning the gates of death and birth from the stand-

point of freedom that is necessary for its development. The only approach, other than an external morality code, that can limit the excesses of freedom comes from the evolution of a new consciousness.

What PBEs, NDEs, previous-life memories and other threshold experiences are showing us is the working of destiny and karma. The factor of *context* is the link with the idea of karma. Those who have had positive experiences often puzzle over why they are “chosen.” The case of Dannion Brinkley is a good example. Why, as he says himself, did this experience befall an individual who had painted such a poor picture in his present life? Could it be that grace from previous lives rewarded him for what he had not yet accomplished in the present? Isn’t this the same grace that gives him the strength to atone for his shortcomings?

For those who manage to come to terms with these experiences, given an understanding of the spiritual background, the path of integration is likely to be much easier and shorter. The case of suicide has shown us clearly how the fate of the living is tied to the destiny of departed souls. Through knowledge of karma and reincarnation, resolution can be brought to the most painful human situations. Knowledge of how destiny works adds weight to what we know from statistics. Suicide survivors are much more likely candidates for suicide attempts than other members of society. Apart from obvious considerations of trauma, could it be that their souls are also enmeshed with the souls of the suicides?

When karma is more and more understood and perceived as a reality, it is clear that modifications of the cycles of life and death do have tremendous implications at a personal level, regardless of legal and political approaches. These consequences are something that we have to learn to discern in our life, when we move from an abstract perspective on a problem for the whole of society to the concrete perception of the particular situation affecting an individual. How does an abortion affect a family? Can it be done lightly in the name of comfort? Consider that an abortion might be necessary. What will be the effects we will carry in our souls from having to make that decision? How can we first acquire consciousness of these psychological aftereffects? And how can we resolve them?

We will see later an example of “destiny work” that turns its attention to all these imponderables of traumatic decisions that affect the

history of a family: abortion, traumatic death, banishment, and oblivion. It is the systemic psychotherapy of Bert Hellinger, working with “family constellations.”

Present-day humanity is offered the possibility to complete the tableau of the expansion of the gates of death and birth in the twentieth century by including the teachings of karma and reincarnation. This understanding, based on a modern perspective, was reintroduced in stages during this century at important turning points. Steiner provided the fruits of his research on karma and reincarnation in 1903 with the books *Reincarnation and Karma* and *How Karma Works*. These were followed in 1910 by *Manifestations of Karma* and the performance of the first of four mystery dramas: *The Portal of Initiation*. The additional mystery dramas were introduced in the following three years.

The seeds planted in those years reached a culmination in 1923. In that year both Cayce and Steiner took a new step in the revelation of karma. Cayce started giving his first life readings in Dayton, Ohio, and Steiner gave cycles of lectures where, for the first time, he took historical figures and traced their incarnations back in time. Unfortunately his life was cut short before he could deepen his revelations. It was in 1962 that Ian Stevenson began studying reincarnation in young children, and his first book was published in 1974. If we refer primarily to scientific understanding, except for these landmarks and a few others, knowledge of reincarnation and karma has not progressed apace with other areas of knowledge. It is still waiting to be developed further.

Knowledge of karma and reincarnation becomes all the more urgent in order to acquire a better understanding of spiritual experiences that modern human beings encounter on their path more and more frequently. This knowledge will have to struggle against the concurrent deepening materialistic perspective that we witness in our world. Many who have undergone spiritual experiences need to be able to place them in the perspective of their lives, as we have seen from the groundbreaking perspective of P. M. H. Atwater.

Understanding of the spiritual world needs to be accompanied by a clear recognition of the eternal core of our being that survives from one incarnation to another. The central spiritual experience that is becoming progressively available to all human beings over the next millennia is a growing reality that permeates human life and the

planet's future. We can now look at another facet of this all-encompassing experience.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE DIVINE FEMININE

*She is more precious than jewels,
And nothing you desire can compare with her.
Long life is in her right hand;
In her left hand are riches and honor.
Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths
are peace.
She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her;
Those who hold her fast are called happy.*

Proverbs 3:15–18

We will now round out the picture of the spiritual revolution we are undergoing in the present time from another complementary perspective. The complex image of the new Christ event needs to be gathered from the partial images that come from many different directions. It is not surprising that we would need an additional perspective: In grappling with so awesome a subject, the often-quoted images of different people claiming to know an elephant because they have touched a part of the animal, with their eyes shut, achieves its full meaning. For some indeed the elephant may be a column, for others a snake, for another a big barrel. Reassembling the parts without a greater vantage point would never reconstitute the reality of the elephant. To do that for the matter at hand, we will turn once again to those who have attained a deeper intuitive knowledge of the spiritual world and its laws, and try to bring together various strands of the tapestry that constitute the reality of the Christ event in the twentieth century and in the new millennium.

The preparations for a new understanding of the Christ in our times have been preceded by important signposts. In the realm of theology, Eastern Europe has laid down the foundations of what has been called *Sophiology*, an understanding of the figure of the historical Mary and of the Divine Feminine in the order of creation. Its pioneer

was the Russian thinker and philosopher Vladimir Soloviev, in the last part of the nineteenth century. His life was marked by key personal spiritual encounters with what he called the “being of Sophia.” He laid down a new theology upon which Andrey Belyi, Pavel Florenski, Sergei Bulgakov, Daniel Andreev, and others further elaborated with their contributions to the understanding of Sophia in the Old Testament; Mary, mother of Jesus in the New Testament; and other aspects of the Divine Sophia in the present. This represented a major shift of interest in the theological field, in light of which the foundations for the Divine Feminine of the Jungians and the current interest in Goddess worship were laid in what Jung called the *collective unconscious*. The theological interest of the Sophiologists was accompanied at the global level with the so-called Marian apparitions, beginning in the year 1830.

From a seemingly independent direction, this interest in the eternal feminine is devoted in many ways to understanding Mother Earth. The roots have been laid down by a significant development of the science of ecology and later environmental sciences. What we see at work in this realm of the sciences is a partial reversal of the tendency towards fragmentation and specialization. Ecology, and, even more so, environmental sciences point to the need for an interdisciplinary approach to science. Over time this leads to the notion of a holistic science, one that considers the whole as a living being that cannot be understood merely by the sum of its parts. It is quite natural that the Earth itself is seen more and more as a living being, particularly in the Gaia hypothesis, which proposes that our planet functions as a single organism that self-maintains the conditions necessary for its survival. Steiner had already put forth this notion in his cosmology, in his scientific approach to Goethe’s contributions to natural sciences, and the practical applications that result from it. Biodynamic agriculture, for example, envisions the farm as a total, living organism.

Societal changes of momentous importance have followed these new ways of thinking, as well as interests that emanated at first from small circles of thinkers. We can look at two of these topics in the twentieth century: feminism and political ecology. Feminism had its first significant expression at the First Women’s Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. The famous *Declaration of Rights and Sentiments*—echoing the American Declaration of Independence—made clear that women were advancing a platform that was

both political and spiritual at the same time. That it had been a spiritual revolution as well as a political one is also clear if one refers to the significant contribution of Elizabeth Cady Stanton titled *The Solitude of Self*, written in 1892. The movement truly emerged into the larger political arena in the 1960s, even though by then the concerns of feminism had become almost exclusively political and somehow deprived of their full initial impact. Present-day feminism is striving to reintegrate these elements in modern forms through an interest directed both towards human rights and to the aspects of the Divine Feminine—or, in terms that we may be more familiar with, towards the Goddess.

The 1960s were also a time of emergence of political ecology. Clearly a new concern for the Earth—threatened by unprecedented natural and manmade disasters—became the focus of a first expression of global consciousness. Human beings were beginning to feel a part of not only a race and a nation, but a global world. Large international organizations—such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth—now straddle the field at the intersection of political and larger cultural-humanistic concerns.

At all times Earth has been known as the Mother. Traditions the world over have known levels of the same reality but with different names: for the ancient Indians she was Shiva, the spouse of Vishnu; for the Chaldeans Ea, the mother of Marduk; the Egyptians knew her as Isis, the wife of Osiris; the Greeks differentiated her with the names of Demeter, Artemis, and Athena; at present all indigenous traditions preserve her knowledge. In the Western traditions the realm of the divine has traditionally been referred to as the Father or other masculine terms. Presently, understanding of the Mother, in all her various aspects, has become the concern of more and more groups of people from a variety of perspectives. What we will be looking at now illustrates further aspects of the manifestation of the new Christ event in its relation to the Divine Feminine and all other more external manifestations that we have only partly covered.

We have previously looked at some of the phenomena that affect primarily individual consciousness. Here we will focus on phenomena whose manifestation affects the external world. We will look at how new manifestations in the etheric affect our physical world, first in the phenomena of Marian apparitions and later in so-called angelic encounters.

Marian Apparitions

Due in part to the work of the Inquisition—both the Roman and Spanish—Marian apparitions were not known between 1531 (the date of the famous Virgin of Guadalupe close to Mexico City) and the time at which the Virgin appeared in Paris, just nine days before the revolution of 1830. Many other apparitions followed, particularly in France during the following 70 years: La Salette in 1846, the famous Lourdes in 1858, Pontmain in 1871, and Tilly sur Seulles in 1896.

A significant change in the nature of Marian apparitions occurred around the year 1879, when Mary appeared in Knock, Ireland, to a group of about two hundred witnesses. In that small village, practically all the inhabitants could see the divine presence in full day consciousness. After that date, apparitions have affected the lives of growing numbers of witnesses. They may not have beheld the being Herself, but witnessed many of the unusual physical manifestations that accompanied her, of which more will be said below. The apparition of Tilly sur Seulles affected more than four hundred witnesses; Montara, Lebanon (1911) was experienced by more than two hundred; the famous Fatima (1917) apparition touched more than 70,000 people.

The latest great apparition, in Medjugorje, seems to mark an interruption in these phenomena in the words that the Holy Mother conveyed to those who saw Her. In that village in the old Yugoslavia, now Croatia, Mary appeared for the first time on June 24, 1981 and the apparitions continue to this day. The first visionaries were six children, but many others claimed private apparitions or visions, and thousands have seen many other sensory phenomena that have frequently appeared since 1981.

Marian apparitions seem to come—most often, but not always—at times and places of great turmoil. Montara, Lebanon, in 1908 and until 1911, was the center of state terrorism against religion. In Fatima, Portugal, the Virgin appeared after six years that had brought the death of 17,000 monks, nuns, and priests, with the Russian Revolution soon to follow. In Beauraing, Belgium, she appeared at a time of economic depression, shortly before the rise to power of Hitler. In Kibeho, Rwanda, ethnic massacres followed shortly after Mary's apparitions. It is not too surprising that Marian apparitions are accompanied by invitations to a change of spiritual direction and accompanied by apocalyptic messages. Our times are apocalyptic, and the mes-

sages that Mary conveys can be recognized in the nature of the events that modern humanity is undergoing—the initiation process into which all of humanity is immersed, with its severe tests and challenges.

There is something more that unites all of these events but may not be detected at first sight. We see in them the qualities of the seers, those to whom the Virgin first makes herself known. In the great majority of the cases, these are people of lower social extraction, who have mostly received little education and many of whom have been sorely tested by poverty, illness, or blows of fate. In many cases the seers are adolescents or young adults. Such is the case for the children of Medjugorje. Jacov Colo, of Medjugorje, was abandoned by his father at age eight; his alcoholic mother abandoned him four years later. Marija Pavlovic, also from Medjugorje, came from a very poor family and suffered malnutrition as a child. Her friend, Ivan Dragicevic, also a visionary, entered the seminary in order to become a Franciscan, but had to drop out because he could not learn Latin, philosophy, or theology.

The only exception among the young visionaries of Medjugorje was Mirjana Dragicevich Soldo, who had lived in Sarajevo and studied at the university. She had been raised in an atheistic milieu, learned English, and traveled widely. Her experiences—which she originally resisted—covered a very short time span, from June 24, 1981 to December 1982.

We are quite fortunate to have accurate observations and scientific studies of the seers' consciousness before, during, and after the apparitions.²⁴ Apparitions are either experienced internally—and in that case are more correctly called visions—or externally. When seen externally, the seer refers to an exact physical location. In some cases, witnesses of an apparition have been distributed within a twenty-mile-wide circle, yet all of them looked toward a common geographical point.²⁵ At Medjugorje, where Mary has appeared at regularly occurring times, before the apparition the seers prepare themselves by reciting Our Father, the Hail Mary, or the Glory Be. Since 1983, the apparitions have started before the end of the Our Father. All of the seers kneel down at the same moment and look at the same spot. Some contemplate; others converse, and although their lips move, no voices are heard. After the experience, they convey that they thought they were having an ordinary conversation.

In a second phase, the Virgin pronounces the words "Our Father" and the visionaries continue, their voices becoming audible all at the same time. At the end of the divine visit, the seers lift their heads, all at the same time. Those who pronounce the word "*Ode*" (She's gone) do so simultaneously.

During the visions, consciousness is intensified, but perception of the outer world disappears. The object of their perceptions is nevertheless a three-dimensional being whom they can point to with their fingers. Although for most this is a joyful experience, they also share in the sadness of the messages that Mary conveys. That these are not hysterical states can be identified in that what a seer (Marija) says in daily consciousness matches what is retrieved under hypnosis; also by the fact that during ecstasy, electroencephalograms of the seers show rhythms of the alpha type, typical of the relaxation-meditation state. Furthermore, psychoanalysis found no trace of hallucination or pathological ecstasy, no sign of neurosis or catalepsy; and finally, no sign of organic anomaly has been found.

Physiological symptoms are also very indicative. The seers do not react to physical stimuli such as touching or pinching. Reflex blinking in the presence of strong light is absent in the case of the visionaries; but it is present before and after the state of ecstasy. Eye movement ceases almost simultaneously with the beginning of the apparition, and regular blinking decreases by 50 to 100%. It seems that visual pathways remain normal but are not used. The same is true of auditory channels. No reaction is elicited to 90 decibels during the altered state; before and after it, the seers show normal reactions to 70 decibels. The same may be said of their voices; they have what is called "articulation without phonation" (production of sound). The functional aspect of it is the preservation of privacy and the conducting of simultaneous conversations among the seers.

Some of the phenomena described above have been recognized in other apparitions.²⁶ In fact it has been shown that in the state of trance, the seers will not react to being burned or cut, and that after returning to day consciousness, their bodies do not show signs of damage.²⁷

After the visions, seers have a heightened consciousness and a clear perception of their shortcomings. They are also able to work together and understand each other even in the midst of great stress. This

does not mean that for some it may seem that life on Earth is difficult after experiencing aspects of life in the spirit.²⁸

Marian apparitions have this added characteristic of affecting not only the seers but also in some ways the subtle aspects of the physical environment. Let us look at how physical laws seem to be suspended or altered for a time. At Knock, the apparition was witnessed during a downpour, yet neither the seers nor the area around the heavenly presence showed signs of wetness. This has happened at other similar events. All around Knock, other witnesses saw “glowing balls” or “circles” of light around the church or in the countryside. At Fatima, hundreds of people saw rains of shining white globules and heard claps of thunder in a cloudless sky. But by far the most common phenomenon up to the time of Medjugorje has been the “sun dancing.” The sun seems to detach itself from its geographical position in the heavens, fall, split into two, spin, or throw multitudes of colored rays. In Medjugorje, at night, lights have appeared at the foot of the hill or as luminous crosses on top of the hill.

Some apparitions have been accompanied by the appearance of a spring of water. This was the case in La Salette, Lourdes, Knock, Beauraing, Banneux, and Kerizinen. Many of the apparitions are also associated with physically unexplainable healings. We should also mention the thousands of photographs of the Virgin Mary taken in Zeitoun, Egypt, and in Bayside, Queens.

We have uncovered a series of phenomena that characterize an apparition that has rarely surfaced in our exploration of NDEs and only seldom in the case of ADCs. The latter experiences are confined primarily to the inner world of the recipient. Phenomena like luminaries, the dancing of the sun, and luminous crosses are perceivable in the physical world. Thus, whereas all strictly personal experiences are mostly confined to the inner world, Marian apparitions affect the physical world and the way we perceive it. Other phenomena that share similarities with the Marian apparitions are the so-called angelic encounters. They too involve phenomena that manifest externally and move beyond traditional laws of physics.

Angelic Encounters

The term “angelic encounter” covers a wide spectrum of phenomena. Here, more than in any other experience, it is clear that our reference

to physical parameters, in an attempt to classify spiritual events, is unsatisfying. In angelic encounters, a being may or may not be recognizable. In some cases only the effects of this presence may be the visible result. The apparition may assume a human form or a clearly angelic one. In fact part of what we will say here does not differ clearly from phenomena previously examined, particularly the NDEs.

To explore this sort of phenomenon in a preliminary fashion, we have turned primarily to the research of H. C. Moolenburgh, and additionally to the work of Joan Wester Anderson. While books about angels abound and are often plausible, there are not many that have looked at these phenomena with a scientific mind. Moolenburgh has come to the topic from a healthy skepticism, in part inherited from his scientific approach as a physician. Let us look at the type of encounters he describes through the eyes of the recipients of these experiences, and first of all at the simplest instances of angelic encounters:

The third story is by a woman who was weeding her garden two weeks before she wrote to me. The date was 29 August 1988. It was half past four in the afternoon and the sun was shining brightly. Suddenly she had the feeling that there was someone standing behind her. She looked around and saw someone standing about one metre away. She was immediately completely overwhelmed by this apparition's penetrating gaze. He was dressed in a shining white garment and he was very tall. She does not know how long this lasted, but suddenly he was gone. However, for a long time she could see his wonderful eyes wherever she looked.²⁹

A large proportion of angelic encounters come in human shape, but most of the time cannot be explained by physical laws. Typical examples include those where help is received by people who are in great need, in desperate and/or life threatening situations. The following is an example:

In 1984, an elderly couple was traveling by train. They got off in Utrecht and took the escalator leading to the platform. First, the man stepped onto the escalator, and the woman followed. Then she had one of those typical

unfortunate accidents that can happen anywhere. The heel of her shoe was trapped in something, and she fell back. At the same moment, she felt two powerful hands holding her arms, and heard a voice which said: "Keep going, keep going." Her husband, who happened to look round, saw a big man standing just behind her, supporting her. When they got to the top of the escalator, she turned round to thank the man who had helped her. There was no one to be seen. Her husband could not see him either.³⁰

Human figures who appear in this fashion often intervene in a basic set of ways. They appear seemingly out of nowhere and most often disappear in the same way. They instill trust and radiate what is recognized as love. Their verbal expression is minimal, if not absent, and to the point. Without revealing their identity, the figures accomplish a helpful act and disappear before the recipient has the chance to see and/or thank the being.

After turning to these examples and all the remaining stories collected by Moolenburgh, let us look now at the phenomena accompanying angelic encounters. The heavenly visitors that come in a time of danger seem completely shielded from the elements. In case of snow, none of it clings to their clothes; in case of rain, they remain dry. The same is true of those who survive quasi-tragic circumstances. A girl who was lifted out of a blazing house by unseen forces did not show any burns or even smoke inhalation.³¹ A woman who had almost drowned in polluted water before being rescued by an angelic visitor did not carry any of the expected physical consequences.

As in many other instances, the being, especially in angel form, is accompanied by the presence of light. Purely angelic beings defy the laws of gravity. They may appear to be as large as a house and yet visible through walls and roofs. They may be floating and their hair or clothes will not fall. They may speak from outside, or else the voice may resound inwardly. Finally, the presence of the being may be accompanied by emotional or even physical healing.

There is an element of readiness in those who receive spiritual encounters. Before the events they often are in a state of despair and/or imminent danger. Despair may be caused by the death of a loved one,

by the inability to overcome personal psychological hindrances, or the belief that their lives are coming to an end. The psychological stress may drive the individual close to suicide. Accompanying this may be a crisis of faith or the desire to know about the spiritual world, and most often the ability to pray in the midst of distress.

During the experience the recipients see as normal certain facts and events that do not normally occur in the physical world. It is only afterward that they may notice the discrepancies, because the experience is etched in their memory with a clarity that does not subside with time. Dozens of years later the experience survives just as clearly as at the moment of its occurrence. Immediately during the experience there is an intense feeling of bliss and a loss of sense of time. These feelings can continue in the following days and weeks. In the short term, the person may have difficulty returning to familiar earthly reality. A certain melancholy may persist. One woman mentioned the inability to tolerate small talk after her angelic visit. In a few cases this can lead to a feeling of confusion and anxiety.

The effects in the long term are very reminiscent of all that has been said before, particularly about NDEs. Some feel inwardly invulnerable, and almost everyone comes back to daily life with renewed faith and a clearer feeling of meaning in their lives. They feel more at one with their environment, and this translates into an ability to perform acts of love and help others. Fear of death recedes, and negative experiences are more easily assimilated. In some instances there is a refinement of intuitive perception: the ability to perceive truthfulness in people and foreknowledge of events to occur in the short term. The new faith lives independently of old beliefs. Those who have belonged to a church generally keep on attending—but those who have not do not feel the need to join one.

Some of these experiences, at least those involving the seeming presence of a human being, correspond to what Steiner has defined as a form of encounter with the etheric Christ. Speaking about the recipient of the experience who may believe he may have seen a physical presence, he has this to say:

But he will come to realize that what he saw was a supersensible being, because he immediately vanishes. Many a person will have this experience when sitting

silently in his room, heavy-hearted and depressed, not knowing which way to turn. The door will open and the etheric Christ will appear and speak words of consolation to him. The Christ will become a living comforter to people. However strange it may seem, it is nevertheless true that many a time when people—even in larger groups—are sitting together, not knowing what to do, and waiting, they will see the etheric Christ. He will himself be there, will confer with them, will make his voice heard in such gatherings. These times are definitely approaching. This is the positive, the constructive element which will take effect in the evolution of mankind.³²

Implications for Humanity

It should not be too surprising that an event as important as the Second Coming should carry in its wake momentous accompanying phenomena in all realms of life. In the realm of consciousness, spiritual knowledge is now made progressively available to more and more individuals because they can rise to where the Christ is present for all of humanity. At the societal level, a new emerging spirituality now confronts a deepening materialism. In the realm of ethics, the human being is making itself the master of all life, intervening in realms that were previously thought of as the prerogative of God: suppression or artificial induction of life, determination of the moment of death, and extension of life through preservation of bodily functions. This is contrasted with a growing awareness of the mysteries of life, and more significantly with the knowledge of the importance of the moments of birth and death. With each step taken in a life-denying direction, there are corresponding steps taken toward greater awareness and responsibility. Side by side with the possibility of shortening one's lifespan with the help of assisted suicide, there is the growing concern of offering a truly human and fully spiritual transition into death, guided by a new awareness rather than by mere tradition. The section of Chapter 6 dealing with hospice will illustrate this trend and investigate its spiritual background. Life can be disposed of with an indiscriminate use of abortion, or such an action may be simply prohibited by law or religious tradition. On the other hand, a human being can reach full indi-

vidual understanding of the subtler aspects of this decision and make informed choices based upon personal freedom. We will analyze this aspect particularly in the section of Chapter 6 on the systemic psychotherapy of Bert Hellinger.

Together with the new expansion of consciousness, we witness the loosening of the threshold between the physical and spiritual worlds—not just within the realm of consciousness, but also in our physical world. Marian or angelic visits and spiritual healing are manifestations of the spiritual world into the physical.

The nineteenth century ushered in preparation for the new Christ event. It appeared first in an interest in divine aspects of the feminine and in its earthly counterparts. Sophiology set the tone for a new interpretation of the divine in the realm of theology. Feminism introduced a new way of looking at the political realm, an infusion of new values into the fabric of society. It is significant that they both developed simultaneously, one in the East, and the other in the West.

At present we are witnessing the attempt to interpenetrate social values with their philosophical-cosmological counterparts. The interest in the Divine Feminine, the Goddess, or Mother Earth is a step towards the resurgence or emergence of a spiritual feminism, the reformulation at all levels of society of whole new sets of values. Let us now turn once more to those who have inwardly perceived the nature of the Christ event of this century.

To what Jesaiah Ben Aharon describes from inner experience, Robert Powell offers a complementary outlook, focusing upon modern social trends.³³ His research connects the unfolding of the new Christ event with a progressive permeation of the Earth with the forces of Christ, accompanied by the growing ability for human beings to be partakers of the mystery of co-creation with the spirit. The continuation of a deepening materialism manifests with the unleashing of new dangers, while human beings also attain deeper levels of individual consciousness than ever before in history—and therefore new moral capacities. Christ's presence in the etheric implies a rather progressive unfolding, developing over the whole body of the Earth. It will take as long as 2,500 years to unfold its course. Spiritual experiences we have grown accustomed to will become more frequent. Others that are only now appearing will spread further, and new ones will emerge.

Christ's return, in the first phase, is a process of gradual descent into the Earth. As this descent penetrates more deeply, new faculties are released and new resistance arises against His work. Thus it is significant that the initial point of Christ's gradual reappearance corresponds to the rise to power of Hitler in 1933. Here, the seeking of an absolute material power is contrasted with an attitude of seeking the spirit. The year 1945 gave us the atomic bomb; the day it first exploded at Alamogordo, New Mexico, was called "the day the sun shone twice." Winston Churchill called it "the Second Coming with a vengeance." Here humanity, instead of seeking the dimension of the etheric, gave expression to the denial of life—anti-life, as it were—and we know that this is the deeper essence of nuclear energy.

The year 1957, twelve years later, corresponds to the launching of Sputnik and the beginning of the space age. It is clear that it is not the scientific development itself that is at fault—rather the idea of seeking cosmic knowledge in a materialistic fashion alone. Other progressive events marked the end of the twentieth century: the drug culture, the sexual revolution, terrorism, the spread of AIDS, and lately virtual reality and genetic engineering, all counterimages of higher evolutionary levels attainable in the present.

Set against these events, we are beginning to witness a formidable expansion of consciousness, a search for true brotherhood beyond national or racial barriers. For the first time, human beings are beginning to feel a concern for what happens to all other human beings and for the Earth itself. More and more individuals struggle to integrate the fruits of spiritual experiences into their lives and to integrate society with a new consciousness. The personal knowledge of Christ beyond dogma and affiliation is another expression of this new consciousness. It is in the United States that the above processes (and their opposite counterparts) are played out more fully. It is in this country that the weight of the confrontation between a new consciousness and a new kind of supermaterialism is at its highest.

The Earth is undergoing what every human being is experiencing internally: a tremendous split. As we have seen, humanity has truly acquired the faculty to work either with the spirit or against it. It is humanity that makes "cosmic history," in manmade events such as World War II or the releasing of the atomic bomb. It is humanity also that co-creates with Christ in His coming in the etheric—witness the

number of people acquiring a new consciousness and experience of Christ and/or the spiritual world, only now possible.

The destructive aspects of present-day evolution are the most obvious and visible; the co-creative ability of humanity at present is seldom considered. This stems from the ability to perceive spiritual truths from a purely individual perspective, from the faculty of communicating with the dead, or with spiritual beings in ways that affect our life on Earth.

An additional perspective on possibilities offered the human being by the new spiritual event of the twentieth century is provided by the spiritual researcher Valentin Tomberg.³⁴ We will not attempt to recreate Tomberg's thinking, which would take us too far into a specialized field. We will simply enumerate the new faculties that he indicates will develop in humanity as a result of Christ's presence in the etheric realm.

The first, most immediate consequence for those who open themselves to the spiritual influences of the time is what Tomberg defines as a "shame that will take hold of human beings in waves of elemental power." This first encounter with the spiritual world will lead many to a complete reassessment of their values and to the feeling that everything will have to be started anew. To this first reaction, often in the wake of intense despair, Christ will infuse more and more human beings with new courage. This will be the prelude to a new way of being and acting in the world. These experiences will enable recipients to speak from a new source of authority that does not derive from dogma or tradition. A new power of conviction will ring from their words and by the manner in which they will be communicated. These human beings will willingly accept new tasks entrusted to them by the spirit—accepted no longer out of duty, but out of love.

New help will flow from Christ to human beings in the form of soul and physical healings. It is these healings that will infuse more and more individuals with those life forces of which modern lifestyles most deplete them.

Finally, the most important ability is what Tomberg calls "karmic clairvoyance," a new form of clairvoyance that has no previous equivalent. Through the division and reunion of lower and higher selves at a higher level that the meeting with Christ harmonizes in a new way, it will be possible to see simultaneously into the karmic past

through our lower self and into the future through our higher self. This will reveal knowledge of events that lie far in the past at the root of present events, and will allow one to look at precise moments of the future with the knowledge of what will need to occur at a given time in the way of compensation. Some examples of this appeared in the accounts of Barbro Karlen, Marilyn Sunderman, and Arthur Guirdham.

Obviously, the new faculties will manifest in different degrees of precision: in some this will be a precise knowledge, in others no more than a foreboding. Knowledge of reincarnation and karma increasingly results from the realm of experience and/or spiritual research of mystics, healers, or prophets, many of them Christian. Besides Steiner and Cayce, we may quote Ann Ree Colton, Grace Cooke, Spyros Sathi, Joan Grant, and a growing host of modern authors. It does not take an extended analysis to realize that their knowledge of karma and reincarnation is no mere reinterpretation of old traditions but something that erupts into modern man's experience with something of a primal necessity. Moreover, it results from personal experience, not belief or dogma.

The future about which Tomberg spoke in 1938–1939 is the present that we have been describing so far. What the Estonian seer foretold has been corroborated by our analysis. We have given many instances of the lasting effects of NDEs and other more conscious encounters with Christ. A reassessment of personal values from within, independent of the traditions or beliefs that the individual held previously, is the hallmark of those experiences. Many of the same individuals return to their lives with a new courage and sense of mission, infused with a passion that stems from the core of their being, not from adopted creeds or outer obligation.

The life of Bill Wilson of Alcoholics Anonymous is very emblematic of this spiritual blueprint. He was an individual who, having reached the bottom of despair, was able to acquire consciousness of the spirit in a new manner, and later work relentlessly for the well-being of his fellow humans. He was healed both emotionally and physically through the experience. The increasing occurrence of phenomena of physical and emotional healing stemming from spiritual sources, like that of Bill Wilson, becomes much more understandable in this light and does their source.

Finally, Tomberg's insights lead us back to where we started our explorations. Knowledge of one's previous incarnations is often accompanied by an unspoken task. Arthur Guirdham, Barbro Karlen, Marilyn Sunderman, and others render this explicit with the realization that their knowledge puts upon them the obligation to initiate a process that dissolves events and causes that lie in the far past.

Thus, of the two primary events that we have distilled in our study—meetings with the Guardian, bringing us to knowledge of our double, and meeting with Christ—it is apparent that the second is the more important. This primarily defines the spiritual atmosphere of the new millennium. Ever since the second third of the twentieth century, humanity's collective meeting with its double is merely the result of "spiritual acceleration" conditioned by the possibility of reaching a new Christ consciousness.

If Christ is operating on our consciousness and our world in a new manner, then humanity is bound to be affected by the results of this reality, expressed through new forms of spiritual-social transformation at different levels of society. We will look at some of these new expressions in the realm of "experiential spirituality," which offers a complementary perspective to the theoretical approach pursued so far.

Chapter 6

THE EXPERIENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

Mindfulness must be engaged. Once there is seeing, there must be acting. Otherwise what is the use of seeing?

Thich Nhat Hanh

In our preliminary exploration into the spiritual experiences open to humanity at the beginning of the third millennium, we have extensively quoted knowledge of the soul that is accessible from modern sources. Psychology—particularly a psychology that acknowledges spiritual reality—offers us a gateway into the reality of the facts and concrete entities of the soul. Persona, double, shadow, neurosis, and psychosis are more than symbols or convenient names. They point to the reality of the life of the soul and its relationship to spirit.

A century after its birth, many new developments in psychology have explored further links between psyche and spirit. Jung was a pioneer in the field, but other approaches followed—suffice it to think of the psychosynthesis of Assagioli, the logotherapy of Victor Frankl, or the whole realm of transpersonal psychology. The practical approaches that we will describe now share some common ground with these predecessors. However, they essentially constitute a new step. Because they have in common a way of looking at the individual as a member of a larger community, these modalities most often involve group work. Additionally, the field we will be surveying is one in which spirituality is approached in a nondogmatic fashion, so much so that they may not appear as spiritual approaches at all, except upon deeper inquiry. This is why we will refer to them primarily as “experiential spirituality,” a term that has acquired a certain resonance in common parlance.

We will look now at five approaches to self-growth and healing, among the most well known and efficient or the most innovative. By choosing these we do not aim to be exhaustive in the matter. Our choice is based upon their present widespread use and success in the

world, or the significant new horizons that they open in the field. The examples we will draw from are very different from each other, in fact as different as possible, but nevertheless present some common elements that acknowledge the realities we have so far explored in this book.

In presenting these approaches we have included biographies: Bill Wilson, Cicely Saunders, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, and Agnes Sanford. The reader may opt to look at the substance of the experiential approach itself and skip the biography. However, the biographies are included in order to illustrate the relationship with our previous exploration of spiritual experiences—experiences that these key individuals have known in their biographies. Only the context of the biography can fully validate and give meaning to their experiences, and consequently offer us an indication of the weight of their contributions. An example will suffice: Bill Wilson's famous spiritual experience had a considerable influence on AA's founding, and the way in which he integrated it sheds light on many of the problems of substance dependence in modern time.

BILL W. AND THE STORY OF AA

The deliberate adoption of a healthy-minded attitude has proved possible to many who never supposed they had it in them; regeneration of character has gone on an extensive scale; and cheerfulness has been restored to countless homes.

William James

Looking at Bill Wilson's biography will help us build an understanding of the deepest fundamental nature and role of Alcoholics Anonymous. Bill's life was so intertwined with the organization that he strove for years to create a clear separation between the two. The founding of AA is the direct consequence of Bill Wilson's biography, and even more so of some particularly deeper spiritual experiences.

Bill W., as he would later be known, was born in East Dorset, Vermont, on November 26, 1895. It was a very difficult birth for both mother and son. Bill nearly died from asphyxiation. The place where

he first saw the light of day was the room behind the bar run by his paternal grandmother. Alcohol was not very far away, in more than one respect. Bill's grandfather had had problems with it, but managed to put an end to the habit after joining a revival and making religion a part of his life. Bill's father was also a heavy drinker who would get himself into trouble. Partly for the above reasons, Bill did not have a drink until he was twenty-two.

Bill was born into a family that was hardly united, certainly not according to the standards of the times. His mother would absent herself for long periods because of the treatments necessary for her nervous breakdowns. Otherwise, she tended to be a disciplinarian and physically abused her son. His parents were divorced around the time of Bill's tenth birthday. Although Bill never spoke about it, he later characterized this time as "an agonizing experience." He did not see his father for the next nine years. After the divorce, his mother left in order to study to become an osteopathic doctor. Bill remained with his grandfather, Fayette. It was a good match for a child who needed affection and for a man who had lost his only son, though it could not cover up the feeling of abandonment that Bill harbored.

The grandfather understood that it was an uncommon child who was under his care. There were many skills that Bill could rely upon: he had great gifts of observation and an ability to gather, digest, and understand complex information and see the laws behind the phenomena. These skills, mostly directed towards practical applications, later helped him in his years on Wall Street. He also had a gift for leadership, allied with an amiable personality.

Bill was intellectually precocious and had both a good imagination and an inquisitive mind. Any challenge to his ability would be reason enough for Bill to prove himself. This is how his grandfather directed his interest to the building of a boomerang, which took six months for the child to finish. Even at around age ten, he had acquired a single-minded streak that would allow him to be completely absorbed by an idea or task, and not find peace until he had accomplished it successfully. In his school years he distinguished himself in science, music, and baseball. How he achieved this last distinction is particularly indicative—it was the reaction to an incident that spurred him. When a fly ball hit him in the head, Bill's classmates jeered at him because of his awkwardness. Bill's irate answer was: "I'll show

you! I'll be captain of your baseball team." That is exactly what he achieved, by using all his spare time to learn baseball and indeed become captain.

His being "Number One" also pertained to his obsession with the violin. He wanted to become first violinist in the orchestra—and succeeded. For all his amiability and popularity, Bill still regarded his playmates or superiors as competitors. The way he approached his algebra studies showed this trait best. He initially had difficulties with it. However, the spur to his achievement came from the discovery of his professor's shortcomings. Learning algebra became an incentive to surpass himself and humiliate his professor. When he reached the goal, Bill remembers: "I had won a battle ... I was the only one on the school grounds—the Number One man again—the only one who deeply understood the underlying principles of calculus."¹

It was clear that this precocious ambition could come only at a price. And so it did. Bill was showing what could be called the tendency towards a bipolar personality. Every new situation introduced great anxiety. Moving to a new setting or facing defeat could create a cycle of depression, the same kind of depression he had first suffered upon his mother's departure after the divorce. Being Number One was a way to momentarily keep these feelings at bay.

One experience clearly showed him the limits of this defense mechanism. His first girlfriend, Bertha, died unexpectedly after a successful operation, soon after their initial meeting. Bill was eighteen, and the love had been mutual. Her death was a replay of an abandonment scenario, only this time beyond any possible control. Recalling the event, Bill commented, "I could not be nobody at all. I could not win because the adversary was death. So my life, I thought, had ended then and there."² A depression followed for the next three years, and Bill lost interest in studies, except for his violin, and failed to graduate. He later made up for lost time on his studies and qualified for college.

It was after the tragic Bertha experience that Bill came to know Lois. Four years his elder and of higher social standing, Lois was instrumental in helping him out of depression and bringing in the love and care that the youngster had so sorely missed. Bill later commented, "At the unconscious level, I have no doubt she was already becoming my mother."

In many ways, Lois was the complete opposite of Bill. When they met she was close to completing her studies at the New York School of Fine and Applied Art. Coming from a deeply united family, she had a happy childhood and remembered hating the idea of growing up. Her upbringing left her a deep-rooted belief in the power of good, together with faith and optimism. These were the qualities that were most sorely tested in her marriage. In hindsight her words carry great weight: "I never dreamt about anybody but Bill Wilson." AA could not have developed without her constant and faithful support and presence at her husband's side.

In 1913, Bill enrolled at Norwich University, a military college. The young man felt, at first, completely lost and insecure. On the occasion of a fall and a hurt elbow, he went to visit his mother for treatment. Once in Boston, he had no desire to return to college and developed hypochondria. The imaginary physical symptoms of shortness of breath and palpitations were accompanied by real angst, panic, and fear of death. After this he went back to Dorset to visit with his grandfather, Fayette.

It was a military college that he fled, but the army was his next destination. The year was 1917 and the reason obvious. The call to serve his country was accompanied by an inner challenge. Was he fit for his dreams of being a leader? What were these bouts of patriotism, followed by a deep fear of death? When called to the test, the discovery that he had courage after all offered great relief.

Winchester Cathedral: First Spiritual Experience

Bill had just passed his twenty-first year. The years immediately before and after show, in an indicative way, the challenges he would face in his life. The young recruit was first stationed at Fort Rodham in New Bedford. It was here that Bill approached alcohol with foreboding. In New Bedford he felt totally inadequate to enter its high society. He had never had a drink before, and the first gin cocktail offered him the magical feeling of belonging. It was the first of many, and Bill discovered, right from the beginning, that he was unable to control his alcohol consumption. With it he could be the life of the party, without it a nobody. After an initial phase, his drinking became so serious that he would pass out, on average, at every third party.

During his years of service, Bill had his first deep spiritual experience while visiting Winchester Cathedral. For a young man completely at home with materialistic values and pursuits, Winchester became a window into the spiritual world. He felt a sense of ecstasy, as if supported by a tremendous presence. He recalled, "For a brief moment, I had needed and wanted God. There had been a humble willingness to have Him with me—and He came." Coming out of his experience, he saw the epitaph above the tomb of a young man, which read:

Here lies a Hampshire grenadier,
Who caught his death
Drinking cold small beer.
A good soldier is ne'er forgot,
Whether he dieth by musket
Or by pot.³

Another experience could also have brought on this inner feeling of ecstasy. During a training practice, Bill and his fellow soldiers were supposed to fire at positions situated over a low hill. Bill was posted three hundred yards away from the target. When the fourth round was fired, the shell mistakenly hit the ground nearby, and the team found themselves covered with tons of soil. They were literally saved by a miracle and came out unharmed. The first experience of warning and the second miraculous rescue could have inspired a different direction for Bill's life, had he fully taken stock of them.

The army showed the young officer that he could assume responsibility and acquit himself honorably. From this high point, a new low followed. Not having finished college, he re-entered the workforce without any special qualifications, again a nobody. He went quickly through a succession of jobs. He was first an accountant for the New York Central Railroad, but was fired; he later worked at New York Central Piers, but quit since he did not want to join the union.

Even when close to success, Bill was constantly undermining himself. Having answered an ad in the *New York Times* for a job offer with Thomas Edison, he followed up and passed the difficult test of admission. However, he did not accept Edison's personal invitation,

even though he admired him. The same happened upon completing his law studies. He was too drunk to pass the final examination.

The pattern of genius and success alternated with that of alcohol and failure. However, Bill soon found the optimal field of action for a person endowed with initiative and a pioneering spirit. It was another opportunity to prove himself Number One: the stock market. Once again he quickly got familiar with a whole new world and put this knowledge to work in an original fashion. For a man who wanted prestige and power, J.P. Morgan and the First National Bank became his next role models. He entered the market in 1922 with amazing assurance—purchasing cheap, unpopular securities and becoming in effect one of the first securities analysts. In 1925 he investigated General Electric just in time, before the radio and cinema boom.

Alcohol was always at his side, although he could break the spell, particularly when he immersed himself in a whole new environment. By 1927, however, he was lying in order to get a drink. The situation only worsened and the next year he signed all right, title, and interest on his accounts to Lois, to protect himself against his own judgment.

The year 1929 brought compounded misery to the Wilson couple. Added to the stock market crash was Bill's break with his employer, Frank Shaw. His next employment in Canada, with his friend Dick Johnson, lasted only until the autumn. In the few years that followed, Bill started showing signs of mental impairment. "The demon was now moving into full possession," he later wrote. He started to hide bottles all over the house, and on occasion became physically abusive towards Lois. He stole from Lois in order to buy alcohol. At night he suffered continual mental anguish.

There was little change in the years that followed. Bill was now almost forty, and the constellation of events of his early twenties repeated itself with a crescendo. Both the abyss and the ecstasy were happening all over again. Because of his genius, Bill could still find employers. It was his brilliance that Joe Hirshorn admired, and that is why he employed him despite the alcohol problem that Bill could no longer hide. Later, a Vermont farming retreat kept Bill dry during a vacation. Once back in town and back to the bottle, he checked in at New York's Towns Hospital. Towns was already an unconventional hospital, and Dr. Silkworth, a man who worked with alcoholics, dem-

onstrated great listening skills and empathy. This step was by now Bill's last-ditch effort. He was in a state of constant emotional stress and forty pounds underweight. Alcohol was giving him such hallucinations and continual physical and emotional stress that he contemplated suicide. The doctor was concerned for Bill's sanity.

In the midst of all of this, Bill still found the incredible inner strength to stop drinking for a year (from Armistice Day 1933 to the next), relapsing on occasion due to the war memories that Armistice Day provoked. Although he relapsed, a new constellation of events had already set in. The first of these was the encounter with his childhood friend, Ebby T., a notorious alcoholic. It was religion that had allowed Ebby to dry out. He had also written a "moral inventory" and offered amends to all the people he had wronged in his life. Although not impressed by the religious factor, Bill could not dismiss the impression that Ebby left on him. This motivated him to get in touch with the Oxford Group that had helped Ebby make such a turnaround.

The Second Spiritual Experience

However, nothing could help Bill at the stage he had reached. He was besieged with remorse for the pain he had imposed on Lois, and he deeply pondered Ebby's experience. Feeling that this was the end, he remembered his Winchester experience, and in despair he turned to God, promising that he would do anything to get better. This was his state of mind before the spiritual experience that AA has rendered famous.

In an otherworldly moment, he felt that the room was flooded with indescribable white light. He was in ecstasy standing upon a summit, thinking that he was now a free man. After this peak, the consciousness of his surroundings returned while he still felt a tangible spiritual presence. He later recalled, "Even though a pilgrim upon an uncertain highway, I need be concerned no more, for I had glimpsed the great beyond."⁴ Simple as the experience may seem when verbalized, Bill owed to it that he neither doubted God's existence nor drank another glass afterwards. Bill W. had just turned thirty-nine. This experience has the hallmark of an NDE or NDLE, though which of the two is difficult to ascertain.

Dr. Silkworth had the good sense to validate the experience, seeing that Bill looked like a new man. He offered him William

James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* to find a compass in his inner world. What is truly incredible at this turning point was Bill's recovered vitality. A man who had been besieged by an unsolvable problem and affected both physically and mentally, Bill found a new lease on life and lived another thirty-seven years, despite his heavy smoking. This new vitality could hardly be explained from any materialistic perspective, pointing once again to the depth and impact of the spiritual experience. The spiritual turning point initiated the life of a new Bill W., and significantly marked the fate of AA.

The NDE was the initial spark that animated Bill in the following years. It lit a fire that sustained an inner certainty and convinced him that there was a way to do what few or none really thought possible: offer a permanent cure for alcoholics. Bill arrived at this formulation in stages, although, as we will see, the essence of these ideas lived in that moment of rapture and otherworldliness. It was a matter of capturing the experience and rendering it possible for others, and that was going to be a long road.

William James marked the first milestone along the way. The psychologist had recognized the signs of a true spiritual experience. He had observed that these experiences often touch those who are utterly desperate, when they acknowledge defeat and turn to a higher power, one beyond themselves. This had clearly been Bill's predicament before the critical turning point. How could this experience be offered to other victims of alcohol?

The next step came from the Oxford Group. It was a wonderfully free association that brought people to the Oxford Group. Born as a nondenominational evangelical movement, it had no theological theories, no dues or membership, nor any paid leader.

Despite these new connections, Bill Wilson's zeal did little to capture other people's attention. It was only danger of relapse that brought forth a whole new chain of events and brought some important figures to the fore who would play a key role in the future of AA. Bill was in Akron, Ohio, where he had just lost a proxy battle to become an officer of the National Rubber Machinery Company. The old ghost of defeat conjured up feelings buried beneath the surface, and suddenly Bill had the thought that he needed the company of another alcoholic to avoid relapse. It was an insight that would have profound reverberations for the future. He looked up a priest in the Akron phone directory

and, without knowing why, chose to call Reverend Walter Tunks, who turned out to be the strongest supporter of the Oxford Group in town. Reverend Tunks put Bill in touch with Henrietta Sieberling, who knew of an alcoholic seeking to rehabilitate himself. Henrietta's personality was the determining factor for Robert Smith to accept a meeting with Bill Wilson. Robert, a doctor and inveterate alcoholic, knew what Bill was going through. He knew it so well that the conversation carried on for hours and resumed the next day. The two of them decided to start working with other alcoholics right away. Bill's meeting with Bob marked the symbolic beginning of AA in more than one way. In Bill's words: "I had quit preaching. I knew that I needed this alcoholic as much as he needed me."⁴

Bill and Bob were complementary in more than one way. It was their encounter that laid the foundation of the future AA. The modality of this encounter has been enshrined in the principles of AA. Bill needed to meet Bob in order to preserve the fruits of his spiritual experience. The two needed to meet each other for their own personal salvation rather than for any altruistic goals. Their differences and complements were a guarantee that AA would be inclusive enough for other individuals who gravitated around the two at first, and for all of those who joined later.

The Birth of Alcoholics Anonymous: A Pioneer Experiment

In the years 1935 to 1937, Bill started distancing himself from the Oxford Group. Bill's exclusive interest in alcoholism was one reason. The other was the need to enlarge his frame of reference. For all its merits, the Oxford Group was based on traditional Christian tenets and on an active proselytism. Bill needed to offer his experience just as it had come to him, as a profound unbeliever until the critical time. It was the two groups of people around Bill and Bob who started to become the determining factor in all the choices that followed. Bill could propose ideas and try to implement them, but it was ultimately the group who would be able to endorse them. In this way an awe-inspiring degree of true "group consciousness" steered the fledgling experiment towards the future form of AA. There was no ready-made blueprint that could be followed because this was clearly a pioneer experiment.

It was the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* that paved the way to the beginning of AA and gave it its initials. Writing it was a collective

effort. Although Bill wrote the drafts, they were reviewed by Bob and by the New York members. The contributions of members were critical in making it a document that could be accepted by all and therefore could serve any possible type of alcoholic. Drafts were also sent to circles of organized religion and accepted by them. The processes and deliberations continued, down to the choice of the title. Finally, the editor, Tom Uzzell, reduced the book by a third.

The book contained the central Twelve Steps—an elaboration of all the principles that distilled Bill and Bob's experience in fighting alcohol. Bill had originally drafted six steps, and felt that they could be further broken down. Before proceeding to do so, he asked for inner guidance. He found himself writing the Twelve Steps with great ease.

This first momentous milestone was followed by the Twelve Traditions in 1950. Now that a way had been found for individual alcoholics, the next step was to find what could be done to make AA both self-supporting and protected from outer dangers. These were not only practical considerations, but also spiritual directives for an organization whose first tradition is that of anonymity. It was there to protect the reputation of the organization if an individual relapsed. Anonymity breaks had created trouble in AA's infancy. Anonymity was the prerequisite for keeping the ego at bay, for emphasizing the priority of principles over individuals, a symbol for the willingness to self-sacrifice. Another important principle was the idea that AA had to be self-supporting and autonomous. It would not resort to advertising or endorsements. Finally, it had to remain devoid of any specific religious profession. AA was becoming a truly modern spiritual brotherhood, in all devoted to its human aims, over and above any commercial or political ties or individualities.

The last brick added to the edifice of AA came from Bill's stubborn conviction that AA needed to emancipate itself from its founder, even when most members did not perceive such a need. The climax was reached in 1955 at the St. Louis Convention. The group consciousness that had worked wonders until then had to sever the last tie of dependence. Bill said that now AA was safe, even from himself. The convention gave birth to the political and administrative structure of AA. Two panels were elected a year apart from each other, for the duration of two years. The delegates needed to receive two-thirds of

the local vote. It was a new, emancipated group consciousness now ready to lead AA.

We have followed Bill's official life closely because it accompanied so intimately the destiny of Alcoholics Anonymous. Other facets of his biography are also very indicative of another aspect of the fight against alcohol. Bill's recovery was far from ended with his spiritual revelation of 1934, although he found in it the inner strength that completely transformed his life. The years from 1934 to 1955 gave Bill and the world many insights about the nature of alcohol addiction and the plight of the alcoholic.

The year 1934 had marked a cardinal life change, but not a deliverance from life's challenges. Soon after the founding of AA, Bill's previous hypochondria resurfaced. He started suffering from imaginary ulcer attacks and suffering all the ills of being a "dry drunk." Alcohol leaves a host of psychological effects and personality modifications that need to be known in order to move beyond the first stage of withdrawal from the addiction.

In 1944, returning from a long tour of AA programs in the country, Bill fell into a very deep and long depression that accompanied him until 1955, partly due to the fact that AA was starting to be independent and did not need him as much anymore. The sudden crisis surprised him. He would spend days in bed and feel suicidal. The worst time of this abyss occurred from 1944 to 1946.

After the deepest spell, the depression cleared momentarily in 1946. At that time he experienced a sense of balance, like a glimmer, between the ecstasy of his spiritual experience and the depth of his own personal abyss. It was then that he envisioned the idea of the General Service Conference that he struggled for years to realize. Bill's experience is reminiscent of what we have seen clearly expressed in Henri Nouwen's instance: the heights of ecstasy were followed by the necessary integration of the abyss that preceded it. It is no wonder that it took so long in Wilson's case.

A Closer Look at the Twelve Steps

In a fashion typical of our times, 1939 marked the starting date of a devastating world war, as well as the beginning of an organization that helped the recovery of hundreds of thousands individuals. There were

about a hundred recoveries by April of 1939, and an estimated one million and more by 1986. Along the way the Twelve Steps of AA have spawned innumerable sister organizations: Al-Anon was founded in 1951, and from it grew ACOA for adults and children of alcoholics. Nowadays about 120 organizations use the guiding principles of AA. In addition, it could be argued that AA stands as the archetype for innumerable support and peer groups, and crisis and suicide lines that cover our social landscape with an extensive network.

The following are the official Twelve Steps of AA:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

What is it that makes AA unique? It is a path that seeks the spiritual in a nondogmatic way. God is defined as the Higher Power, and the person is asked to seek it “in as far as he/she understands it.” Spiritual depth is sought in the social dimension of working together, done from a ground of respect for the individual’s freedom.

Let us take a closer look at the sequence of the steps.⁵ Steps 1 and 2 require respectively: admitting powerlessness and accepting a Higher Power in our lives. At the heart of step 2 lies the process of developing trust. In order to do so, the recovering alcoholic needs to let go of living in a self-created fantasy and—leading to step 3—start to observe the life patterns the alcoholic has generated. Step 3 implies turning to God in a nondogmatic way. We can already recognize here the gesture of letting go of our attachment to our persona and seeking a connection to our higher self. This gesture is a recurrent motif reappearing at different stages, progressively enhanced. At the first stage it touches only the level of awareness. Steps 4 and 5 move on to the taking of a moral inventory and the supremely humbling step of admitting all of one’s wrongdoings to another human being. This is what it takes for the ego to break through the shield of denial that alcohol has built up. Many alcoholics who cannot achieve this step will slide back into the habit. In step 6 one is asked to look at how character defects have been of help in the past. Difficult feelings have also served to protect the recovering alcoholic. Thus, fear can be of help in calling for protection, but too much fear paralyzes us. At this point, at the idea of giving up these protective feelings, the individual feels very much lost. The support of the group is what helps the addict find the strength to face this inner emptiness. Other supports are the sponsor, AA’s literature, and even the simple well-known slogans that AA has contributed to popular culture: “One Day at a Time,” “Easy Does It,” and “Let Go and Let God,” among others.

Although these steps have already contributed to a deflation of the ego’s self-importance, they would amount to nothing without what AA calls “vigorous action.” The admission of one’s shortcomings needs to be accompanied by the desire to provide compensation for the sorrow caused in the world because of alcohol abuse. At Step 7, having seen the difficulties to overcome and sustain new attitudes, the need arises to develop new strategies and support them with tools for

consciousness. Such can be the practice of journaling, calling the sponsor or other supports, or outlining strategies ahead of time to help face specific situations. Steps 8 and 9 require that we write a list of people we have offended, make amends, and offer reparation for our trespasses. It goes so far as to require us to be willing to pay whatever the price may be rather than carry the weight of guilt on our conscience. This step may be daunting to the addict who has often shaped a life around avoidance and is afraid to confront things head on. The preparation for step 7 has built up the strength for this moment.

The final humbling of the ego consists in taking up what so far has felt like a duty as an act of love towards our fellow human beings who struggle with the problem of alcohol. Being our “brother’s keeper” is the twelfth and final step, a humbling of the higher self toward the lower self. “To be vital, faith must be accompanied by self-sacrifice and unselfish, constructive action.”⁶ This is the embodiment of empathy, the capacity of shedding judgment of our fellow human being, and providing an open space for another. The higher self of the individual and the strength of the group can serve as the foundation for the assistance given to individuals seeking recovery. All of the steps serve to reorient the will from being self-centered to being inspired by the spirit, moving from dependence on others to dependence on God, or the inner voice that speaks within each individual. This is explicitly stated in Step 11 with the recourse to prayer and meditation.

AA has laid the foundations for a new consciousness, for the pioneering idea of taking responsibility for our lives that it has helped to spread and popularize. This dimension is further made explicit in the recommendation to take on the practice of daily review, particularly addressing the moral content of the day, and the practice of daily preview, envisioning the day and the tasks to come.⁷

The idea of taking responsibility for our lives is reiterated in the recurring theme that we need to forget what others have done to us and exclusively focus on the self as the source of all events that affect our lives, as well as the turning point from which change proceeds. Thus, it is recognized that we must be demanding on ourselves while considerate of others. Once we focus on the self, we have to identify our real enemies—the inner forces of resentment, self-pity, and guilt. These are the real causes of relapse into alcohol.

Looking at AA alone may make us lose sight of the fact that the Twelve Steps apply not only to alcoholics or drug addicts. With the extension of Twelve Step work, Ruth Hock's insight that this work has a universal quality has acquired more and more justification. This can be particularly seen in later manifestations of its work: Emotions Anonymous (EA) and Co-dependence Anonymous (CoDA). These are truly universal aspects of the human condition. It is the universal human experience to be swayed to a varying degree by emotions over which the self does not rule in full consciousness. On the other hand, even if the term co-dependence lends itself to confusing interpretations, it is within immediate human grasp that many of our close relationships are clouded by mechanisms of unhealthy mutual dependence and lack of true inner freedom.

Let us take a closer look at the first of these two movements, EA, and understand how it operates, whom it addresses, and its results. EA was officially started in 1971 in St. Paul, Minnesota. In 1978 it already counted about two hundred chapters in the US and five other countries. Like all other Twelve Step groups, EA does not judge, diagnose, or offer personal advice. Its overall goals are to enable individuals to solve some of their emotional problems and learn to live in peace with those that have not been solved.

The general qualification for EA membership is a realization of being unable to control a certain emotion. In fact, people who apply experience a very large spectrum of these emotions: from compulsive perfectionists to universal "acceptors" or "rejectors," from depressives to paranoids, and everything in between. Phobias can also be treated within EA.⁸ But, more interestingly, EA can be effective no matter what the degree of psychological illness or the initial degree of individual consciousness. Well-adjusted individuals may be able to get hold of relatively minor challenges (such as an escape into workaholism); other individuals' symptoms may have reached what could be defined as irreversible psychoses, those in which physical symptoms have permanently set in. In the latter instance, the physical symptoms can be kept in check, but—so it seems—only if the individual continues to rely on the group. Interestingly, through EA many depressives find a solution to a problem that very few other medical or psychological therapies succeed in treating. Individuals who heavily depended on psychoactive medications have found in EA a way to manage their

personal challenges with no recourse to medication for the first time in their lives.

Ultimately, the path that AA lays out marks the beginning of a new way of envisioning spiritual development, in which the social dimension is added to the purely personal path of development. Spiritually, AA leaves individuals free to turn to their own sources of inspiration. The social element also respects individual freedom, since AA does not offer judgment or guidance. The individual and social aspects form a natural complement to each other.

BERT HELLINGER AND FAMILY CONSTELLATIONS

*Who then devised the torment? Love.
Love is the unfamiliar Name
Behind the hands that wove
The intolerable shirt of flame
Which human power cannot remove.
We only live, only suspire
Consumed by either fire or fire.*

T. S. Eliot

Bert Hellinger grew up in Germany at the time of the Nazi regime. He claims it was his parents' active faith that allowed him to see through the lie of the Nazi ideology. After the war he felt the vocation for a religious career in a Catholic order, and entered a life of a regular practice of contemplation and meditation. Eventually, he became a missionary to the Zulus in South Africa, an experience that led him to realize the relativity of cultural values. He could observe the similarities between Zulu culture and the spirituality that is present in the cult of the Mass. This was a first bridge to knowledge of reality of the soul. During this time he also worked with group dynamic facilitators and saw how their interventions could help in the reconciliation of opposites.⁹

Upon leaving the Church he launched into an extensive exploration of the different techniques that have evolved from psychoanalysis. In the years following his training in psychoanalysis, he received many other trainings and integrated various elements from a long list

of different approaches: the primal therapy of Janov, Gestalt therapy, transactional analysis, the family therapy approach of McClendon and Kadis, Milton Erickson's hypnotherapy, neuro-linguistic programming, and the holding therapy of Irena Precop.

Hellinger achieved an overall integration of these approaches and has no claim to any particularly new discoveries. In Janov he saw the validity of a body-based psychotherapy. Observing the manifestation of feelings in primal therapy allowed him to notice that the feelings that manifested themselves covered up the primary desire for love of the child toward the parents. Reestablishing this primary movement towards love became Hellinger's focus. From transactional analysis he realized the recurrence of "psychological scripts" carrying over from one generation to the next; some of the scripts an individual carries may belong to other members of the family. Through family therapy he was exposed to the concept of family constellations, and Jay Haley introduced him to the role of hierarchy in family dynamics. These exposures fully revealed the systemic dimension of psychotherapy—how personal destinies are influenced by the family system. Finally, from neuro-linguistic programming Hellinger adopted the focus on resources rather than on problems. He achieved this goal thanks to his keen faculties of observation that allowed him to "acknowledge what is"—one of his favorite expressions. His worldview can be truly defined as phenomenology at its best. The path that took its departure from psychoanalysis led him away from many of its basic tenets. As we will see, Hellinger's systemic psychotherapy is hardly analytical. It has an image-based flavor that offers a whole new meaning to the word *psychotherapy*.

Hellinger and his Family Constellations have caused a real sensation in the world of psychotherapy. Not only do his ideas usher in a new outlook in the field, but Family Constellations has almost become a mass phenomenon in Europe. The new approach generates more interest than any other form of psychotherapy has in the last twenty years, and this trend is not likely to abate soon. It is obvious that his approach will raise a few eyebrows. Hellinger's background as a Catholic missionary, his personality, and the radical flavor of his views feed polemics. He adds to this by standing by ideas and statements that he says he derives from observation rather than speculation. However, he seems ready to admit that he has made mistakes and will alter his

views when new elements of his observations push him in a different direction; hence the feeling sometimes arises that he may be inconsistent.

Family Constellations

It takes a lot of training, effort, and insight to simply see, and in that act perceive reality for what it is. Preformed ideas stand in the way. Truly seeing is one of Bert Hellinger's gifts. A pragmatist—much more than a theoretician—he can call himself a phenomenologist with good reason. To him, knowing how certain phenomena appear is much more important than any theory he could spin from them. Most importantly, he believes that phenomena, when rightly understood, show us the way and the tools that we can use. Hellinger describes what he has observed as “systemic psychotherapy” and “orders of love.” What differs from many other psychoanalytic approaches is Hellinger's purely imaginative approach. A second aspect is his primary interest in simply describing facts while staying away from their interpretation.

Let us look at how Family Constellations therapy works. The client sets up a certain constellation of the closest people in his or her family situation by placing certain people—the “representatives”—in a determined, given space. The representatives take the place of all of the significant members of the family constellation, including the client and even deceased family members. The important elements are the spatial relationships between members, in which direction and/or at whom each one of them looks, and the postures adopted by each participant. After setting up the constellation, the client becomes a spectator. The work is different from role-playing, because people are placed in a position of which they know only very few basic facts, such as partings, divorces, separations, and, generally speaking, other traumatic events. This is a very important element to which we will return later. The representatives are not asked to act out, but simply to register their feelings and observe the situation. It is as if they were in a place endowed with a certain power. They experience feelings and emotions that can be accompanied by physical sensations, such as shaky knees, difficulties standing up, or tight shoulders. At the next stage, the facilitator can ask the client to place in the constellation individuals from previous generations. During this process the facilitator will ask all the individuals in the constellation to convey their feelings

and physical sensations, and will propose to them simple sentences that help to clarify the feelings experienced or offer a solution for tension. The sentences are short and to the point, for example, “I am angry with you,” or “I respect you.”

The work of a constellation evolves in three stages. In the first part, a client receives an image of the present destructive family dynamics at work. In a second stage, the facilitator moves through a search for balance in the family system. The search is led according to the facilitator’s intuition, and involves some trial and error. Only the client and the other participants can say if it feels right or not. The final stage is an image of what could be, an image that can help the individual evolve toward a new equilibrium. It may be the attainment of a resolution, but it can also simply be a next step on the way to balance. At this stage the client will be asked to take the place of his or her representative in order to experience the new situation. The facilitator needs to refrain from imposing a solution, only leading the soul to the next possible step. In fact, at times, he will have to stop a representation before coming to a resolution. It may be that this is the only attainable next step, or that crucial information is missing. Often, the latter may come to the surface later.

After experiencing the new state, the client and all participants are asked to refrain from discussing the experience or offering insights or interpretations. The images generated from family constellations work at a deeper level, in fact at the level of the soul, not of the mind. They have a lasting effect, but it may take some time before results are revealed to the individual. A single representation may be all that is needed, or various interventions—at wide intervals of time—may be staged in order to reach a progressively deeper level of understanding and resolution.

So what are the questions that Hellinger asks his clients? The following is a sample:

- Is there somebody in the family who died young?
- Have there been criminal or violent episodes?
- Have the parents had previous relationships?
- Are there shaming experiences: marginalization, handicap, extramarital births, people needing psychiatric care, jailing, homosexuality, or emigration?

- Are there unusual relationships within the generations: adoptions, abortions, or sexual abuse?
- Are there parents of different nationalities?

The more any of these facts is lived as a source of shame or a source of repressed pain, the more likely they are to deeply affect following generations.

Two systems are explored in Hellinger's work: the first is the family of origin, and the second is the present family. The question asked determines to which of the two the facilitator will direct himself. The more clearly and succinctly a question can be formulated, the more likely the work is to be effective.

And what are the effects of Family Constellation work? A first strong realization is often the experience of our interconnectedness. The soul world acquires a new graphic dimension when one cannot avoid seeing in one's life the concrete effect of a simple representation that would seem to have only symbolic power. People who expose themselves to the work, either as subjects or as representatives, become more conscious of the implications of their decisions. They learn to give more importance to personal needs in relationships and take responsibility for their actions. Taking responsibility for our actions occurs independently of the justifications that have guided them. In fact, individuals may feel responsibility even for their intentions.

Representations may allow us to shed premature prejudice and acquire more compassion towards others. Many say that having the experience of bowing before another (for example, in offering forgiveness) is not an act of weakness. The reverse experience does not cause one to feel proud or superior. In fact, whether we like it or not, images guide our life. The old image of our family guided us unconsciously. The new image of a possible future constellation works without need of analysis, but has an influence on our lives, without depriving us of our freedom.

Love's Hidden Symmetry¹⁰

So what is it that Hellinger sees? In a family unit, certain events leave scars on the soul. These are mostly dramatic or tragic events: anything from sudden death, suicide, and homicide to abortions, stillbirths, adoptions, incest, and so on. Resulting traumas come from the indi-

viduals' response to these events. A family member may be excluded because of a shameful act, or institutionalized and forgotten because of a mental, developmental, or other handicap. Each individual in the family always has a choice: accept the pain and own it, or deny it and suffer from the hidden consequences of this denial. Accepting all family members and ties is recognizing the reality that the soul always knows. Rejecting family ties through anger keeps one tied to all the family members at a deeper level, no matter how close or far one is from them geographically. The only lawful exception may be one of members having committed crimes or murders; they do indeed need to be excluded, at least for a time.

A family is a group of people brought together by destiny. Fate seeks its completion no matter what we may think, feel, or do about it. When we divert it through some drastic decision, it intervenes in some other way in the family unit. These are the phenomena observed by Hellinger, the ones he groups under the name *systemic laws*, applying in most cases within three generations of family links. These laws hold true regardless of space and time, all the more so when consciousness and the ability to love are dimmed. They operate across space; family members affect the system no matter where they are. They also work across time boundaries—the deceased affect the living, and vice versa.

A family group has a consciousness. Children are a particularly sensitive link in the family unit. They will suffer with their parents in order to show their love, because they express love in a primary, blind fashion. In the case of divorce, they often emulate the parent who appears worse off. They feel incomplete if they are forced to exclude one of the parents from their picture of the family. However, it isn't only the parents who play an important role in the family dynamics. Any member of an extended family unit has a right to membership. Wrong decisions made by any individual must be condemned without excluding him or her. Excluding or ostracizing can lead to serious physical and psychological illnesses among children or other family members.

Hellinger alerts us to the reality of destiny or fate in the family unit. He expresses it in another way via the concept of family hierarchy. This hierarchy flows through the parents to the children, from the firstborn to the younger siblings. That is why it is important for parents to share deep commitments to each other first, then to their children. Children should not be drawn into adult concerns or problems by their

parents.

More recent relationships have precedence over older ones. If a parent has a child from a second partner, it is this union that acquires priority over the previous one. An “ideal” family situation is represented in an archetypal way in a family constellation. The oldest child stands close to the parents and the others are arranged around them clockwise in descending order of age.

Love, at least in the common use of the term, covers a wide gradation of feelings and emotions. Above we have described the apparently unconditional kind of love that is a child’s love. A child will blindly follow the parent, no matter their fate. This is not a true relationship, but what Hellinger calls an *entanglement*. By sharing the destiny of the parent, the child is estranged from his or her own destiny. At an unconscious level, the child feels important, but this feeling is born out of presumption, not out of any deeper reality. Within the context of hospice, it has been noticed that dying children often hang on to life, because they feel protective of their parents; this is especially so in the case of single parents or in difficult stepfamilies.¹¹

Growing into a mature, adult love implies a painful separation between child and parent, generally associated with a feeling of guilt from the son or daughter. The necessity of the guilt and the pain associated with breaking the nature of the childhood bond is often resisted in adult life, resulting in the person, later in life, carrying an unbalanced love or attachment to the paternal/maternal figures.

What Hellinger calls the “hidden symmetry of love” concerns the balance of give and take that colors every relationship, especially in couples. The exchange of giving and receiving needs to be balanced, not from a mathematical, but from a soul perspective; the wider the exchange, the deeper the resulting growth and joy. The partner who receives too much will end up feeling oppressed, and therefore unable to give. The same is true in case of a partner causing harm to another. Too quick or superficial forgiveness deprives the need that the offending party has for offering compensation. A magnanimous forgiveness—often a superficial one—deprives the needed outlet for guilt.

The Soul’s Perspective

Family Constellations work offers us a brand new perspective on the

dynamics of a family. It also invites us to revisit important social issues from the perspective of the reality of the soul. Thus, when we consider such matters as abortion, artificial insemination, adoption, and incest, we often do so primarily from the perspective of human rights. This is a justified approach inasmuch as it honors the dimension of human freedom and justice. However, it is only a partial view of things—it does not fully address the soul's perspective. Let us look precisely at how these matters are also issues of destiny.

Adoption may be seen as a generous and altruistic idea, and it often is. However, at the level of the soul, it is overshadowed by another important choice. Adopting is often the refusal of a trial of destiny: the acceptance of a partner's sterility. If this is not clear, then adoption carried for the wrong motive can lead to divorce, illness, or more serious issues. Adoption challenges us to accept our overall destiny and the destiny triggered by the impact of a foreign family constellation. In other words, in adopting we don't just accept a child, but also, at the soul level, the destiny of the members of the child's family system. In the case of adoption, immediate family members, including grandparents, aunts, and uncles, are best suited for successful results. Understanding of the element of destiny is carried even further in the case of artificial insemination. It may be difficult to understand the importance of whether the sperm comes from the husband or from another source. Here, as in adoption, it makes a difference whether or not the issues of two family constellations are compounded.

A polar opposite of adoption is abortion. Regardless of the issue of freedom that goes with abortion, couples intuitively know that aborting is often psychologically worse than accepting a challenging baby. The pain of abortion has to be confronted consciously by the couple through the necessary grieving in order to lessen the psychological consequences.

Another often-neglected aspect of family reality is the role of ex-partners. From a destiny perspective, it should be made clear that their role is fundamental. Without their stepping aside, there would be no new relationship. They are all linked by this simple fact of life. Family constellations look at this issue closely. One of the surprising revelations of Hellinger's work is the reality of physical intercourse. This leads him to issue the challenging remark that "sexuality is stronger than love," if we give to love the meaning applied by every-

day standards. Sexuality creates real links that will invariably appear in family constellations, no matter how fleeting an episode a person may consider any sexual encounter. These conclusions strongly confirm the results of spiritual investigation, even if they may stand at odds with what goes as common sense. They offer us a concrete example of why Hellinger can falsely be interpreted as holding on to archaic ideas, to his Catholic background, or to a neoconservative ideology. This view ignores the fact that everything he says is something that he has come to observe first and foremost as a phenomenon through his work.

Where the divergence between legal issues and destiny issues is the greatest is in the case of incest. As Hellinger sees it, incest is often the result of an unconscious collaboration, where the man plays the active role and the woman the passive one. Often the perpetrator is a man who marries a woman with one or more daughters, and the situation presents an emotional and sexual imbalance. The woman often compensates for this imbalance by unconsciously offering the daughter, who also ends up offering herself, illustrating the blind love of children. Incest thus becomes an issue of love that does not find its true and healthy expression. Clearly, the major responsibility lies with the man, and judicial action is appropriate. However, incest is not resolved by revenge. It is a human situation that needs to be resolved by acknowledging both the parents' fault and the reality of the bonds of love, however misplaced their expression may be. This is important because when a person has been denied or excluded from a family unit, their burden may be taken on by a child or other family member. This individual will carry feelings not their own, and will often display emotions and behaviors that are inappropriate or are exaggerated within a given context. Hellinger calls this an *entanglement* or *identification*—the polar opposite of a relationship, a bond based on compulsion rather than freedom. Personal destiny that has been blocked acts blindly out of inner necessity, trying to find entry where it has been denied access.

Entanglement is not of an “automatic” nature. The information received through systemic psychotherapy is not universal or equal for all. Rather, it depends on context. This is most visible when two siblings set up the same family configurations for therapeutic work. One of the two may be very entangled, for example, with the mother's side

of the family, whereas the other may demonstrate little response to the traumatic event and react more favorably toward the father's side of the family.

It appears that Hellinger's systemic psychotherapy is an imaginative way to make visible the family's forces of destiny. The process attempts to bring consciousness and a loving response from a mood of reverence and acceptance. We must first remember and honor anything that we have done or have been part of, before we can rightfully forget. This does not mean condoning faults or crimes. Standing by the excluded or vilified in order to give them back their rightful place within the family system is the task of the facilitator, according to Hellinger. His is a deeply moral work—when skillfully conducted—that allows destiny its due.

The final image of constellation work is there for the individual to simply behold. From it the soul can draw nourishment. Progress will occur according to the soul's needs and rhythms—for some, within months, for others, years. No interpretation is necessary and the person's freedom remains whole. However, for progressively deeper effects, it may be useful to conduct several constellations, leaving ample time between them.

Working with Departed Souls

Family constellations have shown that a certain memory lives within a family system. It lives in the soul or the so-called greater soul. The individual brain is merely the instrument that transmits it; it does not create it. The soul lives beyond space and time. That is why it is equally at home among the living as the dead.

Family Constellation work indicates that the living need to stop clinging to their beloved dead ones. After a normal period of mourning, such attachments hamper the departed souls' further progress. Heinz Stark confirms the importance of the moment of death, and particularly the thoughts we carry at that time. He observes that the souls of the dead can be in quite a few different states—either at peace or in a restless state. In extreme cases, such as with those who have been murdered, he notices that the soul can be caught in an in-between realm, as if cut off from everyone else and from life itself. This happens particularly when the perpetrators carry no remorse or empathy toward the victims. At the other end of the spectrum are the souls who

have made the most progress after death. “The latest phase of the dying process of such a soul aspect, which has so far been observed with the help of constellations, seems to be the dissolution and union with (or in) those who have lived before, maybe encompassing ever larger areas of an ever larger soul,”¹² concludes Heinz Stark. This is probably why in the majority of cases family constellations concern themselves with the third generation only. In most cases, after that time, the soul has dissolved and become part of the greater soul.

Family constellations know no boundaries as far as the soul is concerned. They help the living as well as the dead. Departed souls are free to participate. They can achieve clarity or resist change just as we do. Therefore, central to this working together in both worlds is an attitude of respect toward the dead. Attention may be turned to them before going to sleep, during the night preceding work on a constellation. People who have done this have sometimes received guidance through dreams.

In some ways Family Constellation work renders visible the reality of destiny within the family unit. It also makes obvious the limits of a purely individual approach in psychoanalysis. Hellinger’s work is successful precisely because it calls on the participation—at the soul level—of all parts involved. The lack of analytical interpretation honors the needs of different souls and the individuals’ freedom.

The Knowing Field

What is at work behind systemic psychotherapy—and most precisely at work in a Family Constellation setup—is the *knowing field*, the name given to this elusive reality by Albrecht Mahr. It is in many ways, but not completely, an objective field. The reactions that emerge from representatives have little to do with their personal history. Different representatives placed in the same role experience the same or very similar feelings, down to specific physical conditions. Experience with constellation work often renders representatives more attuned to this hidden reality, and allows them to perceive the same phenomena more clearly over time. The representations are a form of inventory of the unconscious energies present in family dynamics. They bring awareness on one side and healing on another.

Not surprisingly, family constellations can bring to light new elements of reality. The case given by Bertold Ulsamer of a represen-

tative, during constellation work, becoming certain of who her child's father is, is a good example in this connection.¹³ However, even if this is true in some instances, family constellations cannot and should not be used to retrieve information. Ulsamer offers the example of a representative bringing to the surface a history of abuse of a certain woman. When tallied with the family history it became clear that the abuse had been perpetrated on the subject's sister. The "abuse energy" was present in the system and played a role in it. However, the conclusion first attained was erroneous. Even if these cases are relatively rare, the example ultimately leads Ulsamer to draw the conclusion that one should corroborate a representation with reality and not vice versa. According to him, Family Constellations work rests upon three pillars: energy, order (systemic laws), and reality. In his approach, as in that of many other practitioners, the energetic approach has priority. Order, which can only serve as a general point of reference, is a relative notion, and exceptions to the "lawfulness" of order are too numerous for this criterion to offer a guiding hand. Also, relying on the principles of order would offer a facilitator the treacherous comfort of expected outcomes and resolutions.

At this point we might ask what the knowing field has to do with the new scientific idea of the "morphogenetic field," as Heinz Stark asked himself. It seems more likely that what we have to do with in Family Constellations is similar to what appears in work with hypnosis. However, the difference with hypnosis lies in Family Constellations' greater precision. Here, the system is expressed by representatives in a state of normal consciousness; the facilitator's consciousness does not dominate over the dimmed consciousness of a client or representative.

For a further analysis of the forces at work during Family Constellations, similar phenomena are seen at work in J. L. Moreno's Psychodrama and other similar techniques using drama as a foundation. People who assume a certain role, although they role-play, often get in touch with elements of reality of which they had no previous knowledge.¹⁴

Other scientific studies support Hellinger's work, offering useful hypotheses—particularly so the pioneering work in the field of psycho-genealogy conducted by French psychologist Anne Ancelin

Schützenberger.¹⁵ Her work aims to recognize the influence, at the psychological level, that previous generations have over their offspring. In one of her examples, a client of had a daughter, born on April 26, plagued since birth by asthma and panic attacks. A brother of the client's grandfather had died in an attack on April 26 in which lethal gases had been used. After elucidating these facts, the daughter recovered from both her cough and panic attacks. The client herself continued to suffer from shortness of breath. It was discovered that her grandfather was present during the attacks in Verdun. After these discoveries her breathing improved. However, she still had odd habits: taking her hands to her neck, wearing a short red necklace, often feeling cold. Historical inquiries brought to light that five of her ancestors had died at the guillotine in 1793. One of them had died on January 9, 1793. The client's brother, François, was born on January 9, 1963. After these discoveries the feeling of choking and her related habits disappeared.

Another example from Ulsamer's research concerns the 1993 death of actor Brandon Lee, who died during the shooting of the film *The Crow*, killed by a pistol that should have been loaded with blanks. Twenty years before, to the date, his father, Bruce Lee, had died during the shooting of *Game of Death* in precisely the same way. Hellinger quotes the case of a family where, over one hundred years, three members of successive generations committed suicide at age twenty-seven on December 31. The oldest man—the first husband of the great-grandmother—was probably poisoned by the wife and her later husband on December 31.¹⁶ The observations reported above bring us to a crossroad of influences playing across family generations and also possibly the consequences of phobias carried from previous lives.

Family Constellation work stands at a turning point. Many of its aspects need to be better known and explored, now that its effects can be observed after many years of practice. It may be that family constellations will continue to evolve and create new forms. What is beyond doubt, reflected by the growing interest in Hellinger's work, is its revolutionary, groundbreaking effect—its pioneering edge into the realm of the soul and its destiny in a manner that strives to combine objectivity with the value of the image, rather than the old school of interpretation.

Overall, Family Constellations work illustrates the reality of the modern ideas of destiny that we have introduced, especially in Chapters 2 and 3. At a first level, it demystifies the idea that family links are due to a random genetic lottery. The corollary of that thought—that we can free ourselves from these links at will—proves itself an empty proposition when tested by experience. Moreover, by integrating our relationships with the departed souls, systemic psychotherapy confirms how tenuous the boundary between the physical and spiritual worlds is at present, as we saw in the exploration of ADCs.

THE REVOLUTION OF HOSPICE: SAUNDERS AND KÜBLER-ROSS

Do not fear death so much, rather the inadequate life.

Bertold Brecht

The history of hospice goes back to the Middle Ages. In those times, hospices were places of rest and shelter for pilgrims and travelers. According to need, the sick were cured and terminal care was offered to the dying. The term hospice in relation to the dying was first used by the Irish Sisters of Charity, who opened Our Lady's Hospice in Dublin in 1879. Sixteen years later they founded St. Joseph's Hospice in London. The separate modern hospice unit was inaugurated with St. Christopher's in London in 1967. By 1985 there were about seventy such hospices throughout the United Kingdom. The home care aspect of hospice was begun in 1969.

In 1975 there were only three hospices in the US: the first was in New Haven, Connecticut; the second, in Marin, California; and the third, a hospice unit within St. Luke's Hospital in New York City. By 1977, there were about seventy initiatives covering the span of the entire country. By the early 1990s there were approximately 2,000 hospices in different degrees of development.

During World War II as a nursing student, Cecily Saunders had seen much death and pain. She became concerned with giving dignity to the dying and attenuating their pain. She did this by taking on a degree in social work and then another degree in medicine. Subsequently

she started working in religious hospices. She wanted to combine the ideas of caregiving with the comfort that modern medicine could offer. She rediscovered the Brompton Cocktail, a blend of heroin, morphine, cocaine, alcohol, and antinausea medication, and pioneered the idea of continuous pain control so that the dying could prepare themselves more readily for their transition. In 1967 she started her own hospice, St. Christopher's, in the suburbs of London. In it she integrated all the elements that she thought would add value to a stimulating environment for her patients: a feeling of family, religious support, art—all elements that offer a wider perspective of life.

In America, more than elsewhere, hospice has also received a considerable contribution from Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, through her work, her books, and her workshops on death and dying. Saunders and Kübler-Ross stand out as two of the most prominent figures in the development of the modern idea of hospice. In the United Kingdom, hospice was founded around the idea of a charismatic leader; in the US, more upon the idea itself. In the UK, hospice relied primarily on Christian ecumenical views, whereas in the US the multicultural factor, with the need for religious and moral pluralism, made hospice open to a new kind of spirituality of which Kübler-Ross is an apt representative. The two pioneers, who have just recently departed within a year of each other, form two complementary perspectives. Saunders led the way, and Kübler-Ross offered future possibilities.

Accompanying the Dying: The Story of Cicely Saunders

Cicely Saunders's biography is truly astounding, primarily because of all the obstacles that personality and circumstance threw her way. However, these are the very same adversities that made her uniquely suited to perform her task. Saunders was born on June 22, 1918 to an affluent English family. She never lacked financial resources or social connections. However, she was born to a very unlikely and divided couple. The parents, very different in nature, communicated less and less as their three children grew up. The mother, Chrissie, rather charming and considerate, was out of touch with her own emotions and unable to deal with practical matters. Consequently, she left the children's upbringing to the family's domestics. The children had hardly any connection with such a remote character. Like Chrissie, Cicely inherited a congenital slight curvature of the spine that was to

cause her ongoing hardships. She was unusually tall, so much so that she remembers, “I seemed to spend much of my time falling over myself because I am too big.”¹⁷ Added to this was a great shyness that caused her feelings to overwhelm her; she tended to accumulate inner tension until she could find an uneasy release for it. Because of these many factors, her relationships with men were difficult. From her very extroverted father—with whom she felt very close—she absorbed a very lively and wide range of interests and great determination.

Saunders’ personality is one of great dynamic tension of marked contrasts. She was fearful and yet daring; very sensitive to people’s needs and yet ruthless at times; concerned with overall vision and very keen on detail; knowledgeable of both the scientific and technological and interested in the spiritual; tending to the autocratic and yet acknowledging the need for the democratic and striving toward it; and especially, both practical and intellectual. Her biographer, Shirley du Boulay, remembers that she could throw temper tantrums if something did not go the way she wanted it, especially over little things. For the larger things, she would humbly rely on God’s will. More than any other quality, it was her extreme determination that could educate and propel her above her tensions and inner difficulties.

Armed with the experience of her own shyness and her physical pain, Saunders had a great ability to listen to her patients’ pain, feel what they were going through, and tell them the truth without scaring or embarrassing them. In this she awakened trust even with the most complete stranger. She was persistent even to stubbornness. She had a good sense of humor, even a sharp wit. She expected a lot from people, even herself, and could have devastating effects on sensitive people, even inflicting public humiliation on them in some instances. This made her a charismatic but difficult leader.

Such tension of opposites, coupled with her physical disability, explain how Saunders was uniquely fitted to both act boldly and wait patiently, to fear the limelight and take progressive steps to learn responsibility and leadership. In her teenage years, in the boarding school she hated, and despite her little popularity, she decided to take on the role of house sub-prefect. Likewise, she became a set representative—having the responsibility over a group of probationers—in her initial years of nursing studies.

Nursing, religion, and intimate encounters formed the turning points that marked the path of the founder of modern hospice. Let us see how. It was the circumstance of the war that gave Saunders the courage to veer away from the path that upbringing and fatherly inclination had marked for her. At the outbreak of WWII, she took the Red Cross exams in home nursing and first aid. Later, at her initial training with the Nightingale Training School for Nursing, even with the stringent conditions of wartime London, she felt she had found home. However, her back problems did not allow her to finish her studies, nor to envision taking on the physical strain of the life of a nurse. In order to keep the precious contact with the patients she became an almoner, the rough equivalent of a medical social worker. However, this new profession could not satisfy her as nursing had done, nor fulfill all her lively interests. It was through these interests that she came to volunteer for St. Luke's home for the dying, which, unique for its time, had both an ecumenical religious approach and a pioneering approach to pain control. Here, ever since 1935—little known to the public or the medical profession—a system of “regular giving” of pain control drugs allowed the patients to use the drugs they needed before the return of the pain. This important contribution to Saunders's quest formed the ground for the next step.

The surgeon Patsy Barrett, for whom Saunders started working, indicated to her that the problems of the dying stemmed primarily from the attitudes of the medical profession, and that, if she wanted to affect a change and have the credentials for it, she needed to “read medicine.” Undaunted by the challenge, Saunders enrolled in medical school at age thirty-three, at a time when only 15% of the enrolled were women. The challenge of medical studies “was hell,” according to her own words. She worked to prove that it was possible to prescribe pain control without causing addiction and without causing tolerance to the medicine. Most of all she felt it was important to leave control of the matter in the hands of the patients. In the time that she worked at St. Joseph's she had managed to document more than a thousand cases of dying cancer patients. There she also started to emphasize the importance of seeing patients within the context of their families.

Saunders's medical career went hand in hand with key personal experiences that marked the genesis of the first hospice, Saint Christopher's. Chief among them was a spiritual odyssey that she shared in great parts with key patients.

Saunders had not been raised in religion. A first interest was facilitated through the reading of such books as *Good God* by John Hadham, and C. S. Lewis's and William Temple's opuses, which appealed to her growing liberalism. She also joined the Socratic Society, a group started by C. S. Lewis as a meeting place for atheists and Christians. The real turning point, however, occurred in the summer of 1945 when she joined a group of six evangelical friends who were heading to a holiday retreat with prayer, worship, and discussion, to which she practically invited herself. Her initial mocking and unbelieving attitude was likely a challenge to her friends. However, after one of the services she decided to pray and ask to receive proof of "His presence." And she reported: "The Lord as it were said to me, 'It's not you who has to do anything. I have done it all.' At that moment I felt that God had turned me around and that it was all right."¹⁸ She wrote a poem beginning, "We saw Him in the foam of curving waves," and ending, "The truth came flooding through our minds so dim / That he so loved us that He sought our hearts / And peace and joy came in to dwell with Him." After this episode, the friends could sense Saunders's transformation. She was quite fervent in her faith and shared it in the workplace despite disapproval, so much so that she had prayer meetings before work. She later called these her "very pious years."

This change had occurred at a time of deep family crisis—the separation of her parents. Saunders felt she had been "softened up" by this suffering and rendered able to surrender. Evangelicalism, by calling to her heart, was able to complete the journey that had started with the intellect—she felt forgiven. Du Boulay says, "There was a sense of guilt, simply 'for being.' She had never known a world of innocent acceptance." She had experienced her mother's abandonment from birth. Many friends sensed a deep loneliness in her that she covered up with a constant desire for company.

In the genesis of the hospice idea, Saunders moved from realizing it could not be evangelical to requiring a minimum level of commitment to Anglicanism, and finally to a full embrace of ecumenical principles. What place religion would have among the co-workers was

a matter of debate for a long time. Saunders realized that hospice could not be a religious order, and that spiritual life had to be left to the individual. She accepted reluctantly that it would be a “community of the unlike.”

In her ecumenical trajectory, Saunders had learned a lot from the pioneering Saint Luke’s, but most of all from the patients themselves. After becoming an almoner, among the first patients with whom she worked was David Tasma. He was a forty-year-old Pole who had terminal cancer and felt quite desperate and empty. He had no family, and was very lonely and in great physical pain. They saw each other twenty-five times, as recorded in Saunders’s diary, before his death in February 1947. The relationship soon blossomed into love. Tasma was an agnostic Jew, and Saunders spent much time talking about religion in a way respectful to his faith. To her credit, before he died he had managed to reconcile himself with God.

It was also with him that Saunders started discussions about how to care for the dying. Through this encounter she not only found love, but also confirmed her vocation for bringing relief and comfort to the dying. At his death, she organized his funeral according to orthodox Jewish rites. This love relationship left her to deal with personal grief that she could not publicly acknowledge. After three months, however, a spiritual experience helped her in the grieving process. At the time she was in Scotland, walking by a river. In the beauty of nature she felt as if she were slipping out of time and sensed Tasma’s presence at her side, giving her the feeling that everything was all right. She called the experience “very strong and comforting.”

This constellation of events was to repeat itself, as if at a higher level, in her relationship with another dying patient, Antoni Michniewicz, thirteen years later. This was in Saunders’s words, “the hardest, the most peaceful, the most inhibited and the most liberating experience I have ever had.” Michniewicz was a devout Catholic Pole who had left Poland after World War II. His only close relative was his daughter, but he also had friends. For a long time he was just a friend Saunders admired for gentleness and moral fiber. Then one day, he expressed his love. The two were inhibited in expressing their feelings by the presence of the ward neighbors, so much so that those who knew them never suspected the depth of their friendship. Their relationship remained brief and public throughout, and Saunders recorded

a diary of her conversations with him. She had never experienced such love in her life, and it provided her inner peace. Eventually she had to stop praying for his life and Michniewicz was able to accept his death, practically at the same time. Saunders was with him when he died. After that she was surprised by the depth of her grief—after all, it had happened before. She could hardly bear going to the ward and carrying out her normal functions. She constantly thought and talked about him. She felt later that it was a “pathological grieving.” Once again, but more than with David Tasma, she was left to mourn in a position that was not socially recognized. The next year Saunders lost her father and also Barbara Galton, whose friendship had sustained her during her medical studies. This happened during the time leading to the founding of Saint Christopher’s and Saunders’s determination was sorely tested. She wrote, “It does feel like the end of the world. I had to do this work and though I wanted to do it, I could hardly bear to go on living. I often thought how nice it would be to die.”¹⁹ She felt that Michniewicz was her better, and that his love had elevated her. She now had a deeper love for God and came to realize that giving in a hospice relationship goes both ways.

Was it just a mere coincidence that Saunders was attracted to Polish men? She did not feel so, although she could not explain it. She was later to marry Marian, another Polish man, some time after buying on impulse a painting of his that she had seen in a gallery. She wrote a note to the painter, in which she expressed her appreciation for the painting, and this led to their encounter. In the same way she had purchased Marian’s painting she acquired the statue of a kneeling woman (now in the front hall of St. Christopher’s), which, it turned out later, was the work of Witold Kavalec, another Pole. About this link with Poland, Saunders says that it was “a link that was there from the beginning and was forged again and again.” Poland is a nation that had suffered much; one of its poets called it “The Jesus Christ of Nations.” In the same way that she was drawn to Polish people, she found something equivalent in American Jews. People’s suffering played a part not just in her professional life, but also in many aspects of her private life. Saunders was attracted to people who were in pain, as they were attracted to her. Barbara Galton—who was blind and paralyzed—was one example of many friends whom she saw die.

Hospice: The Community of the Unlike

Hospices begin with two questions. What do dying patients need, and how can we accommodate their needs? Although it may seem obvious, this is an important prerequisite to underline. Putting the patient at the center concretely means that hospice has the ambition of accepting everyone. Although this is an ideal that is far from realized, it is already a major difference from a regular hospital, where the financial element plays anywhere from a very important role to an almost exclusive one at times. Thus business efficiency plays a role in hospice care that remains subordinate to the goal of individual care.

The goal of offering true care cannot be reached without real teamwork. Only people who have rededicated their lives through a common goal can achieve such high standards. Hospice standards of professional services have to match and surpass those of any regular hospital unit caring for the dying. Another major difference between hospices and corresponding hospital units is the ability of hospice to offer more constant attention to the dying patient. In medical terms this is expressed with a higher nurse-to-patient ratio. This, however, is looking only at a quantitative side of the picture. The nurse's work is assisted and facilitated by a host of other professionals, and also often by trained volunteers. In short, the patient is not only treated, but also surrounded by an entire community.

Let us look at the professional side of hospice. The hospice ideal is for the patient to be able to die in familiar surroundings. Whenever possible, this means dying at home. Only a marginal number of patients may need a hospice room for logistic, social, or medical reasons. Hospices look at the whole person, not just the medical case. It is body, soul, *and* spirit that need attention.

According to *Hospice: Current Principles and Practices*, an ideal hospice team is composed of the following specialists: nurses and doctors, social workers, psychologists, counselors, priests, art and music therapists, physical and occupational therapists, dieticians and nutritionists, pharmacists, and trained volunteers. While this wide variety is in many cases still a goal to attain, the integration of many specialists is a common practice in hospice work.

Starting with very practical aspects, expecting death means a disruption in the everyday needs of a patient, a couple, or a family. The patient may need help with transportation, with finances, execut-

ing a will, and other personal errands. If the person is hosted on the hospice's premises, the patient is made to feel as close to home as possible. The patient should be able to bring in houseplants or private objects, music, clothes, favorite foods, and even such "unsanitary" things as a favorite pet. Visitors continue to be part of everyday life and are accommodated as much as possible. Couples should be given space for physical intimacy. Many of these tasks to ensure physical comfort can be facilitated by volunteers.

The other large component of physical care is the medical aspect, an essential point of it being pain control. Pain can be relieved with the aid of simple, logistic therapeutic interventions: a pillow placed in the right position, physical massage, or a change of diet can be the first important steps. A helping ear can help separate the different levels of pain and offer a degree of relief. Physical pain relief involves the delicate use of potent drugs such as morphine. In an anonymous setting, pain control can make addicts out of individuals afflicted with various levels of pain. It can kill the individual's will and turn patients into vegetables.

It has been found through clinical studies that fear of pain increases pain itself. Beyond a certain level, patients who are in pain and do not foresee an improvement of their situation in the near future experience horror and hopelessness. Pain control cannot accomplish its role without enhancement of the patient's responsibility. That is why in hospice settings it is important that patients are able to administer their own medications to find their individual level of comfort. This is a very practical way to reduce the amount of morphine and other addictive substances.

The doctor who views patients as more than medical problems has to develop a whole new perspective on the medical profession. Dr. Robert Twycross has written *The Ten Commandments for Physicians*, dealing with the pain of terminal cancer.²⁰ Among his tasks he lists the need for a doctor to consider the patient's feelings and support the whole family. This means including the patient in their private life, at least to some degree.

Psychological needs are cared for in a variety of ways. The most urgent need of patients is to deal with the psychological turmoil of dying. Counseling helps them come to terms with their feelings. It should allow them to resolve family issues and prepare themselves for

crossing to the other side. It may help them through single steps of their illness or prepare them for a difficult chemotherapy or for the will that it takes to face a different physical appearance after medical interventions.

Kübler-Ross contributed to the understanding of the emotional transition into dying with the now famous five emotional stages: *denial*, *anger*, *bargaining*, *depression*, and *acceptance*. At each stage the hospice patient discovers new challenges to personal growth. These stages should not, however, be understood as a mechanical sequence, but rather as a fluid continuum. Within this perspective, they blend into each other in a highly personal way, so much so that some stages may be barely present in some instances. In a later book, *Death: The Final Stage of Life*, Kübler-Ross adds to these five steps (which she dubbed “stages of resistance”) another two: a *stage-of-life review*, facilitating the completion of “unfinished business,” and a *stage of transcendence*, an active preview of what is to come in the life of the spirit. In 1963, Robert Butler wrote about his patients’ urge to do the life review and proposed using this process as a therapeutic tool to facilitate life closure.²¹ This process offers patients a sense of an emerging self beyond the confines of the body and a whole new sense of wonder and ecstasy.

Emotional support does not end with patients. It is extended to their loved ones through bereavement or support groups, pastoral care, and the like. It is clinically proven that the bereaved stand a much higher risk of contracting illnesses or having accidents.

Finally, it may be difficult to clearly separate what is psychological and what is purely spiritual when dying obliges us to question our core beliefs. Nevertheless, the presence of a pastor, priest, rabbi, or other religious professional is a necessity for those who want to turn to an understanding of the spiritual world. It is not the role of the clergy to work at a conversion—rather to offer answers to the soul who earnestly seeks understanding that lies beyond the limits of physical existence. This last element is what holds together patients, professionals, and those people who are open to it. Spiritual support, although primarily given by the clergy, is given by the whole spectrum of people in hospice. It is most often given in a way that encourages patients’ own religious convictions. Most of the patients appreciate the staff’s desire to act toward them in a religiously or spiritually motivated man-

ner. Under optimal conditions, this means a certain level of familiarity with people's beliefs and backgrounds.

Without the capacity to embark on a journey of self-knowledge, hospice work may be more than many could handle. When self-development is integrated, hospice work rewards professionals and volunteers more than any similar profession could. When self-development goes hand in hand with an intense interest in the other human being, death becomes a path of development for the dying and the living alike.

It is of great interest to the scope of this work that hospice work makes the reality of the soul a visible experience for those who work around it. It has been observed that two to four months before death, sleeping patterns change. Patients will start taking afternoon naps, then morning naps, and finally spend more time asleep than awake. They will be more at home in their dream world than in day consciousness. This is why their visions and communications with departed ones increase. Some visions may be drug induced, but these will tend to include the living as well as the dead. When the patient starts to see only departed ones, we can be sure the time of death is near. We can conclude from the wealth of observations that, for the dying, both worlds are true and present at the same time, and patients may have trouble discriminating between the two. This explains why their language becomes symbolic or imaginative in order to include the new level of reality.²²

Dr. Karlis Osis and Dr. Erlunder Haraldsson found that 84% of patients have visions of dead relatives to whom they felt close. They also witnessed apparitions that ranged from angels to beings of light and spirit guides. These visions are culturally colored; for example, Christians will see angels, Jesus, or the Virgin Mary, and Hindus will see Yama (the god of death), Krishna or one of his messengers, or another of their deities. These visions occur regardless of whether or not medication was taken. Around the time of death, people start to transform; as their bodies die, the dying seem to awaken to the spirit.²³

From actively living in the dimension of the spirit in practical ways, it naturally follows that hospice has fostered the understanding that artificial life preservation is not desirable. Death needs to be consecrated, not endlessly postponed, when it is becoming unavoidable.

Euthanasia, too, becomes absurd when pain is controlled and patients are loved. No patient who could control the dread of pain and loneliness can still desire induced death, nor could hospice entertain the thought. Saunders, who was a vocal opponent of euthanasia, offers examples of patients in critical condition who entered hospice with the desire to die, but not only came to feel at ease in the new settings, but also managed to die peacefully and reconciled to their fate.

Hospice not only promotes a better understanding of the spiritual element that surrounds us, but, by catering to the needs of the dying and their loved ones, also helps to restore the community network that conventional medicine has most often disrupted. Hospice—in practice, most often the home—is the place where dying patients can be in the company of children and family. This makes it possible for family members to incorporate death into their daily experience and witness the transformation that every human being undergoes through such an experience. Dying at home gives the bereaved a sense of completion that impersonal hospital care cannot offer. The death of a beloved one can be the beginning of a quest for meaning and the avenue to new discoveries of the spirit.

Caregivers see their relationships extending beyond their professional role. They may choose to share in recreational activities or rituals, particularly funerals, and offer support at the hour of a medical treatment or share in social or personal occasions on hospice premises. Contacts will continue after the death, in a first step with bereavement accompaniment. Bereaved families may decide to contact and support each other. People come together who would not do so in other circumstances. These links often go on among relatives after the death of the patient. Thus new, unexpected relationships develop that effectively replace traditional structures that have mostly died out in modern societies.

Death, as the most critical part of life, is the most “spiritually charged” event in life. Hardly any time is as important as dying; no place can cause so much pain as well as hard-wrought wisdom and joy. The two possible outcomes make a world of difference. Bereaved people can go on mourning and holding the deceased captive to this side of existence. Otherwise, our purpose for life on Earth can find harmonious resolution and culmination even in the act of dying. Hospice can effectively restore the sacredness of death and offer the fruits

of such an experience to modern-day individuals. Many family members can describe the death of a loved one as both one of the most trying and most memorable times of their lives.

Such an experience may be, for some, the first window through which to view the sacred. The following is the experience of Virginia Hine at the death of her husband:

There are moments of closeness that can heal long years of scratchy and even hostile relationships. There is a strange “ethereal” quality to the way a dying person looks just before death. My husband died of a disease that had rendered his strong body quite misshapen by the end. Yet to those of us who were tending him, he began to look incredibly beautiful a few days before he died.... Death really does have its own majesty, if it is allowed, and it seems to affect the perceptions of those involved in it. Religious people have many ways of explaining this emergence of beauty at the very end of life, but you don’t have to be religious, in the conventional sense, to experience it.²⁴

Through Death to the Spirit: Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, whose work offers new glimpses at the direction that hospice work can take in the future, stands as the representative of the second phase of growth of hospice, its growth into a movement that is actively shaping its own spirituality and contribution to modern culture.

Sometimes called the “death and dying lady,” Kübler-Ross herself would rather have been remembered as the “life and living lady.” Nothing is more apparent to those who experienced her presence than her endless vitality. Her work schedule was one of the busiest anyone could endure. She could survive continued exertion, lack of sleep, poor diet, and other sources of stress, apparently without them taking a toll on her body. So much energy came from a woman barely five feet tall, weighing only a hundred pounds.

In Kübler-Ross’s biography, a few elements seem to point toward her life mission: her upbringing, the influence of Switzerland and the United States, her personal experiences with death, and finally her

scientific training.

Raised in Switzerland, where she lived until age thirty-two, she immigrated to America. Her upbringing gave her strength and assurance, coming from a life steeped in traditions, festivals, love of nature and art, within a tight-knit social fabric. Of those days she also recalled her love for animals and her care of the vegetable garden. Her biographer, Derek Gill, mentions her going to a secret rock where she performed her own sun dances “in the manner of the Native Americans.” Kübler-Ross acknowledged her debt to Switzerland thus: “I had ... my family, memories of hiking and climbing in the Swiss mountains, strolling through moors and forests, collecting rocks.... Without them I would probably not have survived and achieved as I have.”²⁵

America provided her a completely new opportunity. Having come from the land of tradition, she now faced the opportunity to innovate. This is how she viewed the contrast: “My destiny had to be the United States, where I was free to pursue my own work, my own research and my own teaching, none of which could have been possible in any other part of the world.”²⁶ Kübler-Ross was in the unique situation of witnessing how an old culture made death part of life, and then arriving at its antithesis—a society where death was shunned and completely ignored.

Death itself was a constant companion in Kübler-Ross’s life, practically since the day of her birth. Born a very weak triplet, she survived only through her mother’s devoted round-the-clock care. She weighed only two pounds and had to be nursed by a baby-doll bottle. In regard to this exceptional birth and her being a triplet, Kübler-Ross bore ambivalent feelings. She partly felt that she was an unwanted child, and expressed it in this way: “I think that nothing in life is a coincidence, not even my birth, because it gave me the feeling all my life that I had to prove that even a two-pound ‘nothing’ was worthy of living. Therefore I worked very hard, like some people do who think that they have to work ten times as hard to keep a job.”²⁷

At age five, she contracted pleuritic pneumonia; her father’s blood provided vital support. At age twenty-two, returning to Switzerland from Poland in the aftermath of the war, she fell ill with typhoid. This she survived partly because of the strength that allowed her to follow an inner voice telling her to keep moving her limbs.

Another element prepared Kübler-Ross to be a trailblazer in

her field. Although deeply steeped in tradition, her family wasn't religious. When she met with the scientific worldview, she naturally adopted it while at the same time retaining everything she had been taught during her upbringing. Thus, she was able to address the scientific world with the credentials of a medical doctor. Although not religious, she had deeper spiritual cravings, as we have seen from a few elements in her biography. A restless urge compelled her to find answers to humanity's deeper riddles. In sixth grade, in a composition entitled, "My Dream of What I Could Be," she had written, "I want to be a researcher and explorer of unknown frontiers of human knowledge." And she further added, "I want to study life. I want to study the nature of man, the nature of animals and the nature of plant life."²⁸ All her yearnings could not be blotted out by her scientific knowledge, and later she did actively pursue a spiritual understanding of the world.

All of the life circumstances described so far wouldn't yet point to what made Kübler-Ross's personality so unique. In the brief interval of time between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one, she was completely immersed in an understanding of human suffering and working to relieving it, practically without interruption. Professionally, as well as during all of her holiday time as a volunteer, she listened to and worked with refugees, prostitutes, blind children, the wounded, orphans, and Nazi prisoners, among others. Her first day working for eleven hours with World War I refugees coming to Switzerland, she called the happiest day of her life. She had just turned eighteen.

At age twenty-one, Kübler-Ross met the woman she called Golda, in the concentration camp of Maidanek, Poland. Golda, a German Jew, was a miraculous survivor of the gas chambers. Although the rest of her family had died, she vowed to forgive all who caused her hurt. Because of the contrast between the horror of Maidanek and Golda's love, Kübler-Ross formulated an important question that would determine the later course of her life. How can evil hold sway in the world in such a way? How can individuals allow it to happen? As soon as she arrived in America, she experienced human callousness in a way reminiscent of Maidanek, although on a much lower scale—this time toward mentally ill patients in Manhattan's State Hospital. She pondered the image of the butterfly she had seen drawn on the walls of Maidanek by many children. Here was an image of innocence and hope amidst the horrors of inhuman death. This led her to important

discoveries she would utilize later in her career.

Having realized early in life that the possibility of evil lives in each of us, Kübler-Ross started focusing on the issue of death. It came to her from two perspectives. The 1960s had introduced organ transplants along with associated moral issues. In her own words, “the transplant of organs, especially kidneys and hearts, raised an important question as to when are we ethically, morally and legally allowed to remove an organ out of a patient in order to save another person’s life.”²⁹ The question came to her in a second way from the American medical profession’s attitude toward dying patients. Why was death ignored and shunned? Why were dying people left with no support? These questions led her to first explore the experience of dying people by simply listening to them. Later on, she understood ways to alleviate their suffering.

This was the new frontier Kübler-Ross had intuited in her sixth grade composition, a frontier that would later test her limits as well as people’s ability to follow her. In 1969, at age forty-three, two important events propelled her to the task that made her famous. The Macmillan publishing house asked her to write 50,000 words on death and dying; the book that resulted from it sold very well. In that same year, *Life* magazine wrote the famous article about Kübler-Ross’s interview with Eva—a twenty-one-year-old woman dying of leukemia. From the reaction of her colleagues in the hospital of Northwestern University Medical Center of Chicago, she knew she could not continue her work in the same setting, and not within the scientific community. The reaction to her book and the prompt readers’ responses to the *Life* article propelled her into a new career—death and dying workshops all around the world.

Kübler-Ross felt that working with death was just the first part of her task. The success she encountered also taught her to handle fame. But her real task encompassed more. It wasn’t just the attitude toward death that she challenged, but all the belief systems that surrounded it. She had observed that children, before dying, became aware of those who had preceded them in death, even though they had not been told for obvious reasons. She had studied the case of children involved in car accidents around major national holidays. Many of them had survived their family members before dying themselves. To spare them additional stress and pain, they had not been told of their

siblings' or parents' deaths, but would still recognize them at death's door. Similar to the Golda episode, it was again a simple woman, Mrs. Schwartz, who opened for Kübler-Ross the research on near-death experiences. At a point when Kübler-Ross was discouraged and contemplated abandoning her work, Mrs. Schwartz, recently dead, appeared in a disembodied form to the unbelieving doctor. She entreated the doctor to continue her work. Moreover, she assured her of the continuing help of departed souls.

In the years to follow, Kübler-Ross embarked on an oft-tumultuous exploration of spiritual reality. It sometimes led her to extreme experiences due to her impatience and desire to obtain knowledge of the other side prematurely. These also resulted, in some instances, from her trust in the wrong people. Nevertheless, her earnest desire to serve humanity led her past these obstacles. She thus acquired a growing certitude about the spiritual world and received spiritual guidance from departed souls, two of whom she mentions repeatedly in her biography—Pedro and Salem.

The spiritual experiences are central to an understanding of Kübler-Ross's life and work, as we have already seen on the occasion of Ms. Schwartz's apparition. In a revealing statement in her autobiography, Kübler-Ross says that "if I had not been on the other side, I would not be able to be with dying children, with parents of murdered children."³⁰

Kübler-Ross had at least three important spiritual experiences. The first occurred in 1976, at the Monroe Farm in Virginia.³¹ This was a laboratory environment designed to stimulate out-of-body experiences. She was in a soundproof booth, lying on a waterbed, eyes blindfolded. Relaxation was induced by artificial sound pulses. Against the advice of the scientists, she asked that they send the highest impulses possible. Of the resulting experience, she said that she did not know where she was, and she had the feeling of having gone too far. Upon going to sleep, she was besieged by nightmares. This was what she defined as "going through a thousand deaths." One after the other she experienced—bodily and psychologically—the deaths of all the patients she had assisted. The pain was so intense that she somehow got to the other side, rising above it. After a series of experiences connected with the perception of her body as an energetic field, she came in contact with the white light that she knew from the description of

her dying patients, merging into a blissful state of warmth and love. On coming out of the experience, she could perceive, in a heightened state, the energetic field of all living beings. When that faded she had to struggle to reintegrate into everyday life and apparent humdrum reality.

A second experience, which occurred two years later, was a typical NDE caused by three bites of black widow spiders, which would normally cause death. Kübler-Ross felt she had a choice between living and dying. Walking into the living room, where a picture of Jesus hung on the wall, she made the vow to keep living. At that moment she felt enveloped by a bright light and moved toward it, knowing that she would survive.

A final NDE occurred when she visited her sister Eva in Switzerland in 1988. There she expressed to Eva that she was dying and ready to go. Once again, she experienced the white light and returned to this side of existence.

In many ways Kübler-Ross was endowed with special gifts of perception. One of those she describes as follows:

I have had the great blessing of being able to see with my own physical eyes the presence of hundreds of those energy patterns (of people) in full daylight. And it is very similar to a fluttering, pulsating series of different snowflakes, all with their different lights and colors and their different forms and shapes. This is what we look like after we die. This is also how we exist before we are born. We take up no space and it takes us no time to go from one star to another or from planet Earth to another galaxy."³²

These observations undoubtedly point to her special mission in connection to death and dying. In her, we find the desire of the modern soul to bring spirituality and science to a dialogue where neither is subjugated to the other.

**COMMUNICATING WITH HONESTY AND EMPATHY:
NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION**

*Out beyond the idea of rightdoing and wrongdoing
there is a field.
I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass the world is too
full to talk about.*

Rumi

Nonviolent communication (NVC) is included in this work as the most significant tool dealing specifically with language and communication. Within the blossoming field of similar approaches, it has been chosen because of the universality of its principles, the inherently phenomenological approach that leads to the concepts it elaborates, and the thoroughness of its analysis.

From early on, Marshall Rosenberg, the founder of NVC, both witnessed violence around him and was the object of it. His family went to live in a neighborhood of Detroit in 1943 when he was a child. This was the time of the second-worst race riots in the history of the US. Thirty-three people were killed in three days, mostly African Americans. Rosenberg was the target of racial hatred directed at Jews, and knew what it meant not to feel safe at school.

Marked by these episodes, he wanted to understand what moved people to act violently toward each other and what moved some individuals, even in trying circumstances, to act with compassion and understanding. After completing his studies, he received his PhD in clinical psychology from the University of Wisconsin in 1961. He was dissatisfied with the approach of clinical psychology, particularly its emphasis on the problem rather than on resources, and its judgmental language. This brought him closer to the views of such pioneers as Rogers and Maslow.

However, Rosenberg felt psychology did not offer answers to his larger questions; thus, after studying psychology he immersed himself in comparative religion. He was puzzled by the frequent use of the word *love*, and came to define it as something we want to manifest and do rather than as a feeling. He was further helped by psychological research that looks at what constitutes healthy relationships and how

love is manifested in this context. This helped him come to the conclusion that human beings are not inherently violent, and launched him on the pursuit of a kind of communication that would promote nonviolence. In this context, violence is any power we use to force people to do what we want. Physical violence is only a small part of it; the systems of punishment and reward and the use of guilt and shame or duty and obligation form the larger part of the picture. Another aspect is the perpetuation of violence that is enshrined in the way we speak, from single words to trivial but common expressions that denote and perpetuate judgment, criticism, analysis, and diagnosis towards self or others.

The result of Rosenberg's efforts was the founding of the Center for Nonviolent Communication in 1984. By 1998, the center had trained 600 schoolteachers who taught more than 12,000 students. In 2002, more than 120 trainers taught NVC skills to an estimated 50,000 people. NVC trainers work with educators, managers, caring professions, lawyers, military and police personnel, clergy, and government officials, among others. Rosenberg and other trainers work in war-torn areas, economically disadvantaged countries, schools, inner city areas, and businesses.

Rosenberg explains that NVC in itself is only a tool for the goal of increasing awareness of our own and other people's feelings and needs, in a way that enriches everybody's life. NVC as a method is the gateway to a new consciousness. Only when this new consciousness is acquired can NVC claim to be fully successful.

NVC works from two angles.³³ First, it puts us in touch with our self, mostly through the expression of our feelings and needs. This is what it calls *honesty*. At a second level it asks us to be sensitive to the needs and feelings of others, i.e., to be empathic. The dialogue of NVC is a subtle dance between the arts of honesty and empathy, and the discernment it takes to recognize when one or the other is needed. It is all based on communication in the present in order to stay away from the temptation to talk about things of the past, where facts are inextricably mixed with interpretations.

The first strength of NVC is the phenomenological definition of the levels of language. If we look at the language components of NVC, we will distinguish four primary levels in the structure of com-

munication: observation, expression of feelings, expression of needs, and formulation of requests.

At the first level of an interaction or dialogue is the idea of accurate observation. What is it that defines observation and distinguishes it from interpretation? Our familiar language lays many traps. We often say things like “You are *always* late,” or “You *never* do...” when we may say more correctly, “Four times out of the last five you were late,” or “You haven’t done the jobs you promised me, twice already.” Language that is not truly reflective of reality is, by definition, alienating.

At another level is everything we try to define in the emotional realm. Here, too, we can remain *objective* (e.g., “I feel/am upset, hurt, sad, angry”) or exit into the realm of *interpretation* (e.g., “I feel manipulated, rejected, abandoned”), of which nothing can be said with certainty. When I say words like *manipulated* or *abandoned*, I immediately project an interpretation of somebody’s intention into my feelings, by implying that the other person had the intention to manipulate or abandon me. At this level, a key distinction needs to be expressed. In the realm of feelings and their expression, we often confuse *stimulus* and *cause*. No two individuals react in the same way to external stimuli, whether a source of joy or pain or anything in between. An expression such as “You *make* me angry” blurs the distinction between cause and stimulus, and detracts from the ability to take responsibility for our feelings. Going a step further, feelings that are not pertinently expressed and/or inwardly apprehended form a barrier to one’s understanding and self-connection.

At the next level is the expression of our needs. Here too, language can reflect that we are truly in touch with our objective needs and aware of them—as in “I need respect, assistance, support, communication, growth, self-expression, freedom.” Or our language may reflect that we are alienated from our deeper self—as in “I need you to be nicer to me, I need you to do what I want, I need a new car, career, girl/boyfriend, in order to be happy.” In the first example, we are expressing what individuals want and need in a universal way; in the second, the needs of the individual concern external factors instead of the self. When we express a need in a universal manner, we are not depriving anybody else of his or her freedom. Needs, when truly understood and expressed in a universal way, are not mutually exclusive.

My desire for comfort, safety, or respect need never be expressed at the expense of anyone else's comfort, safety, or respect. My desire for anyone to be nicer to me imposes my expectations of what "being nice" means upon the other person. A need expressed in those terms is neither universal nor conducive to productive communication and connection.

Not expressing our needs in the appropriate context comes at a price. What is at stake is not only our connection with others but also with the self. Understanding our needs is often more difficult than understanding our feelings, which are more immediate. Feelings inform us about our needs. The two together help us express both honesty and empathy, with ourselves and others.

When we can correctly observe and express our feelings and needs, we can then pursue ways to satisfy our needs. At this level the self expresses itself with either *requests* or *demands*. Demands are non-negotiable strategies, which are often perceived as the only way to reach a goal. Requests differ from demands in that they are part of a dialogue and involve negotiation, illustrating that there are many ways to reach one's goal without denying the other person's goal. The most important difference between requests and demands lies in how we react when we hear the response *No*. Hearing *no* does not affect a person who makes a request, unlike the one who puts out a disguised demand.

We can express ourselves from either an inclusive or exclusive perspective—this is all reflected in our choice of language. In the world of nonviolent communication, these two perspectives are familiarly called *jackal* and *giraffe*. The giraffe, in this context, has been chosen as one of the gentlest animals, with the largest heart in creation, and symbolizes the ability to look at events with detachment and a sense of peace. The jackal offers the more self-centered perspective.

From the perspective of giraffe/jackal, NVC distinguishes four ways of receiving a message. If we are centered in ourselves—giraffe perspective—we will hear another person's input in such a way that it will *inform* us of either the other person's feelings and needs, or our own. From the jackal's perspective, we will formulate *criticism* of the other person or of ourselves.

To make dialogue productive, NVC has us perform a dance—between honesty and empathy in the art of hearing both our own and

the other person's deeper needs and feelings. Nowhere in the practice of NVC should we deny the jackal voices that surface into our consciousness. These voices are the object of self-empathy, the same kind of empathy we would offer another person. A "jackal message" contains vital information about one's feelings and needs. Jackal messages play an active part in our daily living, and it is only through our acceptance and slow transformation of them that we can speak a language that is truly respectful of all beings, including ourselves.

The above is a very simplified version of the study of language and communication at the core of NVC. Language must be finely honed to determine what part of it is an expression of self, and what part betrays a desire to manipulate for our own advantage or play the victim of circumstances. NVC provides an exhaustive analysis of all the variations of expression and their higher and lower effectiveness in promoting the well being of the person engaged in conversation.

Nonviolent communication, not unlike other approaches we have analyzed, is a tool for moving away from a moralistic worldview to an inner morality of our higher self. From this vantage point there is no need for either/or, good/bad, winner/loser. As with family constellations or the Twelve Steps, it is an invitation to take responsibility for our lives, which we can do only when we abandon harsh judgments of self and others. NVC moves away from looking at the past, because speaking about the past often increases pain, causing us to relive it again. What lives in the present is stimulated by the past but is much more accessible and objective. The only possible exception is when we have to do work with a past trauma, e.g., when role-playing a perpetrator.

Nonviolent Communication and the Heart of Social Change

As a method, NVC is the gateway to practical spirituality.³⁴ After using it purely as a communication tool, many will awaken to experience a clearer relationship to the self. The greatest joy comes from feeling connected to the life around us and contributing to the enrichment of our own and other people's lives. It is more of an experience than a feeling. Two important questions to ask ourselves are, "What is alive in us at the moment?" and "What can we do to contribute to life, our own or that of others?" Even though these questions are simple, we

often don't know how to answer them because we may be disconnected from our feelings and needs. Through NVC we can discern what supports life in us and others, and what does not. But we need to do this in a way that does not introduce evaluations and judgments of the other person.

True connection with self and others offers us an insight of what “divine energy” feels like. A way to visualize this idea has been introduced by Joseph Campbell's idea of not doing anything that isn't play—in other words of not doing anything in order to obtain a reward or to avoid punishment. We simply set as our goal to do what contributes to life.

Given its immediate practical emphasis, NVC is probably the tool that most easily moves outward from the individual to the largest social levels. We can indicate this transition schematically in the following way:

1. Connect to everything in life that promotes our *inner* peace.
2. Create life-enriching connections in our *relationships*.
3. Promote positive change in existing *social structures* as well as create new, life-enriching structures.³⁵

Whether with two people, two groups, or two countries, the principles of NVC are the same. The focus of the process lies in seeing the beauty of enriching life (our own), the liveliness of a relationship, or the life-giving capacity of social structures. What will change, especially on a broader level, are the preparation steps and speed of the process.

Practicing nonviolent communication on ourselves leads us to the idea of learning from our mistakes without losing our self-respect, an aspect of the practice of *self-empathy*. When we do this in the way in which most of us have been educated, we will punish ourselves by judging ourselves and consequently feel shame, guilt, and depression. If we allow ourselves to feel the pain of our unmet needs and to connect to the act or words we regret, we will feel a natural pain, a *sweet* pain—sweet in comparison with the pain of depression, guilt, and shame. Mourning will give us the opportunity to get in touch with a

beneficial regret. This uncomfortable pain, easy to repress, will allow us to see the needs that weren't met in the choice we regret—especially by feeling empathy toward what the other person experienced—as well as the need we were trying to meet. Having done this, we can envision how all our needs would be better met next time. The whole process takes place at equal distance from guilt and denial, which is a way to make our pain productive, rather than turning it into outer or inner violence.

Mourning is an alternative to apology, as it is commonly understood. An apology implies that something is wrong with us and that admitting it to another person sets the record straight; it also implies the need for instant resolution. Furthermore, apologizing can become an end in itself, a quick way out of a difficulty with no learning associated with it.

Once we understand that every action that may hurt us is the expression of our needs, then we can respond empathically when people diagnose us, respond to us with silence, or when they say *no*. In every instance we can seek to understand what their needs and feelings are. With practice, we become able to hear something said to us, not as a judgment, but as vital information that allows us to connect with the other person. In the empathic dance we express what is alive in us and try to see what is alive in the other person. The key of the process lies in not wanting to change the other, but in helping ourselves and others realize that there are better ways to meet our needs at a lesser emotional cost.

As was the case in the personal experience of mourning, there is an important tool in *gratitude*. It is a deceptively simple idea that requires practice, but when it succeeds, it enriches relationships. What we generally understand as *compliments* and *praise* do not serve the same goals as clearly expressed gratitude, because they are most commonly couched in moralistic judgments, such as, “You are great” or “You blew it.” Although not as immediately damaging as criticism, positive judgments offer little to our growth. They tell us nothing about ourselves and give little specific feedback on which to capitalize in the future. Praise and compliments—as has been proven—have only short-term success.

To be effective, gratitude should be specific to an action that has enriched our life, and on which we are clear about how it has affected our feelings and especially our needs. Expressing gratitude offers the giver and the receiver consciousness of their power to enrich life. Expressed gratitude fulfills the receiver's need to participate in contributing to the common wellbeing. Feedback for what we do is much more necessary and fruitful than we commonly acknowledge. Receiving gratitude can be difficult because social habit has us brush it off or hide the idea that we should rejoice in receiving it. The more we are connected to life in ourselves, the more we are able to receive gratitude as well as hear the other person's needs behind any criticism, since both offer us the opportunity to better contribute to our own and other people's wellbeing.

On a final level, social change comes from focusing on the beauty of what we *want* and not on what we *oppose*. Understanding the injustice of "domination structures" that perpetrate violent relationships in most of our social landscape is generally seen as the reason for requesting quick social change. In the NVC approach, this understanding does not lead to the same line of action. We can just as readily recognize the nature of alienating structures and behaviors around us, but, as with change, this is a much longer process. All social change comes down to numbers and momentum. Organizations and structures will change from within when a sufficient number of participants see different and more efficient ways to meet their needs than they see within the main paradigm. In an NVC mode we cannot advocate destruction of those structures; rather we must work with the people within. This can be long and time consuming, which is why it requires the committed cooperation of many people. At the same time, NVC has already successfully worked at establishing alternative structures, especially in education. NVC schools exist in many countries and most often within the existing public school system. Here social change can be initiated within structures that are based on the idea of *sharing* power, rather than *holding* power over others. More will be said about this later.

People who meet in order to do social work may themselves carry layers of inner conflict, and their goals may be stalled by internal disharmony. NVC helps us to see what we want to change in ourselves, before what we want to change in the world, and realize that

unless we come from a certain conscious practical spirituality, we are bound to do more harm than good. This helps us to contribute to the common good, because we want to enrich life rather than correct what is wrong. In fact, we may first want to build spaces of celebration in our life that ensure that our action comes from a place of inner abundance.

In the process of promoting social change we will acquire clarity about what social structures would fit a way that meets everybody's needs—structures that work without rewards or punishments, structures where leaders are also servants. For that to occur, we must base our efforts on the idea that we do not work for money, but rather in order to satisfy ours and other people's needs, especially spiritual needs. Money is such an integral component of our world that it is most often implicitly taken for a need, and used in a system of reward and punishment that does not honor a person's needs. In this arbitrary scale of values, the needs of a doctor are more likely to be met than those of a manual laborer, implying that the needs of the former are intrinsically of more value than those of the latter. A conscious motivation for work comes from the organization's mission, not from money, status, or perks. A good organization expresses sincere gratitude to its workers and aims at promoting the satisfaction of their needs in accordance with its own mission.

Social work, especially in areas of great tension, requires some groundwork preparation that happens behind the scenes. In Illinois, a meeting between the school board and the recently created NVC school took ten months to schedule.³⁶ Since the board would not answer calls or direct requests for setting up a meeting, the school had to give NVC training to a person who had access to them. In another instance, Marshall Rosenberg did mediation work between Christian and Muslim tribes in Nigeria. It took an hour to resolve the matter, but six months were needed to get the two sides to sit together in the first place! Other such work in areas of conflict has been carried out in Israel and Palestine, between Serbs and Croats, in Northern Ireland, and Rwanda and Burundi, among others.

At times, before an especially charged meeting, the collaboration of a team is crucial. It may be necessary to do *despair work*—a term borrowed from Joanna R. Macy—whose goal is the transformation of all “enemy images” that prevent us from seeing a human being

in any person we are meeting. Let us see how this process was used at a critical point in the development of the above-mentioned NVC school in Illinois.

After the school was created, the school board had four new members who had subscribed to a platform of getting rid of the new school even after it had been successful enough to win a national award for educational excellence. It took ten months to arrange a meeting with the board. The meeting had to be kept secret because some of the board members did not want the press to know about it, since it would have been politically embarrassing. Marshall Rosenberg was very pained about things that had been said about him in the press, particularly by the board's superintendent. He had personal judgments about people on the board, particularly in regard to their sociopolitical choices. It took three hours of despair work the night before the meeting for his colleagues to hear the deeper needs behind his rage and hopelessness. Together they role-played the school superintendent to see his humanness and needs. The next day, coming across him before the meeting, Rosenberg was able to hear the superintendent's needs despite the pain that his reactions had triggered. The meeting went well, and in the evening the superintendent called and apologized for his past behavior and expressed the desire to hear more about NVC. At the next board meeting, he voted in favor of the school that he had been elected to sabotage.

Nonviolent Communication in Areas of Social Unrest

Trauma originating from social tensions can be dealt with, first of all, at the individual level. Let us look at the example of an Algerian woman who had been raped and forced to witness the death of a friend for matters most likely concerning enforcement of religious observance.³⁷ This process of healing is a kind of "mediation in absentia," except that in this case the perpetrator is role-played by an NVC trainer who will interpret the perpetrator's feelings and needs at the time of the acts.

A process of mediation usually starts with the victim, giving her a chance to express her feelings and needs until the perpetrator is able to hear them correctly. Then the process is reversed and the victim hears the perpetrator until she understands his feelings and needs. In the example of the Algerian woman, hearing the needs of the perpe-

trator is what allowed a healing that was sustained over many years. His suffering was the gateway to her healing. Surprisingly, as in that specific instance, the process can be done in a matter of one hour or two and in a room full of people. It is healing also for those present.

In the previously mentioned case of Nigeria, it took six months to convince the two tribes to meet. Thirty percent of the population had been killed because of the ethnic strife. There were people in the room who had many loved ones who had been killed by those of the other side; nevertheless, it took just an hour to resolve the matter.

Given the strength of the NVC process in mediation, it is not surprising that it is introduced more and more often in *restorative justice*—which is the idea that justice is better served when perpetrator and victim arrive at a mutual recognition of each other's feelings and needs. The common retributive justice of punishment and rewards is an economically and socially costly system that tends to perpetrate the ills it wants to protect us from. Restorative justice is an alternative that is not only more economic but also more conducive to social reconciliation and individual rehabilitation. Most recently, the Brazilian Ministry of Justice has requested NVC training for its first pilot project of restorative justice.

Nonviolent Communication in Business

Nu-Wheel is a Tucson business specializing in restoring used or damaged vehicle wheels. It was going through a difficult transition when traffic was diverted from its location because of public works; other misfortunes had rendered the owner very sensitive and irritable. Consultant Marie Miyashiro introduced NVC ideas to this business as “productive communication.”³⁸

Mr. Stevens, the owner, used to get irritated when there were delays in the orders or lowered performance standards. After NVC was introduced to him, he realized that business can become more productive through the introduction of policies and procedures that everybody can support, along with the ability to incorporate more employee feedback and work out alternative scenarios with them.

In organizations, time is thought of in terms of efficiency, and very often employees' feelings and needs are not considered or explored. This often generates unproductive meetings and feelings of frustration and alienation. When people see that their desires matter,

production will improve. It is equally important that supervisors perform evaluations that objectively *assess* rather than *criticize*.

Meetings can be places where things are decided with efficiency, but also places to strengthen human connections and renew interest in the work.³⁹ A way to ensure that kind of connection is to start with a quick check-in, where each person tells the group where he or she is at in the moment. It is also a moment to get quiet and reconnect with oneself. “I’m feeling excited about...” or “I am feeling overwhelmed about ...” could be sufficient. There are no comments offered, no questions and answers required.

During the meeting, each participant is invited to speak honestly with a focus on his or her own needs and feelings, refraining from using language that implies right or wrong, especially in others, without avoiding talking about sensitive issues. Before making any resolutions, the group can explore the needs of all, especially those who have reservations. Finally, everyone benefits from the incorporation of time for celebrating and being thankful for what others contribute to their lives.

NVC in Education

Our present system of education tends to reinforce domination structures. Public schools teach us obedience to authority and offer us the idea of work done for extrinsic rewards. In the final analysis, they tend to maintain and preserve the existing class system. It is possible, however, to envision a different system that would offer different outcomes. After educating ourselves, we can educate others to understand and use NVC. NVC schools teach respect for authority, but not obedience. With the realization that submission and rebellion take away our power, these schools will teach children to listen not for what is wanted of them, but for what others in authority need. Tests are given in order to see if the teachers have done their job; they are tests about the efficiency of the learning process. NVC schools now exist in the US, Serbia, Italy, Israel, Costa Rica, and a growing list of countries. Professors are introducing this new way of teaching at levels of higher education as well.

Skarpnäcks Free School of Stockholm, based on NVC principles, started in the fall of 1998. It then had twenty-four children, ages six to nine, and four teachers.⁴⁰ Four years later it had sixty-three stu-

dents, ages six to thirteen, and nine teachers. The initiative was founded on the wish of Swedish parents who desired a school based on democratic ideas and respectful, life-affirming relationships. Principles of NVC are not taught, but simply lived out by the faculty. The teachers wanted to include learning opportunities out in nature and in the community, offering the children a lot of projects but refraining from forcing them to participate. They felt that the most important thing was to empower the children to make independent choices, and trusted that this would also be an appropriate basis for acquiring academic skills.

The children could be divided, roughly, into three groups. The youngest children, who had been exposed to NVC education at home, were the most comfortable making choices. A second group was confused by the idea of options, and almost wished they would be *told* rather than *asked*. A third group, seeing that they had the choice, dragged their feet. The teachers felt tested, particularly by the last group, and often felt discouraged, although they recognized how much these children needed to experience real trust. This scenario went on for the entire first year and caused much apprehension in the teachers about the second year.

During the second year, the last group played out even more of a rebellious attitude. The teachers hung on to the realization that before saying *yes*, the children needed to experience their power to say *no*. It took them another full year to graduate to being able to say *yes* from their heart, and for teachers to still see the *yes* that hid behind their *no*. By the end of the third year, a strong level of trust had been built in the school community.

The process of inner transformation, especially within the faculty, is not clear cut, progressive, and harmonious; rather, it goes through ups and downs. But when NVC consciousness is strongest, the results do follow. The teachers are learning to spend more time listening and less time talking, and it is not an easy change. Since the process takes time, they are learning to celebrate—among themselves and with the children—every little success along the way. These are some of the most prominent results after three years:

- Most of the children show their appreciation by coming early and lingering after school; they play easily with each other.

- The number of conflicts has drastically decreased, and the students handle them more and more on their own.
- Teachers seldom experience open resistance from the students.
- Student test at or beyond the average national level.
- Students are asking teachers to be taught the NVC process.

Paulette Pierce is an associate professor at Ohio State University, where she teaches in the Department of African-American and African Studies to primarily African American students about topics that touch upon painful matters such as slavery, lynching, and rape.⁴¹ She had difficulty looking at these topics without refraining from blaming whites. Having herself embraced the violent perspective of the Black Power Movement earlier in her life, she had felt that it was important for whites to experience guilt and for blacks to experience their anger. This is part of the victim/oppressor perspective. With such a focus, the satisfaction of one's needs remains precarious. However, an alternative paradigm exists in history—that of the civil rights movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

NVC in the classroom goes against the perspective that in social life there are always winners and losers. Pierce saw the appeal of that perspective, but had difficulties with the NVC jargon and doubts as to whether she could be strong enough to handle the explosive feelings of her students. A strong incentive was her feeling of disconnection between her own life commitments and her style of teaching, even though she was passionate about her profession. As a teacher, in the past she was able to give all her opinions and act as an “intellectual gladiator” of oppressed people, encouraging others to do the same.

She set her goals explicitly with her students, while acknowledging the limitations of the setting, such as the need to grade them. She proposed to grade in order to educate and improve, offering individual and group projects as alternatives to exams and papers. She tried to set a new standard by explaining to her students that the goal of learning is not about deciding who is right or wrong. She supported this process by encouraging honest discussion of feelings and needs, shared leadership, and interracial cooperation.

During this experience, Paulette became much more conscious of her language, gestures, and ability to bring redress to situations where she had caused hurt. She also felt less need to be in control, and was therefore able to address situations of discomfort with the input of the students, finding that this would lead to better solutions than the ones she could have devised alone.

During the first year, many African American students became furious over the racial contents of an article in the student newspaper. The crisis was handled by processing the feelings and needs of those individuals who had felt most hurt, and doing this in racially mixed groups. The class decided to publish an alternative article, and organized a highly successful silent protest march on campus. Paulette estimated that the experiment was highly successful, even though she still feels afraid of putting herself in situations where she would be overwhelmed by the feelings of her students. Even before introducing NVC, students' issues could be so powerful that she had to offer recourse to the Office of Student Counseling Services.

As with many similar communication tools, NVC's value is far better appreciated by action than what can be said in writing. It is simple to understand, but difficult to internalize. In essence, it is a tool for connecting with both our deeper self and others. Its use should ultimately render us equally open to appreciation and to criticism. The ultimate goal of any kind of feedback is to allow us to find out whether there is fulfillment of our life intentions, much more than a need for approval.

PRAYER AND SPIRITUAL HEALING

*If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of.*

Alfred Tennyson

Our previous examples of modern experiential spirituality have put forward its importance for the advancement of personal or social healing. It is within this context that spiritual healing finds its place. Even though this may surprise us at first, the reader will find here much of

what has emerged earlier. In addition we will find a link to what we have explored in the earlier chapters of the book that concern spirituality proper.

Prayer has been defined in countless ways throughout the centuries, according to a variety of types and methods. Nevertheless, a constant element of prayer is the belief that when we ask something of God, a Higher Power, or the spiritual world, we can receive an answer that will manifest in the physical world. Agnes Sanford, a pioneer in the field of whom more will be said later, believed that we should proceed into the realm of prayer as we do in the realm of science. What can appear as a miracle—and therefore as something that we cannot find an explanation for—is the result of higher laws that operate beyond the physical realm but ultimately manifest in our world. Amazingly, she indicates that the healing of the body is one of the simplest and most direct ways to test what prayer is.⁴²

Prayer and Healing: Scientific Evidence

Placing prayer and healing side-by-side may raise some eyebrows, especially in scientific quarters; but to those who pray, the association of these concepts is familiar. Let us have a look, from a scientific perspective, at a growing host of phenomena that have already caused many scientists to enlarge their worldviews. We will need to turn to churches and hospitals, doctors, healers, and priests to start formulating an answer.

In England, the US, Canada, and many Eastern European countries, there is a movement of cooperation between traditional medicine and spiritual or energy healing. In 1994, at least three general-practice surgeries in England had spiritual healers paid by the government under the National Health Plan. It was estimated that about 1,500 healers worked at one point or another in British hospitals.⁴³ In Canada and the US there have been about 30,000 nurses using therapeutic touch in hospitals and clinics. The founder of this therapeutic technique is Dolores Krieger, who taught nursing at New York University. A close equivalent, bio-energy therapy, was officially accepted by Polish authorities in 1982. The same can be said about Qigong, based upon the healing effects of certain hand motions: waving, pushing, pulling, and circling, which are done at a short distance from the patient's body.

Since right after World War II, churches—particularly Anglican and Roman Catholic churches—have revived an ancient form of healing, the one that tradition knows of as the “laying on of hands.” All of this is done without any sensationalism, and is also practiced more and more throughout England, Canada, and the US. The trend, however, is not limited to Christian denominations. In the US particularly, a word of caution is necessary regarding television healers. We do not place them on the same level, even if some of them may have genuine healing powers. Many hoaxes have been discovered that cast a serious shadow of doubt over most of the movement; spiritual gifts do not mix well with media sensationalism and the temptation for quick profit.

It is a well-kept secret that scientific research in the field of energy healing has a respectable past and a sizeable accumulation of data and observations. Dr. Larry Dossey has retrieved about one hundred scientifically sound experiments on the topic. Half of them show evidence of prayer’s influence in human life. If we look at the total of experiments with humans and other living beings, there have been more than three hundred such studies since the early 1960s.⁴⁴ We will look at them more closely, but first let us consider some phenomena and scientific observations.

Scientists have a host of terminologies that conceal evidence rather than elucidate it; one of these consists of the cases of spontaneous regressions—unexplained instances of healing. The fact that their occurrence is limited makes many in the field see the dismissal of these cases justifiable in light of the dictum, “The exception justifies the rule,” in itself a very questionable scientific tenet. Another term that covers up more than it possibly explains reality is the *placebo effect*—instances of health improvement when patients are given a neutral substance under the claim that it is an effective medication. It could be argued that the placebo effect proves that mind or spirit has an effect that often goes beyond what matter alone can achieve. In this sense, a placebo is a repository term not dissimilar from spontaneous regression. None of the above dismissals are possible from a phenomenological approach. Disease is what informs us about that indefinable thing that we call health. Aberrations tell us about “normality.” No phenomenon enters the statistical perspective in this view of things. Spontaneous regression or placebo effects are not unexplain-

able anomalies; rather they are phenomena in which higher laws are at work in matters of health.

Yujiro Ikemi, at the Kyushu University School of Medicine in Fukuoka, Japan, conducted rigorous studies on five cases of spontaneous regressions from cancer, including confirmation by biopsy of the illness.⁴⁵ In these cases, regression does not necessarily mean complete disappearance, but rather, at whatever stage the disease may be present, it has ceased to have an effect on the patient's health.

The first individual was a practitioner of Shinto. At the age of twenty-one, he was appointed a teacher. At age sixty-four, he was diagnosed with cancer of the right upper jaw. He was totally accepting of God's will and showed no tendency towards depression. He did not fight against the cancer other than with the moral support given him by leaders in his church. He lived for the next thirteen years without any form of medical treatment and died at age seventy-eight from a trauma to his back.

A second patient was diagnosed with adenocarcinoma at age seventy-seven. He declined surgery and accepted the will of God. Four years later the cancer had regressed. A Japanese housewife married a difficult husband at age twenty-four. In 1966, at age thirty-one, she was diagnosed with adenocarcinoma with numerous metastases. Two-thirds of her stomach was removed and she was given three months to live. She was strong in her religious faith, and nine years later x-rays showed no sign of the previous metastases.

The other two stories are essentially the same as the ones described here. A certain pattern emerges from all of the patients: They all accepted responsibility for their illnesses and life crises, and no anxiety or depression followed their diagnoses. All of them had deep faith and gave themselves to the will of God.

The above examples—although eloquent in themselves—cannot be qualified as true experiments in the most classical use of the term. Let us move further, to more laboratory-defined experiments on the power of prayer, spiritual healing, and ultimately the power of the mind over matter—or over deterministically defined events. These next experiments involve human beings. Unfortunately, and quite understandably, these are the most difficult ones to achieve in an experimental setting. Experiments conducted by Dr. Randolph Byrd, a practicing Christian, have been highly publicized.⁴⁶ He conducted the dou-

ble-blind experiments at San Francisco General Hospital with a group of 192 patients who were prayed for by prayer groups, and a control group of 201 who were left to medical cures alone. The people in the prayer groups were told the first names of the patients with a short description of their diagnosis. The results indicated that the prayed-for patients:

- Were five times less likely to require antibiotics
- Were three times less likely to develop pulmonary edema
- Did not require endotracheal intubation, whereas twelve in the other group did.

Overall, this seems to amount to a strengthening of the immune system. There was, however, no significant difference in mortality. Part of this conclusion—quite understandably—comes from the fact that doctors could not give equal treatment to the patients; thus, for example, those patients whose immune systems were most affected probably received more antibiotics and treatments to help speed up the recovery. The studies had many problems built into them that render them inconclusive.

Dr. Seán O’Laire, a Roman Catholic priest, headed a research project on intercessory prayer through the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, California.⁴⁷ It was a controlled, randomized, double-blind experiment to test mood, self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and other indicators of psychological health, through tests such as the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and the Beck Depression Inventory. There were 147 subjects in a control group, and 259 subjects who were prayed for. Ninety individuals who did the praying received photos and names of the participants, and were to pray for them fifteen minutes each day for twelve weeks. They recorded in detail their prayer in a diary. All of the participants were tested before the beginning of the experiment and at the end of it. The tests showed marked improvements, possibly attributable to prayer in all domains examined.

Let us quote an experiment that refers more specifically to spiritual healing. Dr. Daniel Worth, of Healing Sciences International, Orinda, California, conducted double-blind experiments on the ability of a healer to cauterize a standard inflicted wound. The individuals to be healed were kept unaware of the presence of a healer. The partici-

pants were given 8 mm-wide, skin-deep wounds on the forearm. Unknown to them, some of them were treated by a healer, Laurie Eden, whom they could not see; the other participants were left untreated. After sixteen days, the wounds of thirteen treated people were entirely healed. None of the control group had healed yet.⁴⁸

Dr. Dossey and various researchers have been interested in comparing directed versus nondirected prayer. It is easy to understand the meaning of directed prayer—what we may call an outcome-oriented form of request. Nondirected prayer might ask for something like “what is in the best interest of” a person or object prayed for. This is a vast topic. Nevertheless, we will be able to draw some conclusions from the data. Let us place different sets of experiments side by side.

The Spindrift Organization of Salem, Oregon, has performed a variety of experiments with prayer.⁴⁹ One of their studies indicates that nondirected techniques appear quantitatively more effective, often resulting in twice as effective results. Their experiments were conducted on mold cultivated on agar plates. Part of the mold was stressed with alcohol rinse. Directed prayer had little result on it, whereas undirected prayer allowed the mold to resume its growth and multiply again. The same was confirmed in a test in which batches of seeds were either under-soaked or over-soaked. Participants did not know which ones they were praying for.

Drs. Jeanne Achterberg and Mark S. Rider studied the ability of their subjects to affect two types of white cells that play an important role in the immune system: neutrophils and lymphocytes.⁵⁰ Thirty subjects were randomly assigned to study and visualize one and only one type of cell, including images of the shape, location, and patterns of movement, for six weeks. Each group was able to affect specifically its own kind of cell and not the other.

This general trend is further confirmed by experiments done at the University of Arkansas College of Medicine, which showed that a woman age thirty-nine was able to change her skin test for chicken pox from positive to negative and vice versa at will, by using highly specific and precise visualization.⁵¹ This may indicate that directed prayer has to work hand in hand with specific visual imagery, and depends on the vividness and strength of such imagery. In more than one way, this approach allies faith with scientific insight. What science seems to indicate in the experimental setting is also the conclusion of spiritual

healer Spyros Sathi. He distinguishes between psychic healers, in which the healer transfers his own vitality in an undistinguished fashion—and without deeper knowledge and spiritual perception—into the body of the patient, and spiritual healers, who work with full knowledge and perception of the physical and energetic levels of reality. The spiritual healer can therefore help in more specific ways—and in more numerous instances—than the psychic healer.⁵²

Without doubt, the most convincing experiments on healing were performed on animals or lower forms of life. Bernard Grad of McGill University has worked for at least three decades on experiments with healing.⁵³ He is a convinced experimentalist, led into this work by a number of experiences he had in his youth and a key encounter with healer Oskar Estebany. The Hungarian practitioner could detect disease in the body because of the changes in perception in his hands, such as a prickling sensation in his fingers, burning or cold, or vibrations moving down from the arms to the hands. Grad had to work as a pioneer in the field and first of all establish experimental protocols, such as experimental settings and the optimal length and rhythm of exposure to healing. In all the experiments, Estebany did not touch the animals or plants. There was no chance of physical and/or chemical interaction, and the animals and plants were of a homogeneous age and similar genetic strain.

Let us look at the experiments with animals first. Two groups of mice were wounded in a standard way, by removing a piece of skin from their backs under anesthesia. The group whose cages Estebany held for fifteen minutes, twice a day, healed significantly faster. The same was true in the case of mice that had been given an iodine-deprived diet. In these conditions their thyroid glands tended to swell. Those under Estebany's influence showed much less swelling. Dr. Grad's experiments on wounded mice were replicated by Remi J. Cadoret and G. I. Paul of Manitoba University, and by Estebany himself, in strictly double-blind conditions, yielding consistent results. Dr. Grad went on to study the ability of Estebany to heal barley seeds that had been stressed by a 1% saline solution. Estebany could achieve this by holding the container of the saline solution for fifteen minutes.

For experimental purposes, lower forms of life offer the most precise and controlled settings. Sixty university volunteers, not chosen on the basis of their healing abilities, were asked to induce the bacteria

strains of *E. coli*, which are normally unable to assimilate lactose sugar, to do so by mutating. The students were asked to induce decreased or increased mutations. The results showed the desired effects when compared with the control batches.⁵⁴

Experiments on blood were performed by Dr. Braud of the Mind Science Foundation of San Antonio, Texas. Thirty-two subjects were asked to keep red blood cells from dissolving when diluted and placed in test tubes in a distant room. Half of them were given their own blood, half blood from the others, but none of them knew which one they were assigned. They worked in two sessions of fifteen minutes. The technicians analyzing the results were also blinded to the conditions of the experiment. The subjects were able to protect the red cells from dissolving and bursting to a degree that cannot be explained by sheer chance. The source of the blood had no influence on the results, although the individual skills varied to a meaningful extent. There was a significant degree of use of visualization in the experiments, although it was not a definite and exclusive criterion.⁵⁵

No form of life is beyond reach of the power of mind. In fact its power seems to reach even into the realm of technology. Research was conducted at Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research (PEAR) on a machine generating random physical events (a random event generator, or REG).⁵⁶ Experiments determined that individuals could influence the output toward particular patterns. The most successful were deeply bonded couples. Experimenters asked individuals to influence the output of the REG before and after it was run. Readings were taken after the generation of events or after the prayer was performed (in case of delayed influences). It was surprising to realize that in both cases the effects were identical to those occurring simultaneously.

Similar results were obtained by physicist Helmut Schmidt. In the latter's experiment, psychologist Hans Eysenk and researcher Carl Sargent estimated the chance of results being due to coincidence at one out of several million. Roger D. Nelson analyzed the results of more than eight hundred studies with REGs and published them in *Foundations of Physics*, confirming all the previous conclusions.

Let us look at some other aspects of this new kind of energy at work in the realm of healing and prayer before we turn once again to characterize it. We have offered the example of how the mind can in-

fluence the metabolism of common strains of bacteria and is able to induce reverse mutations whose natural occurrences are infinitely low. If consciousness can provoke changes in the genetic map of *E. coli* bacteria, then genes do not have the absolute power that conventional science and popular belief confer upon them. Reverse mutations have now been studied over time; these are mutations that go from abnormal to normal—that is to say, mutations that take a route of reversed entropy and statistically defy all odds. Such mutations have also been known to occur in patients with myotonic dystrophy, a common form of muscular dystrophy in which muscle wasting affects the face, neck, hands, forearms, and feet.

Let us look at another unusual feature of this bio-energy. In the earlier quoted experiments on mice by Dr. Grad and Oskar Estebany, a “linger effect” was noticed; the side of the table where mice were given energy healing had a residual healing effect on other mice that were later placed there—and not the other side of the table.

Researcher William G. Braud has tried to envision scenarios that would explain the nature of this energy that does not decrease with distance.⁵⁷ Only ELF (extremely low frequency) magnetic radiation would act similarly and cause little attenuation with distance, but these waves do not display time-displaced effects, since they carry only a limited amount of information. “In order to encompass the observed effects, a substantially more fundamental level of theoretical model will need to be displayed...” says Dr. Candace Pert of Rutgers University, a leading authority on brain biochemistry, who believes we are dealing with a kind of energy that is as yet unknown, something that somehow belongs to the realm of spirit and soul.

From whichever angle we look at the phenomena, we are returning to what we have defined as etheric energy, an energy that follows laws that are different and yet complementary to the physical. *Etheric energy* is the term coined by Rudolf Steiner to refer to an energy that acts contrary to all the laws of gravity, the energy that works against entropy, the law of dissipation of energy. It is therefore the energy that sustains all living organisms. One way to characterize it—among many—is to call it *levity*. In the plant that is bound to gravity by physics, chemistry, and physiology, levity is the force that pushes the plant upward against all physical laws. In effect, as Dr. Pert intuited, we have to do with the first rung of the world of soul and spirit;

therefore, the laws that we are acquainted with do not belong to the physical world anymore. We can even say that our normal way of thinking cannot apprehend this realm of existence.

If this is a new kind of energy not encompassed by any of the concepts we actually hold in the realm of matter and physical energy, the next obvious question is: “What kind of scientific protocols can allow us to investigate this new field?” This is a field in which the subject and object of inquiry mutually influence each other, thereby breaking one of the basic tenets of modern science—the criteria of objectivity and reproducibility of every given experiment.

Much published evidence suggests that a physician’s beliefs influence the results of the experiments. The double blind allows us to limit the effects of consciousness over matter—not eliminate them. J. Solfvín concludes, “As a general rule, the double-blind cannot any longer be assumed to guarantee the exclusion of the non-specific effects of the treatment, especially when the actual treatment has a weak or variable effect.” However, double-blind experiments are not useless. “The greatest value of double-blinds may lie, however, in their limitations, which reveal something marvelous about us—that there is some aspect of the human psyche capable of shaping events in our world.”⁵⁸

Consciousness is another imponderable element in all and any of the most elaborate experiments. The same healer can succeed in many experiments and then fail in a following one. Obviously, even the best of healers can have a bad day. Finally, it is next to impossible to replicate experiments given the enormous amount of variables when we deal with human consciousness. Dossey concludes: “Although science has much to say about prayer, it raises more questions than it answers. The mysteries of prayer not only remain, they deepen.” There is, however, a new kind of science that resorts to what we call image-based techniques that give a global evaluation of the results sought.

Let us look at another modern-day scientist employing such an image-based technique to study the overall effects of prayer. For years, Masaru Emoto has been studying water quality by looking at the way water forms crystals when frozen. Photos of water crystals have to be taken at a very high speed, requiring specific freezer temperatures, microscopic observation magnifications, lighting, and lens irises. The crystals are never the same from one day to another. No single crystal

organization ever returns. The only element that distinguishes water crystals is the overall hexagonal form that most of us have seen in pictures. The crystals differ in their specific form, definition, proportion, kind of branching, and prominence of the center in a way that gives us an overall indication of the quality of the water. Pristine water from nonpolluted sources crystallizes in clear, recognizable patterns. Polluted water crystallizes very poorly (only partially), or cannot crystallize at all. Treated water may have all the officially required chemical properties and still not be able to crystallize. This indicates that there is more to quality than chemistry.

Emoto has conducted an experiment with water quality before and after prayer.⁵⁹ To that purpose he has analyzed the water at the Fujiwara Dam in Minakami-cho. The water in its natural condition does not show the least ability to form a crystal structure. The Reverend Kato, chief priest of the Jyuhouin Temple of Omiya City, was asked to pray for the water for an hour next to the dam. To the surprise of the scientists, the water crystals that resulted were as complete and beautiful as any of the more remarkable pictures obtained in ideal conditions.

The experiment was repeated in a more polluted body of water, Lake Biwa.⁶⁰ On the morning of July 25, 1999, there were 350 people offering their prayers, facing Lake Biwa. Here, too, pictures of water crystals before and after prayer show striking contrasts similar to the ones in the previous example. The algae that covers the lake yearly was drastically reduced that year, as the press reported. The effect of this experiment was protracted in time. However, by August 2000 the bad odor indicating pollution had returned.

We can conclude the exploration of prayer and healing with Dossey's apt words:

The recognition of a soul-like quality of consciousness—by science on the one hand and by religion on the other—will constitute a bridge between these two domains. This point of contact will help heal the bitter divisions between these two camps. No longer will people feel compelled to choose between them in ordering their lives. At long last science and religion will stand side by side in a complementary way, neither attempting to usurp the other.

Let us now look at how prayer and the capacity for healing have developed in a particularly gifted individual who was a pioneer in this field.

The Life and Work of Agnes Sanford

Agnes Sanford was a healer who devoted most of her life to healing, and a great part of her writing career to propagating a new understanding of it. Her biography is truly enlightening in that it illustrates links between many of the phenomena we have been studying.

Sanford was born in 1898 in Hsouchoufu, China, to a couple of Presbyterian missionaries.⁶¹ Her father was a priest; her mother, a teacher. Young Agnes was raised in an austere, natural environment, away from radio and television. Every day she was taught to memorize Bible verses, and her mother handled her education. Some of her earlier memories, described in her biography, came from gazing with awe at a tiny white flower of a speedwell herb, and at the flowers of a blossoming pear tree.

The spiritual world is important to the Chinese people, and Agnes grew up hearing about spirits from a very early age. The child's dream life was very active and nourished her in a variety of ways. Art also awakened much of her interest; she began to paint as a child and soon discovered literature, reading Dickens, Scott, and other resources available to her. In her early teens, her love of nature formed a gateway to her first spiritual experiences. Twice during two summers, she recalls in her biography, while immersed in the beauty of the landscape, she felt transported to an experience of oneness with nature. In this state, she lost all notion of time and acquired the first inkling of the sentient life of all beings, even inanimate objects.

Prayer entered Agnes' life, as part of her education and upbringing. Already in her childhood she had experienced proof of the results of prayer, even before her mind was able to acknowledge it. While she was still living in Hsouchoufu, she had been overwhelmed by a very real fear of death. At a loss to deal with this emotion and being taught to keep her feelings to herself, she decided to turn to prayer, to ask God to remove that fear. The solution came through a dream, in her words, "the most real and vivid dream that I ever had." She was

filled with the “radiation of God’s power” and with overwhelming joy. Her fear of death left her immediately.

In her adolescence, another experience confirmed the power of prayer. On Christmas day, she was visited by her school roommate Rachel and her brother, who had seizure disorder. His appearance must have made a deep personal impression on Agnes, who decided to pray for him for seven years. Unknown to Agnes, the young man healed long before the end of her period of resolve.

At age fourteen, she was sent to the Shanghai American School. There, she was first captivated by the beauty of the stage when seeing Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Love for writing and drama was something that she would carry throughout her life. After that first year she moved to a small Presbyterian school for young ladies in Raleigh, North Carolina. On the way to the US by boat, she had another experience of oneness with nature, this time while lying on the back of a lifeboat at night and watching the stars. She felt at one with the universe and lost all notion of time.

In America, she felt like a foreigner and longed for the familiarity of China. Her return to her former culture did not immediately yield the anticipated results. Feeling like an outsider, she fell into a depression. It was finally through the deeply rewarding experience of teaching that she gradually emerged from this identity crisis. Her second assignment was teaching English literature, composition, and grammar at an Anglican school for boys. Here she fell in love with her future husband, Ted, an Episcopalian. She married him in 1923 and formally became an Episcopalian, initially at least to satisfy custom as well as her husband’s wishes.

Married life meant letting go of her profession as soon as her first child arrived. The creative young woman abandoned her own dreams in order to fit the role of dutiful wife that was expected of her. The joy of motherhood was contrasted by a growing depression, and Sanford became suicidal. Her love for family expressed itself only in worry about everybody’s safety, but the depression completely engulfed her. There were many more subtle changes that intervened in Sanford’s life. Not only did she forget her childhood devotion and the gifts that she had received through prayer, but nature, which had nurtured her with magical power, lost all its charm. She had to go through her own personal abyss.

It was a serious ear infection of her third son, Jack, that opened the way to an inner transformation. An Episcopalian minister, Hollis Colwell, came to visit her and casually inquired about her children. Upon hearing of Jack's illness, he resolved to see the boy and say a prayer for his health. What surprised Sanford was the complete confidence with which the young prelate turned to God, and the child was healed the next day upon waking. The same minister prayed on different occasions for the healing of Sanford's mental depression. From the first time he did so, she experienced "great waves of joy" during the act of receiving a prayer.

Sanford started experimenting with prayer at the explicit suggestion of Colwell. The results were not immediate. One day, nevertheless, she prayed to be healed from a bout with the flu because she felt she could not take time from work. To her amazement, the results followed immediately. It was a small sign, but the beginning of a life-long exploration of the wonders of prayer and of spiritual healing. She realized at that time that it was not enough to ask of God; it was equally important to believe fully that the prayer was answered.

Sanford's first true healing was performed on a child in critical condition whose heart, bloodstream, and kidneys were infected. Sanford felt moved by compassion and the strong feeling that something needed to be done given this desperate diagnosis. After the prayer, the healing began in stages over the two next days, and the recovery was prompt. It was an encouraging result.

After this turning point Sanford's activity branched off in many directions. Starting with a Bible study group, she gathered a group of mothers who met for nearly two decades. Through the depth of personal connection, the group became a prayer group, and thus also the instrument of spiritual healings. During World War II, the mothers were concerned about their enlisted sons. They attempted to help through prayer. To that purpose they first had to realize that they could not pray for victory, but for peace for all parties. They prayed that their sons be spared as much as possible from having to kill. This was accompanied by withdrawing any support for the war, even purchasing war savings stamps. While it constitutes no positive proof, it is at least indicative that none of the sons died in combat.

In 1947 Sanford wrote *The Healing Light*, a book that has become a classic in the realm of spiritual healing. The manuscript strug-

gled to find a publisher until a friend, Dr. Glenn Clark, decided to undertake publication himself. The book started selling slowly.

Sanford's "career" as a spiritual healer began when she volunteered as a Gray Lady in the Red Cross in Tilton Army Hospital, where she initially had no intention to offer healing of the body. Her first recovering "patient" was a man whose infected bone would not heal. After her first positive result, she continued to heal hundreds of returning soldiers and teach them to pray for their own healing. This work of healing did not come without its burdens. Working at Tilton Hospital, Agnes started to feel pain around her heart. She expressed that she was carrying the fears and burdens of all of those whose health had become her concern.

Sanford's life of prayer needed outer support as well as attention to her own personal healing. This was done through confession, helping her to clear herself of the tendency toward spiritual pride that becomes very tangible for someone engaged in spiritual healing. This evolution was basically reached in two stages. The first was what she called an experience of the Holy Spirit, made possible in working together with her Tucson friend, Marion Lovekin, and prayer partner, Mildred. This first step, realized through prayer and inner guidance, was accompanied by the experience of deep joy and the ability to understand reality in a different way. Many unsolved problems were now coming to the surface of her consciousness with the knowledge of what needed to be done for them. She felt she had received the gift of peace and the ability to work much more effectively than previously without feeling weary. To those who knew her, it seemed she had shed many years.

Sanford's "illumination by the Holy Spirit" was only a step, as she realized at the death of her husband. Soon after, she felt deeply attracted to a widower, but when his response did not meet her expectations, she found herself in the throes of a new depression and questioned her desire to live. It was a young priest by the name of John Sandford who best intuited her deeper needs. He relentlessly offered his help, even when she grew weary of prayers, both his and those of others.

Finally she had a Christ experience that she described thus: "Light shone all around me, and Jesus stood before me in such a real way that I could see Him with my mind though not with my eyes! I

laughed, I cried, I was utterly beside myself with joy and the feeling of being loved.”⁶² This turning point was a culmination as well as the catalyst of further spiritual experiences, to which we will return later.

After this experience she had truly acquired a perception of the energetic level beyond the physical. In the morning, as she turned to meditation, she would “take walks in heavenly places.” This perception later came to her in full day consciousness. She writes: “Yesterday morning for the first time, as I looked out to the misty hills ... I could see the light around the trees. I do not know what this light is. But I cannot imagine it or dream it into reality. When it comes, it comes of itself, as though emanating from the very trees and not from me.”⁶³

Given her familiarity with the realm of the etheric, it is not surprising to see that other kinds of spiritual experiences accompanied Sanford’s life. Even before reaching adolescence, she had a recurring experience. She prefaces it with the feeling of being abandoned by God, and defines it as a soul sickness that the doctor could not diagnose. Something akin to a memory awakened while studying ancient Greek history. She was experiencing or re-experiencing a scene of human sacrifice, one to which her historical education could hardly have referred. “It was as if I had slipped back through time and seen this particular episode.... And it was more real and more completely devastating than anything I had ever seen in China. I could feel it coming before it came. My throat would constrict and my stomach would turn sick and I would think, ‘Oh no! Oh no!’ But then it would come and I could not stop it.”⁶⁵

Throughout the years, the image with its associated horror occasionally resurfaced in her memory. This dream is mentioned specifically again in the biography after the central Christ experience that Sanford had toward the end of her life. It was, therefore, not surprising that the Christ experience was preceded by a very deep depression. Now she started reliving the episode of the human sacrifice in ancient Sparta that she had experienced earlier in her teens. It was an exceedingly dreadful memory. She describes the place that formed the prelude to her memory as “not heaven, nor earth.” The memory was preceded by an encounter with Christ saying that he would send her to Earth. Then she relived the scene of the human sacrifice that had occurred before. She could see only people’s backs, while being aware of an angelic presence. A boy was sacrificed upon an altar that had the

form of a sundial, but his spirit had already left. The scene changed and Sanford found herself back at the original landscape that preceded the scene. Here, somehow she seemed to experience anew her pre-birth intentions of relieving suffering and remembered being willing to do so.

The remembrance of this whole set of events opened the door for Sanford's quiet acceptance of all challenges that followed. She explains that she was not angry with God anymore. She goes to great lengths to disclaim that everything she says lends credence to the idea of reincarnation, which she qualifies as "this dreary theory." Nevertheless not only does the scene look like a previous life memory, but also the subsequent resolve is reminiscent of the soul's desire for atonement for a deed committed in a previous life! Nor is it surprising that in the sequence of events, the healing of this memory closely follows her meeting with Christ and the acquisition of vision on the etheric/energetic level of reality. There is an inherent lawfulness to the fact that only Christ could heal this kind of memory.

It will come as no surprise that the new Christ event acquired a deep significance for her. Obviously she could not state it openly, and she may have only vaguely intuited it. The following quote is nevertheless very revealing of Sanford's deeper beliefs: "For the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ is coming again in His glory, and there is no holding Him back. A new day is dawning. A new age is upon us: the day of the Lord; the kingdom of heaven. The Son of righteousness is rising and nothing can stop His Coming, just as nothing can stay the sunrise from creeping over the mountaintops."⁶⁶

It will not be surprising at this point to see the themes of conscious knowledge of one's own previous incarnations with the meeting with Christ, and the faculty of spiritual healing. The work of the Cypriot healer Spiros Sathi has been documented in three books by author Kiriacos C. Markides. Sathi has undergone similar experiences to those of Agnes Sanford. He experienced meeting with Christ four times in his life—a meeting he associates with a feeling so intense that it was very painful to come back to daily life.⁶⁷ More than Sanford, he carries the memory of his previous lives clearly imprinted in his consciousness. He, too, in the process of helping to heal a patient, can spiritually perceive the deficiencies of vitality, even before they manifest physically with illness.

While Agnes Sanford and Spiros Sathi are two of the many genuine spiritual healers of this century, other healers have operated under similar conditions to theirs both within Christian and other religious or spiritual traditions.

THE EMERGING FIELD OF EXPERIENTIAL SPIRITUALITY

Nature never repeats herself, and the possibilities of one human soul will never be found in another. No one has ever found two blades of ribbon grass alike, and no one will ever find two human beings alike.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

We have reviewed in detail the genesis, methodology, and spiritual implications of techniques in what we have defined as the emerging field of experiential spirituality. The examples of such practices previously shown are either the most well known, or else some of the most unique and promising. Many of these stand for other approaches that resemble them. The Twelve Steps is the larger archetype for all encounter and support groups. Support groups work as shorter versions of the Twelve Steps, in which the higher steps are not taken. Similar to hospice, we can mention the international residential community settings working with the developmentally disabled, such as Camphill—founded by Karl König and following Anthroposophical principles—or the Federation of L'Arche, founded by Jean Vanier and centered around ecumenical or interfaith spirituality. Hellinger's Family Constellations shares common ground with Moreno's psychodrama and with Playback Theater. Nonviolent Communication's ideas are echoed in different ways in the Path of Contemplative Dialogue of Steven Wirth or the Rules of Communication of Claude Steiner, and others. Healing based on prayer or laying-on of hands is practiced in the West in forms similar to therapeutic touch or in the east through Qigong and other forms.

We have selected five examples that cover as vast a field of human experience as possible. We have also left aside important fields that could arguably be included under the umbrella of experiential spirituality. Such is the case of restorative justice, particularly in its

most community-oriented forms such as Peacemaking Circles, or the whole growing field of life coaching, with forms such as co-active coaching and spiritual coaching. In a wholly other direction, we find the new energetic approaches to medicine as they appear most clearly expressed in the Bach Flower Remedies. These remedies are used as helpers in overcoming patterns of behavior. Finally, there is a fairly new approach to finding the sources of life patterns in the direction of precise events of previous lives. This is the approach of Destiny Learning, developed by Coen van Houten, based on enhanced sense observation, artistic work, and exercises. While including these approaches would enlarge the scope of what we are calling experiential spirituality, the conclusions we would be able to reach would not be significantly different.

Hellinger's systemic psychotherapy is, in many ways, the closest to the field of classical psychology, although in itself a complete phenomenological psychology with a purely imaginative flavor. Twelve Steps may be called a modern nonsectarian path of spiritual development in its own right, appealing both to the individual and the social components of spirituality. Hospice adds the institutional dimension and interdisciplinary team approach in the reconsecration of the experience of death in modern consciousness. Nonviolent Communication focuses on the power of language as the springboard of the experience of self and others; it wants to lead us to the full expression of our feelings, needs, and desires and the realization that they do not stand at odds with anybody else's, when all are clearly understood. Prayer and spiritual healing work via the spirit in the human being and the acknowledgement that each one of us is the vehicle of forces that work beyond self, and operate beyond the physical. The spiritual level is acknowledged as the ultimate source of health.

Can we now come closer to defining what joins these approaches to the healing of the psyche and eventually the body under the umbrella, however loose, of experiential spirituality? The first level is the one that has appeared since our introduction—the recognition of the spiritual level of reality. This is a movement that has been initiated within psychology itself. Already in the 1950s and 1960s, new schools of thought moved away from the original pessimistic views of Freud and those who followed him. Carl Jung towered far above anyone else in a cognitive perspective that offered powerful in-

sights over the dimension of the spirit. Others like Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Rollo May, and Erik Erikson helped create approaches that acknowledged and rested upon the human drive toward goodness, beauty, knowledge, and personal development. The emphasis we have just defined underlines all of the techniques to which we have turned our attention. They all draw from the resources of the individual, rather than focusing on the limitations.

What all approaches have in common is a clear departure from the analytical realm. Thorough analysis or a foundation of knowledge has often preceded the work; however, this is not part of the process. Nonviolent Communication may eventually be understood relatively easily from a cognitive perspective. It is, however, quite another matter from an experiential perspective, where its ideas can only be acquired via a continuous practice that alone can undermine and transform deep-seated resistances in our psyche. Hellinger's rich stores of observation are merely general guidelines for practitioner and participant alike; clinging to predetermined dynamics undermines the role of the facilitator and the outcome of constellation work.

Even in the other processes, as expected, analysis once formed the support for action. Bill Wilson and other members of the early Alcoholics Anonymous undertook a profound study of the stages of transformation of the alcoholic—the ability to move away from dependence on others to dependence on the Higher Power. These principles became enshrined, in an intuitive fashion, in the Twelve Steps. It is not analysis that allows the process of healing, but rather the process of admitting one's own weaknesses and trusting in the help of others. Hospice work is also based on a very deep experiential analysis—of the process of dying. We are all more or less familiar with the five stages of grieving, as they have been popularized. The power of hospice work lies, however, in the body of social interaction between the dying and their extended circles of family and friends, as well as the professionals and volunteers.

At a first level, the leap between psychology and experiential spirituality lies in the clear recognition of the spiritual dimension of the human being. Psychology, as a science, can only postulate spirit. Experiential spirituality, as a practice, can more openly recognize spirit as a driving force.

Immortality of the soul is a central idea to the work of both

hospice and Family Constellations. Hospice promotes familiarity with the spiritual dimension of the experience of the dying person, who lives in two worlds. For the dying, the spiritual becomes so tangible that it is not always discernable from daily reality. Hospice work also leads us to inquire about the first steps in the link between living and departed souls. This aspect is taken further by Hellinger's work. Here, in an existential way, we come to terms with the idea that human relationships do not end with physical existence; nor does the progress of the soul end after death. The acceptance of the immanence of life is the goal of Twelve Steps, in its declared aim of moving away from dependence on human beings to dependence on a Higher Power. Energy healing can be accomplished only from the perspective of a dimension of reality other than the physical. The spiritual dimension of human relationships appears somewhat more subtly, and through continued experience, in the practice of Nonviolent Communication.

Another defining dimension of all the forms of experiential spirituality is their ability to work from the perspective of the higher self in conjunction with our ordinary ego. It is this approach that can promote a nondogmatic exploration of spirituality and/or religion. This is also the avenue to reconciliation of the dialectic of terms of opposition—good and bad, right and wrong, dos and don'ts—that enables us to work from the perspective of the resources inherent in each human being rather than from their problems or limitations.

Twelve Steps does not speak of a higher self per se. Nevertheless the prerequisite of turning to a Higher Power, recognizing our powerlessness, and turning to prayer and meditation are the landmark attributes of reaching toward the true self. Nonviolent Communication's distinction of the possibility of "giraffe behavior" and its equal emphasis on honesty and empathy leads to a reconciliation of opposites only possible from the perspective of our true nature. In a more general way, hospice promotes this paradigm shift through tolerance and encouragement of all religious and spiritual approaches to the spirit, and surrender to the experience of death. Hellinger's psychotherapy recognizes the same basic idea through the fact that everyone, whether one appears as villain or saint, has a place in the family system. Nothing portrays this better than the facilitator's role of standing by someone excluded and recognizing even that higher self that may be completely hidden from view. The above approaches move away

from notions of conventional morality. They encourage us to rediscover the universal element of morality that lies deep in the foundations of the soul and that each one of us is called to recreate anew, rather than relying on external codes of conduct.

Another common but not universal feature of experiential spirituality is the idea of working with the double or shadow. This goes from a clear definition to an only vaguely implied level of meaning. The dialectic regarding lower and higher selves is playfully placed at the center of NVC's definition of giraffe and jackal behaviors. Neither term of the equation is glorified or denied; jackal talk and behavior needs to be acknowledged if we want to acquire a giraffe perspective. Not denying, but educating the lower self is the object of the practice of the moral inventory, and for this reason, offering apologies to those we have hurt has such a central importance in Alcoholics Anonymous. Energy healing often recognizes a link between illness and the errors of our lower nature, but this is not a clearly specific tenet, nor is the proposition of the double clearly discernable in hospice philosophy.

From this brief and far from systematic overview, we have discerned the role that spirituality plays in all these approaches. It is not surprising that it played a central role in the life of the founders of many of these techniques, or of those who played a central role in their proliferation. We have seen the earnest path of Agnes Sanford, a pioneer in spiritual healing. Her case culminated in an NDLE that can be defined as a clear Christ experience. Bill Wilson's life was clearly marked by his spiritual experience of 1934. His formulation of the Twelve Steps was anchored in many ways to this defining moment in time. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross linked the power of her convictions and the strength of her work to the attainment of the certainty vouchsafed by her various near-death and other spiritual experiences. Neither Wilson nor Kübler-Ross called themselves Christian, nor did they belong to organized religion. Nevertheless, they both had a keenly personal understanding of what the life of Christ meant for humanity. Here is Kübler-Ross in her own words: "And Easter is the most important day in our lives—whether you know it or not....Every day in my life—and that to me is what Good Friday is all about—Good Friday is viewed by many people as a sad day because of the crucifixion. But without the crucifixion we wouldn't have had the resurrection. And without the

windstorms in life my patients would not die with peace and dignity and really knowing what we need to know at the moment of our death.”⁶⁸ And Wilson, considering the same topic of life after death, closely echoes her in his own words: “Everything considered, I feel that proof of survival (after death) would be one of the greatest events that could take place in the Western world today. It wouldn’t necessarily make people good. But at least they could really know what God’s plan is, as Christ so perfectly demonstrated at Easter time. Easter would become a fact; people could then live in a universe that would make sense.”⁶⁹

Saunders’s deep experience of the grief in dying, and her after-death communications (at least in the case of David Tasma) led her to a deeper understanding of Christ, through which she could effectively embrace ecumenicalism. Bert Hellinger came to his life’s work after a conscious dedication to a religious path. Marshall Rosenberg extended his views of psychology when he embarked on the study of comparative religion. He formulates his spiritual commitment in terms of the divine energy that flows between human beings and the endeavor to support all that is life giving.

Unfolding Knowledge of Light and Darkness

Darkness and light are two characteristics of the dilemma that lies at the center of experiential spirituality. Darkness and light have been at the center of our study as well. To the first, we have devoted primarily the second chapter with the experiences pointing to life before birth; to the second, we have devoted our chapter on life after death. The archetypal experience of meeting with the Lower Guardian is accompanied by the recognition of our personal darkness. The light of unconditional love is the experience of all forms of NDEs, whose ultimate archetype is the meeting with the Higher Guardian in the Light. In this contrast stand our lower selves and higher selves, whose interplay defines each human biography in endless variations. It is not surprising that the experience of the higher self becomes the defining turning point of inspiration for individuals such as Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, Bill Wilson, and Agnes Sanford.

We are coming closer to what may be experiential spirituality’s two central tenets: the individual’s responsibility in shaping one’s life, and the sacred dimension of human relationships. Over and over again

we are told that supposed “accidents” or life crises have a reason. Alcoholism is not simply a genetic disease passed down through generations; death can be looked squarely in the eye; the pain of traumatic events can be integrated within the family system. In all these approaches, we recognize that there is no solution to the problem without an acceptance of the consequences of our actions and inclusion of all the people who play a part in our lives. Alcoholism or other kinds of addiction cannot be tackled without looking at those we have hurt. Death becomes much easier to confront if we face it with courage, accompanied by caring professionals and by those we cherish and love. Difficult situations in a family can be overcome by integrating and acknowledging all of the members of a family, no matter how painful the initial confrontation may be. By taking responsibility, we can break the pattern of compulsion; destructive and inherently violent habits in our thinking and language can be overcome. Beyond taking responsibility, this means being willing to envision our roles as co-creators with the divine, as we inherently do when healing does not concern us but others, as in the case of spiritual healing.

Individuality is only one part of the equation. The natural complement to the experience and challenge of individual responsibility lies in recognition of the sacredness of human relationships. It is this realization that emerges for many as the surprising spiritual element of Nonviolent Communication, which can become a new form of consciousness after being used as a tool. Reaching clarity about our own feelings and needs progressively awakens us to knowing ourselves in a spiritual fashion, but so does the ability to reach a quality of relationship hardly present in common life. Consider the richness of the Twelve Steps and the function of the group in the recovery of an individual. The same is true of hospice and the weaving of relationships that derives from its interdisciplinary approach. The practice of Family Constellations is vitally linked to the participation of all the representatives, who often derive as much benefit from the experience and the repeated exposure as do the individuals staging their own family constellations. Spiritual healing can be accomplished through the activity of groups, or else spiritual healers can benefit from cooperation with and support from other healers.

Our darkness is a necessary stage to a progressively unfolding knowledge of the divine light, as it is typified in an emblematic fash-

ion in the now-common phenomenon of near-death experiences. That this kind of practical spirituality has emerged in the twentieth century is another of these synchronistic events. Only at present, in the new emerging spiritual dimension humanity is traversing, can the ideas of personal responsibility and higher selves acquire more meaning and reality. This study has tried to give these experiences a name and find the source from which they derive.

We are now living at a time when it is harder to keep the balance and harmonious separation between what is sense-perceptible experience and what can be called a psychic or spiritual level of experience. One level of reality impinges on the other without our always being able to control the situation. Most of us will need help, at one point or another in our lives, in integrating experiences that leave us disoriented or that we cannot comprehend. Psychotherapy started along the premises that there was a specialist and a patient—one who knows and one who needs help. A century later into the practice of practical spirituality, perceptions have shifted. The expert is now more of a facilitator. In Twelve Step programs we have a continuum: The recovering alcoholic starts at the lower rungs, calling for help and relying on others. Once through the process, the alcoholic is ready to facilitate it for others. Although we still have leaders and those who are led, this definition of roles is much more fluid. Even the “expert” in the case of Family Constellations or Destiny Learning is subordinated to something larger. Hellinger’s work cannot be led to an intended solution. It is the “greater soul” of the patient and the family that determines the outcome, which the facilitator merely draws out.

Group work is one of the common elements of experiential spirituality. If destiny is the kernel of the problem, then the approach can only be a group approach. Recognizing the modern idea of destiny—or the notion of individual responsibility alone—is the gateway for an acknowledgement of spiritual laws that influence groups or individuals. Twelve Steps does it by turning to individual morality. Through the exertion of the will, the recovering alcoholic takes responsibility where he once used to blame others. This can be done only by confessing the limitations of the ego and seeking our true self in “God as we understand Him.” Hospice work reveals that the individual has to find acceptance of the most significant spiritual threshold—death—and this can be done only by turning to the spirit, with

the help and support of a new community. Obviously the same reality of spiritual awakening may be expressed in a variety of ways. For some, the reality of love in personal relationships is the gateway to the spiritual; for others, it may be through meditation or prayer.

In entering the methods of experiential spirituality, many of us recognize the necessity of two dimensions of spiritual work—what we may schematically call vertical spirituality and horizontal spirituality. Vertical spirituality refers to the axis of individual–God/Higher Power. Horizontal spirituality connects us to each other in society. The second is the specific goal of a more experiential and practical spirituality. Since all of its techniques are nonsectarian, our relationship with the spirit is strictly the domain of our conscience. Earnestness in this direction is certainly a great support to the work of healing.

Knowledge of the laws of karma and the practice of experiential spirituality reinforce the dimension of horizontal spirituality. Here is a dimension of spirit that is acknowledged to be an increasingly problematic area of life. There is a profound yearning visible everywhere in society to re-enliven a dimension of life that has undergone such profound devastations with society's exponentially growing transformation—the destruction of traditional structures happening at a much faster pace than the formation of new alternative social structures. The dating frenzy promoted by myriad agencies and the fragility of intimate relationships are only the most visible tip of the iceberg. A horizontal spirituality, clearly acknowledged and embraced, is almost an imperative for those who seek spiritual growth in the modern world. This does not imply dependency on outer structures. Most of the social therapeutic approaches we have described can either be interiorized after a time or be used only according to need—for example, when fighting an addiction, facing death, or other traumatic events. The necessity of a conscious integration of horizontal spirituality will be ever greater for those who want to work in the social field and/or the renewal of culture. Central to this practical approach to spirit is the ability to evolve a truly universal and completely individual elaboration of a new, nondogmatic morality. This is the needed antidote to the proposed restoration of worn-out codes of morality, which are revived beyond their usefulness in a time of cultural crisis and turn into fundamentalism.

Through the recognition of the horizontal dimension of spiritu-

ality, experiential spirituality can attain the furthest reaches of its meaning. It is not solely about bringing healing to individuals, but also about bringing it to groups of people. Alcoholism or other kinds of addictions are best healed in groups. From the groups that are formed emerge different kinds of relationships than the ones that existed in the dysfunctional settings of addicts. A slow but steady modification of the social environment is the final result of the work of AA or any other Twelve Step group. The hospice movement likewise affects large groups of people. Suffice it to think of the widespread diffusion of bereavement groups offered to those who mourn for a loved one. The number of new social relationships formed within such groups cannot be quantified. However, the most visible result appears now after more than thirty years of hospice work. The perception of death itself has shifted from a completely taboo topic to one that more and more people actively acknowledge or even study with great interest. This is again a ripple effect that reaches across society, not just individuals. The same can be said about Family Constellations. It is spectacular in Hellinger's work, when healing can be brought to the realm of the dead with further effects among the living. Nonviolent Communication applies not only to two individuals, but also to opposing groups, parties, ethnicities, or religions. NVC carries enormous promise in the educational realm, where it aims to create a new way of being among the new generations. It has also been used as a tool for social transformation in areas most affected by ethnic and/or religious wars. Finally, prayer and spiritual healing can be powerful means for forming community, as they often occur within those churches that want to turn to the most concrete and experiential dimension of faith.

Experiential spirituality has its greatest potential as an instrument for bringing about social and cultural renewal. What can start as a separate practice involving a few hours a week or a separate workshop during the year can gradually be incorporated in the work of organizations and movements for social renewal. All the examples quoted form a beginning for what is bound to expand much further in the next century, with the potential to positively affect larger segments of the social body.

Conclusions

ANOTHER GLOBALIZATION IS POSSIBLE

This world may indeed, as science assures us, some day burn up or freeze; but if it is part of His order, the old ideals are sure to be brought elsewhere to fruition, so that where God is, tragedy is only provisional and partial, and shipwreck and dissolution are not the absolutely final things.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

In our exploration of the revelations of the spirit that make modern spiritual experiences understandable, and of the wealth of approaches to experiential spirituality, we have ascertained the creation of new values for the emergence of a new culture that recognizes and honors larger and larger areas of consciousness. This work places itself in the perspective of cultural renewal, in the realization that all lasting social change comes from a grounding in the spirit that alone can provide new sources of values and meaning.

At the end of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century, philosophers already referred to what they saw as the impending “death of culture.” Since then, the symptoms of this phenomenon have surfaced further and become more and more obvious. This has been the focus of our first chapter. Old utopias and institutions from the past are either crumbling or being artificially sustained beyond their time. The resurgence of nationalism, on the other hand, is causing worldwide devastation at a time when continued movements of emigration and mixing of races is becoming a *fait accompli*. The greatest part of what the media convey could hardly be called culture, but rather represents the effect of the invasion of economic interests or political agendas into culture.

NEW INITIATIVES

Ever against this downward trend we see myriads of steps, small and large, that are affirming the birth of a new way of looking at the social question from the framework we have defined as the emergence of Civil Society. Let us look at how these new values are shaped in various fields of action.

Business and Trade

We will begin with actions directed at the circulation of goods. We have all heard of or been part of product boycott. It is an activity whose final aim is to influence the economy, but boycotts are done primarily in order to uphold and promote values. The targets of boycotts are corporations that perpetuate degrading practices towards their workers and/or the environment or other moral issues. The participants in these actions have two aims in mind: first, informing the general population about little-known facts concerning the manufacturing of products, and second, inviting a change of behavior from the informed parties. These two factors, together with access to the targeted audience, determine the degree of success of a boycott. Here, economic choices are affected by an area in which corporations and the media do not have exclusive control: knowledge and information. No political channels are necessary to initiate or conduct a boycott, although their presence may later help.

A large-scale boycott was conducted in the 1990s in order to stop products coming from sweatshops of the Burmese dictatorship. A successful Internet campaign reached the decisive point when Massachusetts and Los Angeles passed resolutions supporting the boycott in 1995. The cities of Portland, Oregon, New York, and Berkeley followed suit. At Harvard, a movement started by undergraduates successfully derailed the university's contract with Pepsi, who had plants in Burma. In 1997, Pepsi announced that it was closing its operations in the country. Walt Disney, Liz Claiborne, and Eddie Bauer also bowed to the pressure.

Corporations have started to reckon with a force that operates outside of the canons of the economic and the political, a force with which they have had to come to terms. Witness the numerous exam-

ples of successful boycotts and corporations reversing earlier decisions in matters of labor or environmental practices. Socially responsible investing is another initiative that has been regularly growing over the last decade. Issues for which funds are screened include: alcohol, tobacco, military investments, human rights and employment equality, environmental impact, and animal testing. Individuals invest in socially responsible funds through a number of specialized firms. In conjunction with exerting these choices, investors and firms can engage in “shareholder activism.” Corporation policies can be influenced from the inside by the added power of shareholders acting in concert to modify practices found objectionable, discriminatory, exploitative, or damaging to the environment. Under US corporate law, owning \$2,000 of company stock for a year allows the stockholder to introduce a resolution. Co-op America, which actively supports initiatives for economic justice, estimated \$922 billion as the amount of stock controlled by investors who favor socially responsible choices in 2002.

That the choice of a product comes with a lifestyle and is imbued with values has been made clear before the practice of boycotts, with the marketing of organic produce, promoting respect for the environment. A more recent practice has spread under the name of Fair Trade products, applying mostly to consumer goods coming from the Third World—coffee being the most common example. Fair Trade coffee is often produced in small cooperatives. It may be grown organically and/or under the shade of trees, both better environmental practices than traditional monoculture. Finally, the product is sold through organizations that allow most of the proceeds to reach the coffee farmers. Through these organizations the farmer is better protected from the price fluctuations of the open market. By promoting cooperative and healthy workplaces, and respect of the environment and cultural traditions, Fair Trade serves as an educational tool. The Fair Trade Federation encourages public disclosure of anything belonging to the product and acts as a consumer education organism.

Over the last ten or twenty years, Community Supported Agriculture has gained a foothold in our country. The experiment is centered on the idea of providing consumers with organic (or at least pesticide-free) produce while consciously ensuring the viability of the farming operation. It is a way for consumers and producers to work

together at the smallest conceivable economic level. At a microeconomic level, CSAs have spread an alternative economic model that is based on the direct integration of producers and consumers, a model that bypasses many of the constraints created by a vast and impersonal market economy. CSA subscribers support the needs of the farmers and their families, and have a voice in production choices. The needs of farmers and consumers are negotiated directly, rather than mediated by the supposedly value-free market economy. For the farmer, this is primarily an economic decision. For customers and supporters, this choice may stem from political convictions or the desire to create new values, respect the environment, and support those who make courageous and economically risky life choices. All of the examples given above are means for introducing alternative visions that integrate larger areas of values, traditionally left out of the economic model.

Social Justice

Other examples of cultural action directed towards the social arena are the so-called Conversation Cafes. In 1992 Len and Libby Trauman of San Mateo County, California, started the Jewish-Palestinian Dialogue Group. Its focus was directed at the process of peace in the Middle East. It did so by bringing together people of both concerned parties. People of Jewish and Arab descent meet in a living room—not to resolve an issue, but simply to listen to each other and enlarge each other's perspective. A very precise procedure emphasizes listening and information as opposed to attempts to convince and influence the other. The originators of the idea see this as a preliminary step to action in a more political realm. The latter, they say, must be preceded by a clearer perception of reality and a better understanding of and empathy for the perspective of the other party. The idea has achieved a successful response, and at present specific conversation cafes cover a wide spectrum of interests.

Still within the aim of promoting social peace through the agency of the law, we can look at the idea of restorative justice. It aims at replacing the normal course of justice and retribution with a mediation involving offenders, victims, and a third party. It is applied in cases of minor offenses and assaults, and property crimes, and has served the justice system by alleviating court dockets. Restorative jus-

tice is a preventive system dealing mostly with juveniles and first-time offenders, people who often respond more readily to educational efforts. The approach stems from the idea that while the offender has to be held responsible, it is also true that his deed has torn him out of the web of society. Entering in dialogue with the victim is the means for enhancing empathy and understanding on both sides, while offering the offender a chance to reintegrate the fabric of society. Through this mediated dialogue, it is easier for the offender to agree to restitution and carry through with it. Victim and offender come out enriched from the dialogue. Introduced twenty-five years ago, restorative justice has now spread to forty-five states in the US and counts more than three hundred programs nationwide. It is interesting to note that both *Yes* (Fall 2000), a more political publication, and *Health and Spirituality* (Spring 2001) speak of the phenomenon in basically equivalent terms.

An impressive citizen initiative on the national scale is the Brazilian Citizenship Action Against Misery and for Life, initiated by Herbert Betinho de Souza of the Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Analyses (IBASE). It arose from the movement that led to the demise of the corrupt president Fernando Collor. In 1994 it was estimated that about 2.8 million Brazilians were active in the neighborhood hunger committees that the initiative promoted. A third of Brazil's population has made contributions to its goals. The way the organization works is through simple, manageable goals. People with at least some resources are invited to meet face-to-face with a hungry person and devise how to help him or her. It is an invitation to make connection, to hear a story, and to be changed by an encounter and later move on to action. This experience offers a practical view of the ills of a country. The personal and social levels become the basis of later political change.

Another inspiring story is the one that led to the Treaty to Ban Landmines, signed in 1997 by 140 countries, though not by the US. The sponsors of the initiative were New England activist Jody Williams and socially engaged NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Physicians for Human Rights, plus victims of landmines themselves and other famous individuals. Williams won the Nobel Prize in 1997, but she attributed the merit to the voice of Civil Society.

The Media, Education, and the Individual

A growing section of the alternative press is ever more loosening its connections with clearly defined political choices, and more and more consciously exploring areas of cultural/spiritual renewal. Although it might originally stem from the arena of political alternatives, this sector of the media actively explores the power of the individual to set forth original ideas for renewing society at a local level, or toward alliances of interest groups crossing classical political boundaries. Individuals set forth as examples come from segments of society that we cannot quite define as politically homogeneous. Additionally, these publications often focus on the power of art and spirituality to affect our lives, or simply matters of lifestyle such as our nutritional habits, spiritual choices, and schooling. Examples of the above are *Yes*, *Utne Reader*, *Ode*, and *Kosmos*.

The growing importance that homeschooling takes in modern society, especially in the US, underscores once again the impact of a generalized cultural crisis. There are an estimated 26,000 children homeschooled in Australia and New Zealand, about 80,000 in Canada, 50,000 in the UK—all low figures compared with the US. The first US parents known to be homeschooling were the Bergmans in Utah in 1971. By 2003 there were an estimated 1.1 million children taught outside public and private schools in the US. According to the 2003 US census, 33% of homeschooling parents gave religion as a reason for their choice. This was followed by 30% who objected to the poor learning environment of public schools, 14% who were critical of school curriculums, 11% who wanted to offer more challenge to their children, and 9% who gave morality as a reason for their choice. Of the families that homeschool, an estimated 58% come from a religious conservative background.

Homeschooling allows parents a flexibility of choices in the following matters:

- Choice of the curriculum: from traditional education to Waldorf, Montessori, and Charlotte Mason approaches, or the theory of multiple intelligences and others

- Allowing especially the younger children more play-based exploration and more imaginative rather than cognitive ways of learning
- Offering an education that is more tailored to individual needs
- Placing more emphasis on artistic education
- Offering religious, moral, or spiritual education as part of the curriculum
- Providing consistent education for children whose parents' work obliges them to move often

Homeschooling covers a variety of concerns and sets of values that represent all ends of the political spectrum.

Sociologist Paul H. Ray has shown us what impact is felt in society from the aggregate action of those he has termed *cultural creatives*, each acting at first through purely individual choices. In 1997, Ray estimated that 24% of Americans, a total of 44 million people, are cultural creatives who subscribe to values other than those supplied by our media. The same tendencies can be seen at work in places such as the Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, and Britain. Most of the cultural creatives make choices that advertising cannot reach, based on their own cultural priorities. Many individuals in this group have withdrawn their trust in traditional institutions and have placed a greater emphasis on personal empowerment. Cultural creatives are likely to promote the use of art or personal creativity in their daily life instead of abusing passive media and television absorption. They may be interested in providing their children with alternative education or homeschooling. Aware of the need to give a central place to spiritual values in their life, they may adopt meditation or prayer, learn listening skills, or develop conflict resolution skills. Approximately 33% of them claim to have had a spiritual experience, and 82% believe in the healing power of prayer. They often actively support nonprofit organizations that care for the environment, the fate of excluded segments of our population, and the Third World. All of these separate actions of individuals and groups and their cumulative effects

are hardly quantifiable, but they have a growing impact on societal choices.

GLOBAL ALTERNATIVES

The new kinds of social action we have described cut across traditional political divides. Good examples are homeschooling or socially responsible investments. Various political approaches are present in both phenomena. Whether you homeschool your child from a liberal perspective or from a traditional Christian perspective, one of the main reasons to do so lies in a certain recognition that teaching has suffered great limitations by having to be entrusted to the political arena, rather than being an independent cultural concern. The diversity of approaches brought by the many forms of homeschooling reinforces the idea that freedom of perspective and diversity should prevail in education.

Socially responsible investments may stem from respect for the environment and social justice, or from concern for individual moral issues as, for example, from a more religious perspective. The two are not strictly exclusive and actually can overlap. What is common to both approaches is the desire to establish values and put them into operation in the economic realm, rather than have an imaginary neutral market set those values.

The above actions that affect our sociopolitical body are the visible result of NGOs operating within a new emerging canon. The US counts, according to estimates, more than one million NGOs (including all organizations, whether they are involved on the globalization issue or not). The National Wildlife Federation in the US lists three million members. Consumers International claims five million members worldwide. The network of Friends of the Earth reaches a million people in sixty countries.

In 1998, eight major nonprofit organizations possessed \$4 billion worth of resources: CARE, World Vision International, Oxfam Federation, Médecins Sans Frontières, Save the Children Federation, Eurostep, CIDSE, and APDOVE. Socially responsible funds in the US reached \$1 trillion by the year 2000.¹ These financial numbers are one

of the indicators of the strength of an emerging Civil Society that has in many ways become a worldwide reality.

Let us look more closely at the movements and organizations of Civil Society and the type of action we have explored. Most of the NGOs do not engage in the production, distribution, or consumption of goods. When they take advocacy of political rights as their goal, they do not aim at taking over any of the functions of government. Rather they tend to encourage government to better accomplish its role.

The political sector ensures our social needs—chief of all, the idea of equality and fairness through the instrument of the law—besides promoting the conditions under which businesses, organizations, churches, schools, and other social entities operate. Economic activity ensures the production and circulation of goods and satisfies our basic daily needs. Spiritual needs that create values originate from an area that we are calling *culture*, in order to differentiate it from government or the economy.

Culture deals with worldviews, knowledge, meaning, values, symbols, identity, ethics, art, and spirituality. Places of worship, places of entertainment, schools, sports venues, museums, and art galleries are its gathering points. Identity and meaning are inseparable. They give human beings a cognitive, esthetic, and moral orientation in the world. Culture is the source that determines our behavior and action in the world. The prime mover behind culture is the realm of the spirit, intended as its source. It is in the area of culture that we learn to commit ourselves to ideals such as freedom, justice, individual responsibility, and civic responsibility. Later we can employ this knowledge in the economic and political arenas. If the cultural arena is usurped by the state or the market, it is ultimately the human quest for meaning that is impoverished, mutilated, or delayed.

The idea of the promotion of human dignity through culture is diametrically opposed to the purported idea of “market democracy.” According to this view, if a country wants to look like America politically, it has to follow its example economically. Actually, the reverse is much more likely. A vibrant cultural life is necessary before a certain degree of integrated economic development is possible. Such was the case for America in the one hundred and fifty years preceding the Revolution. Such a development of civic life led to the Declaration of

Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, all of them crowning a vibrant life of ideas. Economic development came only after political independence. The latter followed the development of a specifically American culture.

To develop a free society, we need to start with culture. We have to start with the choices and the setting of values that can only come from Civil Society. When Civil Society is underrepresented, the results are similar no matter which ideological doctrines are chosen. Benjamin Barber argues with irony: "You can look at countries like Singapore, that are quasi-authoritarian, China that remains deeply totalitarian in its politics, both of which nonetheless have capitalist economies. China is probably the most capitalist, or becoming the most capitalist, of any nation in Asia. They are very good at capitalism. They've also proven rather good at communism, and they also proved you can do both at the same time."² China did not develop an independent and vibrant life of culture. It is this independent culture that is most feared at present; witness the fierce control exerted over Tibet and over all other religious traditions, most recently Falun Gong. Chinese authorities perceive that their one-party system must continue to exist in a cultural vacuum because it would not survive the challenge of freedom in the cultural sphere. This also explains their obsessive fear of tools of communication such as the Internet. The same is true in the dictatorial regime of Myanmar (formerly Burma), where owning or operating a computer with access to the Internet is a serious crime. These examples prove in reverse the role of information, education, and all that befalls the role of culture. As is the case in China with the cultural monopoly of the Communist Party, so it is elsewhere. In the United States as well, control of the media is vital to the interests of the transnational corporations and their political allies.

Another kind of globalization is possible if we turn the assumptions of elite globalization upside down. TNCs cannot drive a new world paradigm, because their prevailing value is the bottom line. Elite globalization makes this paralyzing predicament a worldwide reality by driving values down to the lowest common denominator. The economy cannot be the source of values, but rather the source of the spiritual emptiness that is all around us. An alternative idea of globalization looks first and foremost at the creation of a new global culture along

the lines that we have been following so far, values stemming from new revelations and new practical consciousness tools. The new spiritual experiences that reach the surface of human consciousness reveal that there is a vibrant source of renewal we have barely begun to tap. A new source of spiritual knowledge can lead us to an acknowledgment and understanding of all that cries to be heard at present. Experiential spirituality offers us another set of tools to accompany this awareness, encouraging a personal transformation that will contribute to a critical shift of consciousness that can reverse worldwide destructive trends. From the cultural realm, benefits really can trickle down to the political and the economic.

Ammunition for this way of thinking comes, surprisingly, even from a recent *Economist* article.³ The results of political changes that occur in nonviolent fashion, the article suggests, are not long lasting if they are not sustained by the presence of strong and cohesive nonviolent civic coalitions. Political changes may only bring further disillusion. Such has been the case most recently in Ukraine and Myanmar, despite successful political campaigns. The *Economist* article concludes: "Countries with few local NGOs, civic groups, trade unions, churches, student organizations or other independent sources of influence are unlikely to produce the necessary leaders. And if they do, the sensible autocrat will squelch them as soon as possible. That is what happens in Iran, where opponents of the regime, especially students, are given no chance to organize, and where television is always censored and newspapers often closed."

Action stemming from the cultural arena can lead to two essentially different orientations in the world. It can either be life sustaining and life affirming because it addresses the real and deeper needs of human beings, leading us to the affirmation of compassion, community-mindedness, beauty, and truth; or life destructive because it embraces substitute values that cannot reconcile an individual's needs with those of others. Elite globalization replaces our true needs with the artificial needs with which advertising continuously bombards us. These create destructive, dysfunctional, and ultimately pathological individual and social behaviors. Discovering the spiritual source from

which our deeper values and desires can be recognized leads to the possibility to satisfy the needs of all.

When values are lost, the cultural vacuum is filled by the reality of the economy and political utopias or agendas. This has been the tragic reality of the twentieth century. Where culture failed to renew itself, two great temptations took over; fascism's alliance of the state and big business with a prevalent economic drive, and communism's enshrinement of the primacy of state ideology over individual rights. The third voice, belonging to culture proper, was too weak to emerge over the ideological battles that stormed over the century. Now that the Cold War is over and the two world adversaries have melted into an indistinguishable alliance, we could argue with Michael Lerner that we stand at the edge of the "globalization of selfishness," a perverted mirror image of what culture is about. Where spiritually motivated values fail to emerge and take hold of the imagination, we will find ourselves more and more exposed to the aberrations of materialistic selfishness that defy understanding. Corporate executives, not otherwise famous than for profiting from the most colossal failures of the century, go to unprecedented efforts to display wealth. Kenneth Lay of Enron had a \$13.5 million waterfront estate of 15,000 square feet in Boca Raton, Florida. The no less infamous Bernie Ebbers of World.Com owned a thirteen-room apartment worth \$18 million, on Fifth Avenue in New York City; the furnishings alone were valued at \$11 million.⁴ In the cultural vacuum of our times, billionaires are seeking their next million with the same energy with which hungry people in the Third World seek their next meal.

The perversion of culture also appears in the present mega-media, permeated and dominated by economic interests of advertising, often transforming information into entertainment and sensationalism, and turning their sight away from the places in which spirit manifests itself in real cultural renewal. Political and economic powers know the values that these media yield and their effect on public opinion to which they are very sensitive. That is partly the reason for US spending of more than \$400 billion per year on advertising.

Global culture works in tandem with the personal spiritual experiences we have outlined. Individual consciousness mirrors global

consciousness. The personal experience of spiritual abundance is preceded by a personal encounter with the shadow, the personal abyss, everything that wants to define a world of scarcity and fear and deny the existence of hope, compassion, and love. It is a stage that takes time, tolerance, and dedication to overcome, and that leads us to believe that there will be no light at the end of the tunnel. The encounter with the Light of love or Christ is the experience to which humanity can aspire in its future. As described most typically in near-death-like experiences, we can see that more and more individuals come refreshed from the experience knowing the reality of love and of an abundance that can fill all dimensions of our lives. But we do not need to have experienced it firsthand to embrace its message and walk in its footsteps. We all stand before this epoch-making choice in our lives.

Civilization is going through this worldwide set of choices—a culture of fear accompanied by scarcity of resources, mounting terrorism, and insecurity; or a gradual shift towards the embodiment of a sustainable economic development that supports personal growth, compassion, and all the highest human aspirations. The choice lies between a culture of exclusion, antagonism, and competition and a new way of looking at “the other” as the indispensable complement that allows us to overcome isolation, separateness, and loss of meaning. Instead of the old dualism of good and evil, right or wrong, good or bad, we can make room for a new philosophy—one of reconciliation in which evil is not fought and overcome, but rather understood, integrated, and transformed, whether at the personal or the collective level.

More and more voices of individuals and organizations that are looking beyond the dualism that has permeated the twentieth century are finding an echo in the popular soul. Jim Wallis looks at the right/left divide in his recent bestseller, *The Politics of God*, from a politically independent but spiritually committed stance. The subtitle of his book indicates this very same concern for balance: *Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It*. Looking at the major issues at play in national politics, he sees the divide between right and left corresponding primarily to the emphasis of the former on individual responsibility and of the latter on social responsibility. The two values, he reasons, are not at all incompatible, but are most often presented as such. When we look at smaller initiatives, typically at social

work with an underprivileged population, it is implicitly accepted that social responsibility will not be fostered at the expense of individual responsibility.

To return to an already familiar place, these values correspond to what the practice of Nonviolent Communication professes as *universal human needs*. My desire for individual responsibility will not be prejudiced by anybody else's need for individual responsibility—quite the contrary. Nor will a concern for individual responsibility be harmed by others exerting their idea of social responsibility. The two complement and strengthen each other quite naturally.

The above view, when applied to one of the hottest issues in the national arena, is fertile ground for analysis. Wallis reasons that the issue of abortion sets the two above sets of values against each other. On the one hand is the very valid and justified issue of human freedom and social responsibility; on the other, the no less true sacredness of life and individual responsibility. The reader may remember how both sides of the issue were treated in Hellinger's *Family Constellations*. In the family representation, the soul of the newborn is just as real as the soul of the mother, albeit from a perspective that goes beyond conventional morality. When the issue is examined under the lens of national politics, Wallis determines that all of the choices we are presented with are polarized perspectives that avoid looking at all the necessary sides of the issue. On one end of the spectrum, the life of the newborn is sacred and the mother's freedom is sacrificed; on the other, the choice of abortion is trivialized, as if saving a human life were at the same level as any other personal choice. When all needs are considered, we could ask a third question that political slogans comfortably avoid: "How can we help parents in their choices and give them the means to avoid being pushed into the socially and humanly costly choice of abortion?" Abortion will then be available as the means of last resort, when all other alternatives have failed.

To return to Hellinger, even though the necessity for abortion can be understood, the soul will pay a heavy price no matter the convenience of the choice. Yet, when that choice is unavoidable, help can be offered to relieve the suffering. Here again, from the realm of experiential spirituality, we can devise the nature of a choice that stems from a purely cultural matrix rather than from a political one—

moreover a solution that transcends the trap of conventional morality bound to particular religious or political views, or socioeconomic factors. In the clamor of political extremes, all desire for reconciliation is lost and voters will often face equally unsatisfying choices.

In the above examples we have indirectly shown how a complex situation can be adequately encompassed and understood with two techniques of experiential spirituality. NVC and systemic psychotherapy have helped us focus on an issue from a purely cultural perspective, because they clearly transcend the limitations of the intellectual structure of either/or that reigns in common political or economic choices, but is out of place in large societal issues.

Initiatives in the cultural sphere do not spring from direct action, but from a need to understand the world in a different way. Whether participating in a boycott or joining a support group, the aim of the individual is the need to inform oneself and others of the choices that positively and negatively affect both the individual and society. A real encounter based on true listening is often the simplest, most radical beginning in this renewal of the cultural sphere. Growing segments of society are realizing more and more the power that lies in telling our life stories. Two individuals who know each other's stories can better understand and accept their diverging perspectives. This archetypal encounter between two individuals is the very heart of the approaches of experiential spirituality.

Once an encounter has occurred, we can take a further step by changing behavior in order to match new beliefs. This is the simplest starting point for nonprofit foundations. An inner need to seek information on an urgent topic ignored by the media and by public consciousness may naturally spill over in a desire to spread that awareness and help fight the social ills that have been perceived. Craig Kielburger of Toronto was thirteen when he started the organization Free the Children. At age twelve, he came across the story of Iqbal Masih, a child who had been forced to work as a slave for a Pakistani carpet factory. After escaping at age ten, Iqbal received an education and later traveled to many countries, speaking against child labor. He was murdered at age twelve. Craig first brought this topic to his classmates' attention, speaking in the classroom about Iqbal's biography.

An informal group took over from there, holding speeches in schools and in religious and community groups. The turning point was a petition for the liberation of Kailash Satyarthi, an Indian activist who fought against child labor. The release of the Indian leader, together with a press conference that drew Canada's media's attention, were two important steps towards the founding of Free the Children, an organization that has worked with more than 100,000 children in 27 countries. All the members, apart from supporting staff, are under age eighteen.

Let us look at the soul of another genuine activist with a deep spiritual commitment. Julia Butterfly Hill fully embodies what it means to be a spiritual activist. For 738 days, including two very cold winters, she lived near the top of an old-growth redwood tree in Northern California.⁵ The purpose of her action was to alert people to the devastating ecological practices of some lumber companies, and the connivance of public agencies and the very same political world, which claimed to enact enlightened legislation in the matter. For more than two years she experienced the gamut of psycho-spiritual experiences, from the depths of despondency and fear to the transformations brought by the power of prayer and acceptance. Her action stemmed primarily from the desire to test her personal beliefs and grow from them, not just proselytize for a cause. This is the kind of action impossible to achieve without a spiritual awakening. This is her testimonial referring to a crucial moment of her tree-sit: "Things began to look overwhelming. I decided to fast and pray. When you cleanse your body, you also cleanse yourself mentally and spiritually. So I fasted and prayed, because this tree-sit needed some divine intervention."

She was not part of any specific political movement, and had, in fact, to fight against narrow-minded interpretations of her intentions. She started her action where Earth First had taken initiative, but without being an Earth Firster. She did it solely out of her own personal beliefs, often in contrast to political directives she was receiving. Her experience led her to realize that she had to be inclusive, and could only work at raising consciousness of others, including her so-called enemies. She tried and succeeded to be inclusive of all outlooks, extending her willingness to share with the very same people she was criticizing. The result of her example made it possible for a new politi-

cal alliance of lumber unionists and environmentalists to emerge, two forces long at odds with each other. The landmark trait of her work is the focus on resources, rather than problems, that can only stem from a belief in and dedication to spiritual values.

Becoming what could be called a spiritual/cultural/sacred activist means spreading consciousness of the uniqueness of the role of Civil Society and its autonomy from traditional politics and business. Beyond opposing what is destructive and life denying, spiritual activism should contribute to the promotion of new global values that uphold healthy social relationships, and respect the environment, the spiritual world, women and minorities, and individual ethical choices. Resistance is a very real, initial need. We have seen it in the events leading to the battle of Seattle and the awakening of consciousness that resulted from it. This work will be needed as long as Civil Society remains the poor sister of national and international governance and the economic sector. However, resistance alone has a limited impact. Beyond that stage, it becomes necessary to devise and implement alternatives through dialogue and cooperation.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND EXPERIENTIAL SPIRITUALITY

The above overview, far from systematic, can at least indicate how vast is the arena of culture and how diverse is the work that can be accomplished in its realm. Two very different levels have been encompassed within this review. One is the structural level of the promotion of the cultural realm, what is now called Civil Society; the other is the inner aspect of the change of consciousness needed in order to move from the idea of political activism, with which we are all very much familiar in our time, to the fluid, moving, yet unknown consciousness that is needed to affect the realm of culture as a spiritual, visionary, or cultural activist.

At the outer level is the need to promote a healthy and independent Civil Society through the formation of networks of initiatives and through an active participation in the emerging three-way dialogue that has been dubbed *three-sector partnership*. In so doing, Civil Society establishes its equal rights in cooperation with government and the

organized business sector. At this point in history, it is still the younger, weaker sibling that the two giants want to co-opt and subjugate to their own interests. The understanding of the need for Civil Society to stand on its own feet as the third force is a notion that is only slowly gaining ground.

Great steps have been achieved in recent times wherever Civil Society is invited to the table on an equal footing in dialogue with government organizations and businesses in the growing idea of three-sector partnerships.⁶ The novelty of this approach lies in a dialogue that goes beyond opposing ideologies. In the reality of the precariousness of Civil Society, this work of dialogue, which alone can bring lasting results, needs to be supported by a clear recognition of the issues that Civil Society stands against.

The aim of this work covers what we could provisionally call the “inner aspect of Civil Society,” the sets of ideas and techniques that can help define its identity, promote its inner strength, and set a whole new way of being and working for those who want to act primarily at the promotion of those values that are threatened by the “globalization of selfishness.” It is not only a new society that needs to be encouraged; it is a whole new human being who can see beyond the unavoidable outer and inner traps of materialism that are reflected in the strictly dualistic mind. This is a work that takes time, ideas, and techniques. The promotion of these ideals both on a cognitive and on a practical level requires what more and more people see as a culture of encounter and dialogue that will allow the cultural sector to overcome its traditional weaknesses of insularism, dogmatism, and suspicion of other groups’ ideas and behavior. It is this culture, first achieved at the local level, which can be applied later at the local, national, or global levels, in the dialogue between Civil Society, government, and business. Where will the global experts in dialogue, mediation, and arbitration be if they will not permeate the culture of the local organizations for social change?

That this culture of dialogue, moving beyond sterile dualistic thinking is emerging is the realization of Paul Ray. In relation to the new cultural wars fought within the nation, or at a global level, this is what he suggests “So, what position do the Cultural Creatives take in the cultural war? They refuse to choose sides. They head off in a third

direction that is neither left nor right, neither modern nor traditional. Oppositional movements have influenced them less than cultural movements that try to educate our desires and change our minds about reality. They want to see the big, inclusive picture, and they want to work with the whole system, with all the players. They regard themselves as synthesizers and healers, not just on the personal level but on the planetary level, too. They keep cutting across social class and racial lines, across ideological lines of liberal and conservative, and across national boundaries, rejecting militarism, and across national boundaries, seeking long-term ecological sanity.”⁷ Even if the overall estimate may appear over-optimistic, it certainly reflects an evolution of consciousness. This perspective is present in the way social change is presently debated.

New organizations have sprouted on the sociopolitical horizon from a variety of backgrounds that cover new realities of the political-cultural arena. The year 2006 alone saw a Conference of Spiritual Progressives in Washington DC, a conference on Sacred Activism in Seattle, and the Spiritual Covenant for America also in Washington DC. Books have appeared approaching the political question from a variety of new angles, such as *God's Politics* by Jim Wallis, *The Left Hand of God* by Michael Lerner, *The Bank Teller and Other Essays on the Politics of Meaning* by Peter Gabel, and *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community* by David Korten.

How can spirituality work hand in hand with concern and action for social change? Stone Circles convened a Conference on Spiritual Activism in June of 2005 in New York.⁸ People in this gathering came from numerous traditions: Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, Yoruban, Yogic, Native American, and others harder to define. They were engaged in practices that ranged from meditation and prayer to nonviolence, sacred scriptures, worship, yoga, ritual, storytelling, art, music, and time in nature. Their stated interest lay in the recognition that a consciousness shift is needed in order to promote significant changes of behavior. Spirituality is the springboard that helps them see the larger picture and renew their energy and commitment to daily work. Combining action with reflection, social engagement with contemplative practice, can ultimately lead to what could be boldly defined as *embodying love*. It is recognized that many organizations for

social change struggle to support their own people who often face exhaustion, burnout, and inner hopelessness. Attending to one's needs is an important step towards the healing of the organizations and the communities to whose needs the individuals attend.

Movements for social change will not be successful unless rooted in spiritual principles and practice. Participants in the Stone Circle conference expressed the need for techniques that help to cultivate sets of principles and "mechanisms that simulate deeper awareness of what is happening directly in the moment." The difficulty lies in finding practices that respect all backgrounds and spiritual beliefs. Groups often need to find an internal balance between the individuals more focused on process and those who want more action and decision-making. This tension does often turn into a rift. And yet, emphasis on either inner transformation or action may simply be a false dilemma. This is at least what new movements that have emerged with the millennium tend to demonstrate. They are offering us a tangible prospect on the future role of Civil Society.

ARGENTINA'S HORIZON OF HOPE

With the benefit of what we can reap from the experiences of the Zapatista movement and Argentina's experience of "horizontalism," we can look at how new forms of social change both support and are supported by personal inner change. For this, we will look primarily at Argentina. Here we can find an emblematic portrayal of the devastating policies of elite globalization on one of the most developed and industrialized countries of South America. And yet, we can see, as a phoenix rising out of the ashes, a movement of hope that can serve as an example to all who strive to carry further social change hand in hand with inner development. In addition, looking at Argentina will form a sort of summary and compendium in action for everything that has been articulated in this book. A first dream made concrete will offer us a way to dream further the future of a sustainable globalization.

The Political Situation

Argentina had a strong welfare state in the 1940s and 50s. This gave rise to the Peronism, essentially the regime of a populist strong man, Juan Peron. The political ideal of armed insurrection touched the country in the early seventies through ERP and the Montoneros. The former were originally a Trotskyist movement that later embraced Maoism. The latter was formed by left-wing Catholic and Peronist groups.

In 1970, the Montoneros kidnapped former dictator Pedro Eugenio Aramburu (in power 1955–1958) and others who had collaborated with him: unionists, politicians, diplomats, and businessmen. Other important kidnappings occurred in 1974 and 1975, targeting politicians and business executives. In 1975, the group sank an Argentine destroyer and exploded a bomb in the Federal Intelligence Department of Buenos Aires, killing eighteen. For their part it is estimated that the ERP occupied 52 towns, robbed 166 banks, and stole over US\$76 million. They concentrated their activities in the impoverished area of Tucuman to the northwest. The Montoneros carried out techniques of urban violence; the ERP acquired control over about a third of the Tucuman area. Both groups never constituted a serious political threat—due to the lack of popular support—and were the object of intense repression, sanctioned by the government of Isabel Peron. They offered, however, the pretext for the political repression in the years that followed—1976 to 1983—in what has been called the “Dirty War.” Estimates of human rights organizations place the number of people who disappeared at 30,000. They were the object of murders and torture of great cruelty. The repression targeted all political opposition, trade unionists, and students.

Under the atmosphere of continual repression, a new kind of movement arose: the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo). These were mothers who met while trying to find out the fate of their disappeared sons and daughters. Every week for almost thirty years, they have gathered in the central Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires for a half-hour walk around the plaza, modeling a kind of humanitarian protest—one that took the regime by surprise. They wore white scarves as a symbol of peace and displayed pictures of their loved ones. The original association discontinued its efforts in 2006, judging that they had the support of the present government; a faction still seeks further recognition of the government’s role in the

abductions and murders. Three of the fourteen founders have disappeared.

The Economic Situation

Argentina's economic woes have deep roots in its political past. The origin of the latest turmoil lay at least as far back as the military regime, which contracted enormous debt for projects that were left unfinished and for the Falkland/Malvinas Islands War against the UK. In the eighties the state was unable to pay interest on its debt. Inflation grew and reached 200% per month and 3,000% annually in 1989. Carlos Menem came to power and implemented a neo-liberal agenda in alignment with the IMF, bent on labor deregulation and privatization of state companies—telephone, energy, and water among them. Argentina kept on borrowing, and due to a favorable exchange rate could import cheaply—which led to a flight of the dollar away from the country, an impoverishment of the industrial infrastructure, and consequently higher and higher unemployment.

The introduction of soy in Argentinean agriculture speaks volumes for the neo-liberal policies sponsored by the IMF. Most of the world's soybean cultivation comes from three countries: the US, Brazil, and Argentina. Together they produce 188 million metric tons, or more than 80% of world production and more than 90% of the soy produced for export.

This trend has resulted in the massive displacement of Argentine farmers, and the appearance of hunger and starvation in one of the richest agricultural nations. This is also accompanied by ecological devastation. To place land under soy cultivation, vast acreage has been deforested, making the soil more susceptible to flooding and ultimately desertification. Most of the soy cultivated is of the "Roundup ready" genetically modified strain, meaning that it is routinely cultivated with high doses of Roundup herbicide, which it has been engineered to tolerate. At present, due to extensive monoculture, soy will be more and more susceptible to emerging microbial, fungal, and other attacks, such as soy rust, which entered Argentina in 2003.

Numbers give an idea of the progression of the crop: production reached 27,000 metric tons in 1970, 3.5 million in 1980, 10.7 million in 1990, and finally 34 million in 2004. Soy formed 50% of the

country's grain harvest in 2003; rice, wheat, corn, and sunflower declined apace. Internal beef consumption declined by 16% between the years 2002 and 2003 alone.⁹

The production is dominated by a few companies that have formed a *de facto* cartel, leveraging the infrastructure necessary for its growth from the government, while passing on social and ecological costs to the community. Between 1967 and 2001, under the pressure of the neo-liberal policies sponsored by the IMF, 260,000 family farmers went out of business; 160,000 after 1990 alone.¹⁰ Where soy reigns, the landscape has been depopulated of most farmers, practically made dispensable. The companies have mechanized much of their production and the local population depends on jobs that occupy them for only a few months a year.

To give an idea of what the changes meant for Argentina, consider that the country that had been called the "granary of the world" has started to know hunger and starvation, particularly after the 1980s. Between 1990 and 2003, the agronomist Alberto Lapolla estimates that 450,000 Argentines died of hunger, the equivalent of 55 children, 35 adults, and 15 elderly a day.¹¹ The transnational corporations have transformed Argentinean lands as short-term investments, a little like a factory that depreciates and can be moved elsewhere. Benefiting from government-sponsored infrastructure, they can maximize their profits in a short span of years, then leave the local community to deal with the ecological devastation that happens particularly fast in ecologically fragile soils.

The precarious economic situation generated in the 80s was aggravated by a sudden reevaluation of the dollar, which caused prejudice to the country's exports and the source of dollars that they constituted. By the end of the 90's, the results of these policies were clear. Argentina entered a recession, while the government continued contractive policies that further hurt the poor and unemployed. Foreign investors withdrew their investments, and further capital resources fled overseas. That was not all—the 90s continued a trend of disruption and social fragmentation that affected the last surviving places of encounter: the neighborhood clubs or libraries, the unions, and the social ser-

vices. Even the habit of meeting the neighbor over coffee was receding, say some. All sense of community was fading away.

The economic collapse culminated in a collective loss of confidence in the economic policies of the government. When the citizens started withdrawing their assets from the banks, the government froze their accounts. Yet here, what could have been a violent uprising and a spiraling of violence effectively gave birth to something new.

December 19 and 20, 2001

We have seen the precedent established by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. In the 90s, following the closure of industries, the unemployed started to organize first in the south, then in the north, and finally around the capital in MTDs (*Movimientos de Trabajadores Desempleados* or Movement of Unemployed Workers). They essentially created a movement without hierarchy, staging massive blockades of major road arteries and pressuring the government for unemployment subsidies. The blockades earned them the popular name of *piqueteros* (roughly translated: blockaders). It is of great interest to remark that the great majority—in places up to 90% of their ranks—were women.

Argentines speak of the 19th and 20th to refer to all that happened during those two key days of spontaneous uprising in December. These started with pot bangings (known as *cacerolazos*), in which the population spontaneously marched towards the center of the capital. Along the way banks and foreign and especially American companies were the object of destruction. The middle class, in effect declassed, found the inspiration to extend in solidarity towards the under- and unemployed, understanding that their common woes had their origin in the neo-liberal policies of the government. The accompanying slogan was “*Que se vayan todos*” (roughly, “We want all of them [politicians] out”), which replaced previous political slogans. Participants encompassed a large political spectrum. President de la Rúa declared a state of siege. In reaction to that, more pot-banging demonstrations followed in Buenos Aires and other major cities, indicating that the government was losing the support of the middle class. Those who did not take part in the outpouring often helped those who were.

On December 20, the protesters converged to the Plaza de Mayo in spite of the state of emergency. Five people were killed, and

other violent incidents occurred throughout the country. Having lost political support, de la Rúa resigned.

A participant to the events has said: “This was the beginning of a new sense of identity, and moreover of community. People started to regain the confidence to look at each other after the fear generated by years of military dictatorship and economic devastation. In effect community began around the question of ‘how can we solve our problems?’”

Horizontalism

In the last ten years we have witnessed the development of social movements that do not act along the political premises of the past. Rather they show us the potential of the assertion of an independent Civil Society. One of the earliest was the Zapatista movement that began to involve the indigenous communities of Chiapas, Mexico from 1996. The indigenous communities have organized themselves at a grassroots level in a process honoring their cultural identity, independently from the state or political platforms. At another level, a similar development is promoted by the landless movement in Brazil (MST), reclaiming land left uncultivated. Other similar movements are rising in the Third World in the South African shantytowns, India, Ecuador, and Bolivia through the initiative of indigenous groups rising to stop the privatization of common resources (in particular, water) and destruction of the environment. On a smaller scale this is also taking root in Eastern Europe, Canada, and the US. What is unique in Argentina is the level of organization and the impact this new idea has on the economy with the formation of expanding networks.

Different concerns converge into the movement: struggles for the earth, life, work, health, and against hunger, bringing together people of revolutionary persuasions, feminists, LGBT, indigenous communities (Mapuche and Guaraní), and also many with no previous militant experience. The convergence has become something larger than the sum of its parts in the fight for dignity and freedom.

We have seen that the MTDs played the role of forerunners of the present movement. They started in the north and south of the country and organized against local governments and corporations. In great numbers they took their requests to the streets by blocking major

roadways and pressuring for government subsidies. What was new was their recourse to direct forms of decision-making. Instead of designating a representative, the group decided that they would negotiate directly at the blockade. They thus obtained the first unemployment subsidies in Latin America. These movements created a loose network, called *Anibal Veron*, soon after the crisis of 2001. Over time another one was born in its stead, the *Frente Dario Santillan*. A shift occurred around 2003, when part of the MTDs decided to focus on self-organization and attempt to implement their own self-sufficiency, rather than depending on the state. Roadblocks lost a great part of their importance. Other forms of organization have acquired further importance in the movement that recognizes itself with the two central ideas of *horizontalidad* (horizontalism) and autonomy.

The aftermath of the 19th and 20th saw the rise of spontaneous neighborhood assemblies in which many tens of thousands were actively engaged. Some estimate that there were about 200 assemblies in urban Buenos Aires in the month following the uprisings, each comprising from 200 to 300 people.

Often, writing on a wall or a poster would invite people to meet at a certain place and time, and an assembly was born. However, participation in the assemblies has decreased since the heyday of the 19th and 20th. The adversaries are state interference, other intruding parties pushing political platforms, and a lack of concrete direction for their work. The political parties have resorted to creating false neighborhood assemblies, then using the time they have to press for their agendas. This, however, further discredits them. Most of the neighborhood assemblies that survive are those that have concrete projects and/or occupy buildings.

Another element of the landscape of horizontalism is the *tomas* (“taken”). The word is used for occupied factories. It is consciously chosen over words with a political connotation, such as “occupied” or “recuperated.” The greatest majority of the *tomas*, if not all, occurred in places that were abandoned by the owners and in which the workers had not been paid, at times for up to six months. These were workers who had nothing else to turn to than their work and trade for survival. Many of the factories had also been partly emptied of machines and raw materials, or else had aging equipment. The assemblies also occu-

ped buildings and banks that had been abandoned for a great number of years. No violence was done to the factories, no door forced, nor were the sites used for living quarters.

From a few dozen at the beginning of 2001, there are now a few hundred revived workplaces. Among these are: factories, printing presses, medical clinics, a four-star hotel, and a daily newspaper. These workplaces work very closely with the media and art or educational collectives, offering them space. Among activities offered there are: popular kitchens that feed over a hundred people a day, popular education classes, theater and music workshops, bakeries, cafes, and places for working with street kids. Popular kitchens are often the first step addressing the urgent needs of poverty and undernourishment. Others who have land organize organic gardens and raise animals for meat.

The tomas seem to have quite a wide popular support. The government is constantly trying to find openings and weaknesses in the workers' vigilance or support in order to evict them. When the authorities and police come to dislodge the occupants, support is offered in most cases by the neighborhood associations and other collectives, but also by people from all walks of life; for instance, the retirement home situated across Chilavert came out to defend the reopened printing press. In some cases, as for Zanon—one of the largest reopened factories—support included Internet articles from journalists and other individuals all over the globe. At present, many occupations have received variable levels of support through the legal system.

The workplaces have started to network in order to support each other, initially through a system of barter of their products and services. The networking is starting to expand to a global level, facilitated by the tide of change that is going on throughout South America. In 2005, a "First Gathering of Recuperated Workplaces" was convened in Caracas, Venezuela, with representatives of 263 workplaces from eight countries. Networking extends to other aspects of the whole movement. The Argentines are weaving relationships with the Landless Movement of Brazil (MST) and are constantly exchanging ideas with the Zapatista Movement of Chiapas—for example, through visits of delegates to Mexico. Global networks have now been established,

such as the People's Global Action (PGA) and, of course, the World Social Forum.

We have reviewed the developments that characterize the Argentine revolution. Something has already emerged of what makes horizontalidad unique, through the new social structures that have been created. But, we will not find its key signature in a rigid definition. Horizontalism is not an ideology. It is more of a way of relating to one another in a direct democratic way. Another departure from classic ideology is that you will not find only one key thinker in the movement. This is why we will quote this or that voice, be it a worker in a toma, an assembly participant, or an MTD member, as they have been collected in interviews by Marina Sitrin.¹²

Another key word of the movement is *autonomy*. This word is used to differentiate the new phenomenon from the state or from hierarchical organizations. It has no relation with the Marxist understanding that the term covers, especially in Italy. Unlike older forms of autonomy, social change is not requested from the state or deferred to some future ideal condition such as seizure of power. "Autonomists" intend to change the world without taking power. In this they are similar to the Zapatistas. "To be truly autonomous is to come close to not depending on a specific plan. I believe that now is the point of ruptures, where plans are falling apart, and that little by little we will find ourselves without them," says an unemployed worker from an MTD. From now on we will refer primarily to horizontalism in order to refer to the movement as a whole.

The new movement emphasizes an experiential approach as opposed to utopian ideas and goals. "If one day we achieve true autonomy, we won't be autonomists or autonomous, but will, in fact, be free," claims Emilio of Tierra del Sur neighborhood assembly. Another individual echoes, "The reality of the situation is never subordinated to the ideal—like the concept of a correct assembly. We're much more on the side of reality than the ideal.... We don't celebrate the fact that there are assemblies in the abstract. We don't find all assemblies interesting as a general rule." The same spirit is found in the Zapatistas' dictum: "walking while questioning, and moving forward with our reflections," which implies a willingness to proceed through trial and

error. It is interesting that the two movements speak with similar words in spite of having little contact.

It is not surprising that Argentine horizontalism places great emphasis on the realization of concrete projects; starting a community kitchen or an organic garden is more important than laying a permanent blueprint for the future. “Thoughts and ideas are not solely the product of cerebral cogitation. Thoughts must also engage the physical body. Thoughts emanate from transformative practice,” says a member of an MTD. “[Horizontalism] is something that’s constantly under construction and reconstruction,” says one of his friends. In fact, people equate the experimentation with ideals to a sort of quest. Ultimately, no forms or techniques (e.g., assemblies or piquetes) are seen as universally valid. What is used today may have no reason to be tomorrow. There is a refreshing commitment to questions rather than answers, and this is reflected in how the participants express themselves in “I believe” or “I feel” and ultimately “I don’t know” or “I’m not sure,” without dimming their enthusiasm for a continued search. What is started is wholly new, a process of uncharted creation. It goes from traditional delegation to direct participation. So, in the beginning at least, it is strengthening the traditional democracy of the voting poll to a more direct democracy. It is to this, among other things, that the term horizontalism refers.

Another important feature of horizontalism is the idea of true dialogue without compromise or fear of different opinions—true consensus over and above weak compromise. Full discussion promotes participation; it does take more time, but the walk is important, and a new consciousness is created through it. Listening to each other is, in fact, at the center of the whole process. This is the process that awakens awareness of the importance of the process of communication and the “new practices of sociability” that the movement is seeking to consolidate. This is the means for getting to the core, to what everyone has in common, rather than pitting one interest against another. All of this is what the political parties cannot do when they try to join or co-opt the process, especially in the assemblies.

Horizontalidad counters the idea of one person—one vote as an idea of ultimate justice. Rather, it wants consensus, working to encompass differences. In this way, no central authority is needed—

rather, facilitators or temporary leaders. When all voices are included, a true “group thinking” that does not sacrifice individuality can emerge. Thus, much of the support that people and organizations offer to each other starts just at the level of listening to and sharing experiences that can inspire. When a *toma* is threatened by eviction, the support and input of others who have gone through the experience can be a very important first stage. The attempt to encompass diversity is summed up by Neka, a woman from MTD Solano: “What we are as a movement is not about building a unified movement or hegemony, but a step toward creating diversity.... This [building horizontally across different movements] is much more powerful than building a single or universal movement.”

There is a diffuse realization in the new movement that classical political thinking is what caused the problem in the first place. Many will clearly indicate their distance not only with institutions, but also with all forms of political thinking. They may call their experience a process of “internal revolution.” Those who consider themselves political militants—and there are many—often express themselves in the old revolutionary language. However, two elements are grafted to it. The first is the reference to the new terms of *horizontalism* and *autonomy*; the other is a distance from institutions and a disillusion with party politics. If there is a model that is often invoked, it is the Zapatista precedent. Overall, this translates to the desire to move from the individual to the social levels of reality, rather than the reverse. The bridges to the new individual experience are the flexible social structures and networks.

Many groups consciously decided not to ask government for help—in some cases even foregoing help offered—in order to intentionally step into a space of autonomous initiative, rather than dependence upon the government for solutions. On the other side, the reality is that the unions and the political parties do not do much to offer support to reopened factories or MTDs.

An experiential approach, a commitment to questioning, and inclusiveness lead to another important result of horizontalism—the joy and creativity that exudes from many of the participants, in spite of an often-grim reality of need. This is how it is expressed by Toty of MTD La Matanza: “We are constructing with a happy passion.” “Hap-

piness isn't something you can postpone until tomorrow—we must live with total fervor today,” echoes a fellow unemployed member. Everybody realizes that this was hardly possible before the present. “Under capitalism, we were giving up the possibility of enjoying ourselves and being happy,” remembers Neka of MTD Solano. But she adds for good measure, “The leftist parties try to destroy our differences. It's a form of power to make us one thing. That form of power, of course, is false and fake and would have everyone obey a capitalist or Trotskyist boss.” One way to extend this joy is through solidarity with the least fortunate. Assemblies have taken initiative for helping out the *cartoneros*—the unemployed who survive by recycling cardboard and other recyclables—offering them hot meals when they finish work, staging celebrations and fundraisers, and so on.

Listening, creating, and spreading joy embolden many to express ideas that seldom find their way into the arena of social change. This is what has become consecrated with the term *affective politics*. “The movement has to be the thing that revives healthy relationships,” says Vasco of MTD Allen. Another fellow unemployed member expresses it even more boldly: “We try to love each other. It's difficult.... This is part of our changing culture, and as we change we notice how much we really need to.” Many individuals interviewed by Marina Sitrin (in her book *Horizontalism*) recall with pleasure how far they have come along in modifying relationships of antagonism into caring and appreciative friendships. Over and over again they express the wonder of discovering something new about themselves or celebrating the reconciliation with the one who was perceived as an enemy. Affective politics is not just meant for internal consumption, however; people express wanting to extend it to the rest of society.

Building a New Culture

Horizontalism offers us the most concrete example of what it means to create social change from a cultural perspective. It is a departure from anything attempted in the past. “We are creating a new movement, and this movement doesn't have much to do with previous ones” (Nicolas from Indymedia). And further: “We're not creating the opposite, but are creating something else. We aren't building the opposite to the capitalist system, that's been tried and it doesn't work” (Emilio from

Tierra del Sur neighborhood assembly). We are entering an uncharted territory, and this is accompanied with the often stated “We don’t really know what we want, but we do know what we *don’t* want.” The creation of this newness explains the need to create new words or adapt old ones to express a new reality—one, moreover, that is rapidly shifting.

Carlos G of Zanon—the largest factory occupied in Neuquen—says, “What the workers of Zanon are accomplishing represents a truly inspiring redefinition of values.” And further: “It is all part of a new reeducation. You speak with a certain confidence, you feel that it is a *compañero* that struggles at your side...and there you become more human. How are you not going to love him? Yes, you esteem him, you love him, and I am not exaggerating.” There is a diffuse consciousness that horizontalism is really about a whole redefinition of values, and further, that these values are not something definite and immutable. This lack of uniformity is itself the source of aliveness of the movement. Some see that this redefinition of values is what will lend strength to the fight against poverty and social ills. The difference of horizontalism with the alternative politics of the past is that the latter struggled for single issues or for material advancement alone. The new movement wants that advancement to be the result of new values and new relationships and not the other way round, because that is already a source of joy and transformation in itself.

A particular example will be particularly meaningful for what has been explored within this book. In Argentina, the topic of abortion has been previously viewed within a traditional worldview, heavily influenced by Catholicism. At present, in the discussions that come up around abortion there is an urge for working with all its aspects and to treat them within the context of Argentina’s culture, rather than solely as a question of rights. Acknowledging the trauma of abortion is advanced as an important aspect: “To have an abortion is a terrible thing, whether you have the money to have one or not. It’s a horrible experience from a cultural point of view. It’s also awful because someone is messing with your body,” says Paula, of a feminist and LGBT collective. And she adds, “It would be a very profound cultural question, not only a legal question.” And Claudia, of an alternative-media collective, adds: “One thing that is clear though, is that the feminist discourse of

the past no longer works. It's old, and it needs to be revised to speak to our present condition as women." Considering that this is said by women who have not hesitated to stand up where men had most often given up, these remarks cannot be passed off as submissive acquiescence. These views are often expressed by the very same women who are very active in changing the *machista* attitude that is still very present in the movement. Once again, this is part of a spirit of inquiry and questioning, rather than reliance on ready-made answers.

Looking at the Argentine backstage, we can further delineate the profound meaning of the present movement. December 19th and 20th are described over and over again as a "rupture," the equivalent of a collective shift of consciousness that made possible a new social birth. This goes together with the realization that what has most power is really the new consciousness. "Many people survived the crisis and began to think about how to rebuild their lives in a different way. It's really incredible," says Martin of a neighborhood assembly, referring also to himself. People relate the experiences predating December 2001 to their present life and see how they have changed by taking new, unprecedented steps. They link the change to their own adoption of new values. Many have found new abilities and skills they would never have suspected. Even those who were already politically involved will notice this: "I changed. For me, it wasn't a political awakening, because from a practical and theoretical point of view, I was always involved. But what I did have was a really skeptical attitude," says Carina of the Argentine World Forum mobilizing committee.

The new consciousness lives with the heightened awareness of being poised between two worlds, two diverging realities. "We all arrive here from the outside, having been beaten up by the outside world.... Whereas here [in the MTD] you may have a problem, but it comes out of work we're engaged in, rather than your lack of something," says a woman from MTD La Matanza.

The people in the new initiatives have the feeling that they are learning to be human from a wholly other perspective. They want new ways of being and thinking. They can point to larger implications of their personal predicament from diverse perspectives. "Capitalism produces sick people and sickness, in that order," says a man from

MTD Allen, adding, “That is because we live in a society where everybody is permanently desperate, and that makes people sick.” Another unemployed worker intuits that this matter has even deeper roots: “The problem of power cannot be attributed exclusively to capitalism.... Its historical roots lie in the totality of modernist thought and in the way humanity carved out its historical trajectory.” Ultimately, this is best explained by Neka of MTD Solano: “We have fought against and attacked the capitalists, but we didn’t know how to combat capitalism.... We can annihilate private enterprise and the corporation that symbolize all of that [system of domination], but if we don’t combat our way of relating—which reproduces all these things—it seems like we are fighting an empty battle.”

At bottom some feel it is cultural survival and the survival of our humanity that is at stake. “We’re at a point in time when the contradictions of capitalism presuppose either the dissolution of humanity or the creation of a whole new civilization,” states an unemployed worker. And Emilio, of the Tierra del Sur neighborhood assembly says, “How do we change ourselves and our communities? This is as important as getting rid of the IMF.... More important, even,”

Cultural change of such a dimension is a slow path. In the words of Zapatista Subcomandante Marcos: “We take the slower path in order to construct something true, something that is representative of the people and the collective.” This indicates that nothing all-encompassing is awaited from the first steps. What horizontalism understands is that the self cannot find expression in traditional politics. It is lost in the abstraction of interest groups, social classes, or abstract thinking. Rational thought and directed action are valued at the expense of feeling, relationships, and what makes a person whole.

For all of the above reasons, taking power is a very low priority; exerting it differently is the key. Horizontalists pride themselves of holding assemblies and taking decisions in ways that are completely transparent. Power is felt in the individual’s ability to change the tenor of their relationships and build new social relationships and structures. It is seen as *capacity*, a potential. This goes together with the realization that what has most power is the new consciousness. “I dream that we recover our culture, that we recover the value of each other, and of merely being human,” says Gonzalo of HIJOS (a collective of the

children of those disappeared during the dictatorship) in summing it all up.

It comes as no surprise that in the radical shift that horizontalism represents_women played a very important role from the beginning. They also played a part in it before horizontalism was thought of as a new reality. In the dark days of the Dirty War, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo ushered in a protest movement that went beyond the political to essential human values and presented the first real rupture. Women in the movement are very aware of the role they have in shaping a new culture.

The creation of new values is the real threat to the existing system, and this notion is clearly expressed by how repression manifests itself, as in the case of Chilavert, a printing press of just eight people—the same who printed the book *Horizontalidad*. The attempted eviction of the press involved eight assault vehicles, eight patrol cars, two ambulances, and police with dogs. They had to retreat due to the overwhelming support the workers received from all areas of society, including the neighbors and even the elderly from the neighboring retiring home. In other instances as the case of Felix Salud, an occupied clinic, the police were present in numbers surrounding the whole building, and had brought in assault vehicles, fences, firefighters, and helicopters. There, too, thanks to the outpouring of support, the eviction was staved off.

But the difficulties are not just external. Many realize that in order to create the new they need to resist fear, and that fear is the best weapon the government can spread against the movement. Fear and inner doubt naturally take over once the initial euphoria of change wears off. As Emilio of Tierra del Sur aptly puts it, “It’s much easier to believe in the system by voting for a leftist party, than to attack it.” Creating new values is challenging and exacting. Many unconsciously experience the difficulty of staying in the vacuum of the creation of a new culture, and some take refuge in what they know, the promises of political parties. This means that some people in the movement come and go, even return, challenged by the transformation that is needed at a personal level. Political parties know this, and will pay good money to enroll the most active participants—for example, at election time,

offering them ten or a hundred times the money they are able to make on their own. Some offer examples of salaries of up to \$1,500—a considerable amount in Argentina—in order to buy off people to sap energy from the movement and cause division in times preceding the elections.

It is to be foreseen that the islands of new culture will coexist with the older culture, and that this may be the predicament for a long time. Creation can take place alongside the survival of the old. This is, in fact, what happens with an alternative economy that is set alongside the prevailing one, with which it has to have innumerable points of contact. It would be preposterous to postulate a parallel economy.

We have seen how the new economic initiatives seek strength in the collaboration of like-minded initiatives. They are seeking to do so in independence from the state, political parties, the church, and all of the institutions in general. Central to the new approach is the creation of flexible networks. Emilio of Tierra del Sur expresses it thus: “The traditional leftist configuration is like a tree, where the central committee is the trunk.... On the other hand, the relations we are experiencing between different movements resemble web-like formations. It’s like a network, a real network, where no single group leads. It’s a web of independent and interrelated communities, which don’t work around a single consolidated project; rather relationships form around concrete projects.”

The clearest example of the articulation of these networks is expressed by the revived workplaces. Chilavert, the printing press, has commitments with other reopened factories (for example, through barter), with popular kitchens (printing free flyers for them), with neighborhood assemblies that came out in their defense, and so on. They will themselves show up when another factory nearby is threatened with eviction. However, there is an understanding of the limits of close cooperation among reopened factories. This works well between entities of comparable size and output, but not beyond that. The smaller networks can only address the first levels of needs. The future will require further experimentation and creativity.

Another important aspect of horizontalism is what is emerging in education, information, the arts, and medical care. Many MTDs and

initiatives are establishing schools with a wholly new curriculum, consciously different from the prevailing culture of domination as it is propagated in the public system. At MTD La Matanza, where the new school is supported by the microenterprises (sewing, baking, silkscreen printing, and book publishing), a woman says, "We believe that in some way we're going to change the education system from what we experienced.... All the things we're taught are carried inside ourselves and they are difficult to remove later. We think that it's more difficult to struggle with the enemy inside of ourselves." Another woman adds, "Teachers are used as a tool for the government to promote the system, and we want to break with that." Occupied workplaces and neighborhood assemblies often invite artistic collectives and independent media and harbor cultural initiatives under the same roof.

MTD Solano has taken similar steps and also foresees doing the same in matters of health care. As Neka says, "We also talk about producing autonomous health care and autonomous education.... We also have a lot of people working in libraries and with children's projects." For matters concerning health, the reopened clinics feel an urge to set themselves up in such a way that they can provide to the needs of all, regardless of financial resources, and strive to do so within their constraints.

The thorniest issue at present lies in the relation to government and its institutions. The movement as a whole has taken a stance of "stand and resist." Understandably, horizontalism needs to accumulate practical experience and find an understanding of its own unique contribution, before it risks being diluted or co-opted. The new that is being built needs to be protected and strengthened before the risks lying in the next stages can be taken. Most are aware of the dangers of co-optation and how capitalism has been adept at incorporating everything that supposedly threatened it. That may be the reason for refraining from engaging at this stage of the game. Some will admit that the relationships with the state will deserve due attention in a not-too-distant future. "This [relationship with government] is really ambiguous terrain that intelligence can occasionally help you navigate," says a man from MTD Solano. "We've chosen, at least within the movement, not to become auxiliaries to, or supporters of, the government...."

We understand the limitations in this and know there are others who are doing it.”

On one level, these relationships are starting to be built. The judiciary is often asked to support the tomas and give a legal foundation to their enterprises. Local legislation, sometimes only temporarily, offers a framework for factories to continue in operation and explore how to legalize ownership—for example, forming a cooperative. In this realm it is clear that an adversarial stance would only lead to a dead end.

A new movement is showing the way in Argentina, Chiapas, and elsewhere. What is most prominent is the fact that it is organized primarily along cultural and not political lines. Nicanor Perlas, a cultural activist in the Philippines, defines what characterizes the new cultural arena of Civil Society in its being organized in a wholly new way.¹³ Much of what he expresses can be recognized in the Argentine situation. We will search in vain in Argentina for a new charismatic leader that inspires a unified line of thought or strategy. Leaders offer what best they have for temporary mandates that they receive; they have to prove their integrity through the tenor of their life and commitment. The movement itself is led by many; it is mobile and fluid. It works like a network rather than a tree, as is the case in any political party. The outcome is a fluid creation of new ideas and initiatives, rather than the creation of new permanent structures. This is a concrete example and inspiration for all culturally based initiatives aiming at social change in the future.

HORIZONS FOR A NEW CULTURE

This book has looked at what already exists in the realm of cultural renewal, as it applies to social matters, and how it can be articulated in terms of principles and practices. What is offered can be envisioned as a basis for the contemplative practice of the emerging Civil Society. It is not intended as a complete inventory, but rather as a sampling of ideas and practices that inform and sustain a new way of acting in the world that is only becoming possible at the beginning of the millennium. Let us briefly review the two complementary aspects that have

emerged from this work: new spiritual ideas and new spiritual practices.

Rudolf Steiner was a pioneer in the diffusion of the ideas of karma and reincarnation from a new scientific perspective. Edgar Cayce, Spyros Sathi, Arthur Guirdham, Joan Grant, Grace Cooke, and a growing host of mystics and seers have come to the knowledge of previous lives and have contributed to the diffusion of these ideas that are sorely needed for the whole of civilization, despite the fact that the dominant culture most often vehemently resists them.

Acceptance and active exploration of these ideas creates the opposite consequences of what is most often naively feared. Considering that we most likely are eternal individualities, being schooled in the material world will lead human beings to want to better their lot in life. The realization of a responsibility that we do not magically blot out or absolve ourselves from with death will awaken us to a more urgent desire to bring redress to those deeds we regret. Furthermore, a genuine understanding of the laws of reincarnation and karma eliminates the false dilemma of knowledge versus faith. True knowledge is indeed the avenue to love, but such results may not appear immediately or in the same incarnation. That does not absolve us from the task of acquiring knowledge of the spirit, or from the effort of expressing love for our fellow human beings. All knowledge of the spirit will inevitably make us better people, able to act with more compassion and understanding of other human beings. Neither side of the equation of knowledge/love needs be a false dilemma; nor do faith and science need to be irreconcilable.

An understanding of karma that reaches beyond the few easy clichés is of great importance in the moral realm. It deepens the feeling of human responsibility, and gives full meaning to the familiar concept of “taking responsibility” for our lives. In the idea of karma there is really no other substitute for individual responsibility, nor anyone to legitimately blame for our life burdens beyond the structural ills of society. The most important consequence of understanding these ideas rightly is that we shape our destinies to such an extent that what meets us is most often the result of what we ourselves have set in motion, or of what challenges we have embraced with love for the task—a love that we often need to rekindle.

It is most often objected that the notion of karma is a kind of escapism from responsibility. It is true that old ideas about karma have often degenerated in this direction. Living with a karmic perspective means living fully engaged in the present with the awareness of the weight that our decisions carry. These premises would encourage anyone to acquire spiritual discipline and develop listening and/or conflict-resolution skills. Sheer intelligence and willpower will be re-evaluated in the light of the fact that they have little value in a larger perspective where acceptance, atonement, forgiveness, and personal growth are key virtues. A karma-based perspective is a continuous invitation to understand and accept other people's limitations, change our own perspectives, and slowly modify our worldview.

Acquiring a deeper understanding of karma in our own lives will invite us to the underestimated effort of accepting ourselves as we are, mourning what we regret, and growing into the realization of the unique contribution we can make to the world. Self-acceptance will then form the basis for accepting others and forgiving them their transgressions. Knowledge of the laws of karma will render us more realistic in what we can expect from others in one lifetime. It will also grow into the realization of what our role can be in their personal growth.

The above holds true when we direct the gaze to group issues, knowing that they are the compounded effects of a mosaic of individual karma or the replay of other more ancient situations of conflict. Wars, ethnic hatreds, and religious strife plunge their roots far deeper than the mind can acknowledge in a necessarily simplified manner. While we most often may not be able to reach such knowledge, we can at least be wary of ideological and strictly political solutions. Holding this perspective in mind is already a great help in the direction of moderation.

The perception of the divine in the dimension of the human can help us consecrate our life to service of our fellow human beings. Service will then be perceived as the necessity of the soul's growth and find its reward in understanding of the "network of love" of which we are part for both our own and other people's growth. It is a true wonder that the divine can always be perceived around us in other human beings, and that every encounter is an opportunity for us and for the world. Not least of all is the growing realization that human beings are

beginning to actively co-create with the divine in a way that is only becoming possible now that the veil between the two worlds is thinning.

Taking responsibility is, as we have seen before, the central idea of experiential spirituality. The practices we have examined invite us to a paradigm shift, to a new consciousness. Most of all we need to patiently vanquish the demons of the dualistic mind, the “us versus them” mentality that seeks an enemy in every problem. If there is an experience most easily reached by anyone who earnestly engages in experiential spirituality, it is the idea that “the enemy is us.” As Civil Society invites us to think beyond duality in the social realm, so is experiential spirituality threefold by nature. It invites us to think in *both/and* rather than *either/or* terms, and to reach the third term of the equation without which the opposition of the two remains sterile. NVC is most often carried out in conflict situations, and there is no term of opposition that it cannot help us resolve; there can only be a corresponding lack of skill. There is no moral issue, no matter how painful, that a Family Constellation setting cannot help us move in the direction of improvement and healing over time. Likewise, the Twelve Steps help us modify entrenched aspects of our personality concerning substance abuse or relationship dependence when they are taken earnestly to their ultimate consequence. Prayer at the personal or group level is another healing and community-forming tool of great power.

A new consciousness is what can differentiate individuals and organizations working in the cultural field. The old objections that pacifists were as angry as those who supported war is what should invite us to ponder and hesitate to rely on formulas for quick solutions. As the report of Stone Circles suggests, a different society will ultimately only derive from the slow incremental effect of the sum of changes in individual consciousness until a significant shift is produced. How can this tendency be accelerated and how can it be found in large doses in the organizations of Civil Society? It has been proposed and repeated in many of these circles that we have to set the basis for a “vigorous culture of encounter.” How could this become more than wishful thinking? It is a fact that moral exhortations hardly produce desired improvements. Behind every idea that acquires strength

in the world, there is concerted practice and individual discipline. Where then are the techniques and discipline that would allow Civil Society to be a spark for cultural renewal and social change, if not in the tools of experiential spirituality and in new spiritual knowledge?

What is it that makes a cultural/spiritual activist different from the typical political activist of the last century? We have seen it in the example of Julia Butterfly Hill. In the measure that this kind of activist is directed outwardly, all the more did she need to be aware of herself and of the tenor of her relationships. The variety and depth of the tools of experiential spirituality make it only a matter of choice for all of us to know what we need in order to ally effectiveness with compassion, determination with flexibility, and practice enthusiasm without dogmatic fervor—in brief, to ally the opposites in a synthesis with the third within ourselves. This will be the stuff of miracles.

The emerging force of Civil Society needs to grow in the awareness that it does not just want to bring about new outcomes. It must first and foremost want a different way of being, at a time in the history of our planet where few other options remain.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Pre-birth Memories: An Account

(Excerpt taken from *Children Who Communicate Before They Are Born: Conversations with Unborn Souls*, by Dietrich Bauer, Max Hoffmeister, and Hartmut Georg, Forest Row, UK: Temple Lodge, 2005, pp. 62–65)

“It was much more difficult to write it down than I had imagined. I wanted to stick as strictly as I could to the truth, but my descriptions sound to me like a delicate fabric which I am trying to reproduce with rope!”

She starts by describing the difficult life situation of her own mother who is not married, has an alcoholic partner, and has already had one miscarriage. During her second pregnancy, in about the sixth month, she feels the child in her womb kicking her vigorously, after which she is not aware of it moving any more, and it feels as though it has died. She immediately goes to the doctor, who wants to operate on her, for he thinks the child cannot be saved. She rejects this, goes to another doctor, who gives her injections and orders rest, until, some days later, the child moves again.

“I was this child.”

This child is born, but she is not beautiful to look at. One of her eyes squints, the corners of her mouth turn downwards, and later on her teeth grow crooked. She makes a sickly impression, and gets a temperature every now and again for no apparent reason. Her mother does not like showing her to people. Friends are sorry for her being so unsightly, and the only thing they admire is her blond hair.

The child wonders why adults pity her. She does not feel at all unhappy or lonely, for she lives and plays with a little brother to whom she gives things and a big brother who protects her. Only the grown-ups cannot see these brothers. Not until later does she hear that apart from the earlier miscarriage, her mother had a further miscarriage after her second child.

It happened once that in the presence of the child the expression “the end of the world” was mentioned. In bed that evening she imagined the following picture: the sun setting, the yard with its hill and its cherry trees disappearing, the linden tree in front of the balcony and herself with her little blue tin bucket all disappearing. And she was afraid that there would not be another day tomorrow. All later feelings of fear were nothing compared to this feeling of being caught

up in the destruction of the world, of seeing everything she was used to holding onto disappearing—the house being razed to the ground and the trees crushed and herself swept away in the roar of the storm. A monster opens its jaws and threatens to devour the child. She screams with terror. She turns over in bed until she lies on her knees and implores: “Dear God, do not let the world come to an end tomorrow! Let the sun come back! At least tomorrow!”

Then the whole world was transformed. A great calm was suddenly there, and a question hung in the air: “Why?” She then entered more strongly into her own inner depths, searched for the reason why and, finding the answer, she said: “I want to do something in the world. I have promised to do something great, and I still have to do it.” And giving this answer she felt herself to be in the center of creation, full of love towards everything that had just appeared so destructible, but also full of a feeling of responsibility beyond all understanding.

Now, for the first time, she experienced loneliness, and wept. But then it seemed as though at the head of her bed there was seated a being clad in a wide, white robe, before whom she knelt, and laid her head on its lap, and the being spread out its wings over her.

When the child started school the moments of conviction came less often. The child often thought of a being sitting on the right hand of her bed, but she felt as though she were merely imagining it. Admittedly the being did “speak” to her, and she felt his presence, but less and less did she believe in what she saw. Yet she was furious when this being gave her to understand that it was not going to oblige any more but wished to withdraw. The child convinced herself that the being could not possibly withdraw, for she herself was creating it in her own thoughts. But the room became empty.

The child is perplexed, and cannot bear being deserted. Whether on that evening or later on, she resolves to believe that the being exists as long as she can only feel it. And the resolve restores her sight. The being is there again in front of her. Now, however, he stands up and moves towards the child, standing before her, joined in some mysterious way to her brow. The child felt the being as outside herself yet at the same time within her, where, with a movement of the hand, it pulled away something like a curtain which appeared to have been just inside her forehead. And for the first time the child saw the

following pictures arising, like a dream, but at the same time like a long-forgotten memory.

As a grown-up, decades later, she writes: "I am amazed that the experiences I want to narrate have not been forgotten or concealed beneath the passing years. It is more as though, closing my eyes, I were remembering something that had recently happened or, to be more exact, as though it existed right now, filling the whole of time, outside me, above me."

And then she gropes for the right language for the memory pictures, tentatively seeking for the right feeling of responsibility for what she saw, strict with herself: "I feel myself released from darkness. I move and this fills me with wonder, joy and the inescapable wish to continue this movement. At the edge of the darkness a being detaches himself, which accompanies me on my left. Lights emerge in front of me which move and intertwine like snakes, but which do not concern me. It seems to me that my companion wants to embrace me and carry me back into the unconscious dark. Yet I strive on towards something which looks like a spot of light. It is a plain spread out before me, picturesque and colorful.

"I am warned against my parents, especially my mother. But with all my strength I want to dive into this light. The voice of the being now becomes clearer. I may choose between two ways: the one is to be externally beautiful but inwardly impoverished, the other to be rich and beautiful within. I choose the second way with the thought that I shall after all be able to have an influence on my exterior. Then I am surrounded by a kind of love, but also sadness. And as I depart I am allowed to make a wish. But the movement has caught me up. It appears that that itself is the wish. I experience time, feel that what lies behind me is fading away. I am alarmed and force myself to turn round. I want to be certain about my father, never lose consciousness, and bear a light within me. The joy of the being who is beside me feels like a song. Then it grows dim, after which an impressive voice tells me that I shall have a task, and I promise to remember it. As I move forward forgetfulness overcomes me, enveloping me like a cloth. Once again I call out, and this call is like a bridge which becomes as thin as a thread and hazy. Then my memory fades."

APPENDIX 2

The Life of Rufus Moseley

The following has been gathered from the *Manifest Victory: A Quest and a Testimony*, by Rufus Moseley, New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1941; and *A Resurrection Encounter: The Rufus Moseley Story*, by Wayne McLain, Minneapolis, MN: Macalaster Publishing Co. 1997. The quotes come from Moseley's book, unless otherwise noted.

Rufus Moseley, born on August 29, 1870, grew up in a very close-knit community near Elkin in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. He had a warm, honest relationship with his father, whose utter honesty he admired. His mother led a very devoted life of prayer and was very supportive of her children's education. Such was her faith in Rufus that she followed him later into then highly criticized Christian Science. The boy was so physically frail that it was feared he would die young. He suffered many attacks of physical poisoning and painful indigestion. In later years the doctor would use opiates to relieve the pain, but Rufus so disliked the aftereffects that he would often prefer to endure the pain.

During his childhood he grew up among Primitive Baptists, Methodists, and Missionary Baptists. At age six he awakened to the following words of the Bible that his brothers read to him: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." This is the discourse of Jesus to the Samaritan woman from John 4. In his autobiography he also mentions that while taking First Communion he saw a gentle, glowing light over the table. These experiences notwithstanding, in his youth he had not formulated any precise commitment to faith.

As a child he was already successfully applying his skills as an arbitrator between quarrelers. From an early age he wanted to become a lawyer. At school he learned to read slowly and his handwriting was poor. At age seventeen, he took an exam that allowed him to teach at the elementary level. He taught his first summer term in a challenging and disruptive classroom. Seeing that he was hardly old enough to pass as an authority and master a difficult situation, he decided to seek and befriend the ringleader, and managed to win the class's trust.

He later pursued four years of college education at Peabody College, one year at Mercer University, one semester at Heidelberg, Germany, and several summers at Harvard. At that time his spiritual leanings came to the fore, and he resolved to turn to a life dedicated to Christian teachings. Yielding to this inner urge he had his first experience, although brief, of being in the “kingdom of heaven,” meaning a state of rapture.

From 1894 to 1900 he taught at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. From 1889, when entering Peabody, to 1900 when he resigned his professorship, he had a very active intellectual life. Political science was one of his major interests. He so impressed his professor, Henri Pratt Judson, that the latter helped him secure a teaching fellowship. Besides political science he had a thorough background in philosophy, depth psychology, and literature. According to biographer Wayne McLain, he was one of the most educated men of his time.

The flexibility of Moseley’s thinking may be a little puzzling. In theological terms he was not a fundamentalist, although more orthodox than the average fundamentalist; not a religious liberal, although he saw himself indebted to many liberal thinkers. He would have sympathized with the goals of liberation theology, but not its means. He did not have an apocalyptic vision of history as it is currently held, but viewed Christ’s mission as the ultimate goal of history. He did not see human destiny as an escape from earth, but neither was he a philosophical naturalist. He did not deny the experience of earth; rather he saw it lifted and spiritualized through Christ. He could always see what was worth saving even in his philosophical adversaries. Of Dewey’s deterministic philosophy, quite opposite to his thinking, he adopted the pragmatism and the practice of learning through experimentation.

Moseley was strongly influenced by “idealists” such as Plato, Emerson, and other transcendentalists who helped him realize the role that mind and ideas play over form and matter. He saw the ideal made actual through the ministry of Christ. With a certain challenge to commonly held opinion, he stated that he came to the Baptism by the Holy Spirit (his Christ experience) more through Emerson and Plato than through biblical orthodoxy. In his autobiography we can see how

living so deeply in the world of ideas transported him to the spirit. While reading Plato he once completely forgot his body and the pain that so often plagued him. He stated: "I was lost in intellectual delight." When he returned to his everyday consciousness, his pain resumed. This experience was repeated some years later.

Throughout his academic career and especially later, Rufus liked to express himself with humorous thoughts and in parables that would suggest rather than fully elaborate on philosophical concepts. He was able to relate his spiritual insights in brief, condensed sentences, rather than with elaborate trains of thoughts. He loved the poets—particularly Tennyson, Emerson, Browning, and Donne—and after his Christ experience, found more truths in them than in the philosophers. McLain intuitively: "Such a capacity for transfigured synthesis in thoughts is a poetic quality more of the nature of intuition rather than analysis." In essence, Moseley had gone through a thorough, comprehensive schooling of the intellect before being able to express flashes of deeply intuitive knowledge.

From 1900 to 1910 Moseley was associated with Christian Science. He became a paid contributor to the *Christian Science Journal* and eventually the First Reader of the Macon congregation. This was a radical departure from the Baptist background of Mercer University. Christian Science had grown out of the New England transcendentalist movement and was then a very new development in American religion. The young man was attracted to Christian Science as the most daring and radical experiment for "doing again at least some of the works of Jesus." He was, we could say, on a quest for complete wholeness. His health played an important role in his decision. However, he wanted to know the laws of life that make one healthy and was determined to not ask for healing unless he learned how to live better.

The eagerness of Moseley's inner journey led him to willingly sacrifice a position of prestige—his professorship. He resigned because of his desire to learn from the Christian Scientists and the obvious fact that this could not be accepted by the faculty at Mercer. Here, as in everything else he did, he was seeking to be led by the spirit. His resignation was accepted with mutual good feelings and his

relationship with the Baptists continued on even better terms after his departure—such was the esteem in which he was held.

Even though Moseley was weary of Christian Science's aspiration for perfection, he was attracted by its enormous claims, in the spirit of experimentation. The spirit under which Moseley entered this phase of his life can best be understood by the conviction he had then reached: "I saw in the love and wisdom of Jesus a scientific certainty, an understandable law, and a workable principle that I had not seen clearly before. I saw that the teachings of Jesus are really provable or demonstrable to all who dare honestly and bravely to try them. When we yield to Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and His way of life, we are not in the realm of opinion, not in the realm of belief, but of highest self-evident truths." This, as we will see later, stemmed not from dogmatic persuasion but from an intuition of the possibility of experiencing the very same ideas that he intuited.

What led Moseley to his final Christ experience was a gradual crescendo over time. The seeker had quite a few experiences that are actually frequently confused with the ultimate goal. The difference is that the last one had permanent effects, albeit with a minimal delay as we saw in the chapter on the Christ experience. Asked by a Methodist minister if he had had a "second blessing" (the so-called "Baptism in the Holy Spirit") he answered that, Christ encounter included, he had had about seventeen.

He first experienced "a wonderful sense of divine love" when he initially converted, but he said he was too immersed in his quest for knowledge and ambition to become a lawyer or somebody important. The experience of union and love increased when he gave himself completely to the quest for God and abandoned the ambition of a secular career after leaving Mercer.

Moseley's trademark was his great earnestness to openly experience what others offered him. On the occasion of a visit from the evangelist Penn, he alone responded to his invitation to experience the spirit despite peer pressure to resist the emotionalism of revivalism. He went to another service with Pastor Penn and later, while reading a passage of Saint John, he felt sure of being at that moment "in the joy, peace and fearless love of the Kingdom of Heaven." All these steps along the way illustrate how much Moseley

eagerly and sincerely believed in the possibility of fully experiencing what he believed to be true.

Upon attending his first Christian Science service in Boston, during communion, he felt lost in the spirit and enveloped in a great ocean of love. He had no conscious memory of how he went from the gallery to the main floor of the church. In his experimenter zeal Moseley became interested in Moore Hall's gatherings in Macon held by ministers of the Pentecostal movement that had just recently spread from Azusa, California. As he gave himself to thought and prayer, he says, "A burning power got over my body and I had periods of unusual illumination. Finally in about a week's time the glory left, but the power on my body increased."

Other pronounced spiritual experiences followed the aftermath of the resolution of difficult human situations; for example, his various choices that led to the parting of the ways with his colleagues. The decision to seek release from the Christian Science movement caused him much inner suffering. Afterward he felt much stronger awareness of the presence of the spirit. He joined the Pentecostals, but there experienced tension with their orthodox tendencies. Among his certainties at the time he claimed: "that...the Spirit of Truth, rather than a church, or even the church that is His own body, was to be the authority, teacher, leader, guide and revealer of Him, and that we should not even call, much less look upon anybody on earth as Master, Rabbi, Leader, Father, Mother, etc."

McLain states somehow intuitively that only a resurrected mind is the appropriate response to Moseley's resurrection testimony. We could argue that the reverse is also true: only because he had that resurrected mind could he reach the cardinal experience of his biography. In effect Moseley possessed one of the most trained minds of his time. He had an intense earnestness allied with objectivity in the approach to the truth. Moseley reached this stage through a complete dedication to knowledge together with an utter capacity for self-denial, to even abandon knowledge for the pursuit of his higher self. Knowledge was never an end in itself.

After his central experience, he perceived Christ's presence even in nature. "Even the cattle and the chickens, to use a fine line of

Browning, had learned the new law, so surpassing were they in form, movement, grace, and beauty.” The experience of cosmic consciousness motivated Moseley not to be the leader of any sect, nor belong to any branch or denomination of religion. He explained that, in a way, he hated all denominations for their sectarian limits, and in a deeper sense he loved them all. This resolution allowed him to be of help to all groups and churches. He felt assured that he would not need to build any church because the churches of others would open to him. Likewise he was offered a regular space in the *Macon Telegraph* where he could regularly pen articles. Until the end of his life he worked in his pecan grove while he ministered to the poor and imprisoned and witnessed to “those on the top of human privilege.”

Moseley is remembered for the truly genuine interest he had in everyone, his ability to smile and laugh much, and his irrepressible optimism. With such a dose of earthiness it is not surprising that he did not like the epithet of mystic, but preferred to call himself a “firsthand.” His writings in the *Macon Telegraph* reveal his interest and concerns with economic justice, world hunger, international peace, and overcoming racial prejudice and denominational bigotry.

More important than everything he did in the world were his theological views, or rather the tangible fruits of his Christ experience. Having originated in 1910, they still sound prophetic and corroborate much of what later phenomena have brought to light. Moseley invited those who listened to him to leave the observer stance and become subjects of the quest for Christ, to have the desire to meet Him in the here and now rather than hope for Him after death. In an article in the *Christian Science Journal* of September 1908 he wrote that “while to God there is only one universe, one creation, for human beings the Christ is the mediator between the two worlds.” And he concluded with: “The resurrection and ascension as well as other events in the life of Christ Jesus are unfolding stages of consciousness as well as facts that are possible of recurrence in the experience of all who go His way. Everything in God is always a present and eternal possibility for each and every son of God.” (*Manifest Victory*, p. 63) Through his experience Moseley realized that heaven wants to come to Earth much more than we need to go to heaven. The transformation of the earth

comes from having to unite with the divine made human, the truly human that incarnated in Jesus Christ. He saw in the death and resurrection of Jesus the “beginning of the biological transformation of the entire external universe.” And further: “Love creates the external order.... In a word love creates, completes and transfigures concretion.” (*A Resurrection Encounter: The Rufus Moseley Story*, p. 14) Rufus’s encounter with Christ’s resurrected, glorified body sustained and emboldened his conviction that human destiny includes a transfigured Earth.

For Moseley the resurrection appearances of Christ are not finished. It is essential to transform our inner being in order to make this encounter possible. The appearance of Christ has to be explained not as that ultimate journey in outer space that we would take after death, but as a movement into a higher dimension of being. Moseley’s prophetic views overcome the notion of a dualistic universe with a material Earth and a divine heaven. That is what led him to assert that heaven and hell are already present, and that likewise Christ can be encountered in the here and now.

The consequence of all the above is that we are made to be partners in the work of the spirit, of Christ on Earth: “The divine purpose is to make us like Jesus Christ, and partners with Jesus Christ in making all things like Him.” And further: “He’s interested in a cosmos that is redeemed and glorious, and a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, peace and everything” (from a talk he gave in Ardmore, Oklahoma shortly before his death in 1954).

Moseley loved the experience of the Earth. In the new meeting with Christ, old notions of asceticism play no part since there is to be no separation between the sacred and the profane. “Neither gazing up into heaven nor working to make the Earth better, apart from the Holy Ghost and apart from vital union with Jesus, will prepare one or the world for His coming, either before or after the millennium” (“Present and Coming Kingdom,” *Macon Telegraph*, May 7, 1933). It isn’t therefore surprising that Moseley’s focus lay not in the Christ that *was*, but in the Christ that *is* and therefore in the elusive idea of Second Coming. In this regard he writes: “The reason that we have to wait for the full manifestation or coming of Christ, for the kingdom of God on Earth in its fullness, is that God awaits our full cooperation with Him

and for His perfect love to triumph in us and in our relationships with one another. He is ready and all that is in the way is for us to get ready.” (“Workers Together,” *Macon Telegraph*, June 22, 1930) and further: “Jesus is coming again and coming in great glory to the end that we may be changed even bodily to His likeness and be lifted to His throne of power and dominion.” (“God is Love,” *Macon Telegraph*, August 19, 1934)

His personal experience is what allowed him to say that “the coming of Jesus in glory does not mean that He is brought to the level of the world’s life, but that He is to appear as He is to lift us into His likeness, and as fast as possible to lift all life. He is first to appear to those ready for His appearing.” And further: “In the light of all that is now at hand through the love of God... what manner of response there should be—a putting on of Christ, what hastening preparation for His coming, what co-working with Him that everything that lives and suffers and enjoys may at the quickest possible moment receive and participate to the fullest in the love and peace and glory of Christ.” (“Resurrection as Fact,” *Macon Telegraph*, April 20, 1930)

**NOTES AND
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NOTES

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