

New Grateful Reflections on Experiences
that Changed Me
Don Evans
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A Sequel to the 2013 Book

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FIRST PART

New Writings in 2015; Written First for

Downloaders of 2013 Ebook

Introduction

On March 6, 2013 I published my ebook *Grateful Reflections on Experiences that Changed Me* (GratefulReflections.com). Now, in September, 2015 I'm publishing another ebook. It's a follow-up, and I've given it a new title, inserting the word *New* at the beginning.

The new ebook came together in a way that involved my changing my plans many times between the summer of 2012 and the summer of 2015. It brings together two very different pieces of writing.

The first is an entirely new piece that I began in April, 2015 and continued into the summer. I gave it the new title and on July 6 I sent it first to people who had downloaded my 2013 ebook.. I wrote directly to them and for them because their downloading made them somewhat likely to be interested in reading this new writing in 2015. I explained to them that I was trying it out on them. If they responded favourably I'd feel encouraged to work further on some unpublished sequels to my 2013 ebook.

In 2012 I had set aside five chapters that I had planned to include in my 2013 ebook. I decided that I'd deal with these later as sequels. Some chapters were

almost done, so all they would need is some editing and some revision. Others would need substantial additions.

In 2013 I was disappointed that so few people downloaded my ebook. I knew it would not become a best-seller because it was not a how-to-do-it book, but I had hoped there would be more people letting me know their appreciation. But I also felt that I was called to do such writing and to make it available. (Section IX of my new writing in 2015 explores my passionate need to write, which began when I was ten. This need continues during my late-eighties. It's a way whereby I as a loner moved out of my mild autism as a child, connecting with people outside my private consciousness.)

I emailed the new writing to downloaders on July 6, 2015. A few people immediately let me know they were planning to read it but had not done so by July 12, when I did receive detailed comments from Floyd Kelly. When I heard from him I immediately decided to work on the five sequel-chapters. My decision arose partly because of his encouragement, but also partly because of my passionate need to write and my sense of being called to do so.

In my message to the downloaders I said that I was sending them some more reflections on experiences, especially recent experiences in 2015. Throughout the whole message I assumed that they were the only readers, so I often asked them to consider a particular issue. I have retained this style, although my envisaged readership includes others for whom I'm also asking these same questions. I hope you can adjust to this!

Although the experiences I'm going to report are mainly in 2005, I'm going to begin with an experience in 2008 that I've never published before.

I Called by Spirit to Meet a New Friend

I had a strong sense of being called by Spirit to get to a shamanic gathering in Guelph. A message came to me during a meditation:

Go to the shamanic gathering in Guelph that you've heard about. There you will meet a particular woman. You will be able to identify her although you haven't met her before. It is important for both of you to meet there and to meet again nearer Toronto to explore ways in which you can help each other.

We did meet at the Guelph gathering and several times that summer. What turned out was that each of us had spiritual gifts to bring to the other.

We were not meant to be lovers or life-long "soul-mates" but our encounters deepened each of us in significant ways on our spiritual paths. During the years since then, we have encouraged each other from time to time by email, for we appreciate each other's gifts to the world.

II Called by Spirit to a Piano Concert

Early in April, 2015 I learned that Helene Grimaud would be in Toronto to give a concert on April 19 at Koerner Hall. Immediately it seemed obvious to me that

I was being called by Spirit to attend, so I ordered a ticket. For several years I had not been outside my seniors' residence to a public concert. I was simply too weak. My decision to go did not arise because I was suddenly stronger. I was still very weak. My reason for not ordering two tickets was that I was far from certain that some new health crisis wouldn't prevent my getting there, however determined I was. If I had to cancel, I wouldn't be disappointing a friend.

During the previous ten years or so I had resonated deeply with Helene Grimaud as I listened to most of her recordings. But her visit to Toronto was an opportunity, perhaps my last, to connect more deeply. Being in her physical presence as she played would provide a direct access to her unusual energies as she played.

I did muster enough determination to get to Koerner Hall on April 19 . It turned out to be very significant that I was there and that I was there alone to experience what I did. When I got there I learned that Helene Grimaud would first play for an hour without interruption. Indeed, she had instructed the staff not to allow anyone in until she was finished! After an intermission she would be playing Brahms. The program informed us that during the hour before intermission she would play piano music that conveys what it feels like to be surrounded and pervaded by the energy of flowing water.

The wonderful acoustics in Koerner Hall helped! The hall is like a resonating musical instrument such as a cello or a grand piano, and listeners feel as if they are inside the instrument. So Helene's devotion to sound plus the Hall acoustics carried almost everyone into rapt

attention for an hour. When she finished, her deep bows were not conventional. She was conveying her deep gratitude for our intimate grateful response to her playing - her primary way to initiate connection with people directly, deeply and authentically.

As I listened to her music a flood of body-memories came to me, memories of water-energy that I had experienced previously when various gifted human beings enabled me to do so. For example, in 2010 an African shaman called Mandaza immersed me bodily into the waters of a lake in Algonquin Park, part of a ritual of cleansing and renewal for our circle. And in 2011 Sophie Seyer, a healer from Quebec, initiated me into an embodied state in which I felt water-energy flowing both within me and around me.

As each memory came I thanked the person who had blessed me. The theme of gratitude became powerful, so sometimes I found myself thanking persons who had helped me in “ordinary” ways.

Some of the initiations into water-energy were described in my ebook. Indeed, I’ve been re-reading parts of my ebook to fill out events that I remembered powerfully but briefly during Helene Grimaud’s piano concert on Sunday, April 19, 2015. I had mostly forgotten because for several years my powers of memory have been decreasing somewhat and recently my chronic exhaustion has seemed to damage me spiritually. My previous shamanic and mystical resources have been less and less accessible.

For example only once in 2014 did I bring someone else some healing/blessing energy through my hands. When I did, it was a complete surprise. It happened quite simply. Two devout Christians discerned that I could bless them with the presence of the risen Jesus. They asked me to do so, and I did. Nothing esoteric happened again until I was silently “applauding” Grimaud at the end of her first hour. My arthritic hands prevent me from clapping, so I sent her a grateful *Thank you* through my hands.

III The Piano Concert: Days Later

During the piano concert by Helene Grimaud on April 19 and for about five days afterwards my impression was that it was an event as momentous for me as the meditation on October 19, 2011, which initiated many months of radical experiential changes and grateful reflections. But from about April 24, 2015 what has been happening in me has been fluctuating, complex and somewhat bewildering. Sometimes my experiences would revive me and revitalize me. Sometimes they would do the opposite. Only gradually has some clarity emerged:

Yes, for a few days there were some experiences of access to shamanic experiences which had receded – e.g. having healing energies flowing through my hands and bringing this to various parts of my body. But these experiences receded again as my bodily-emotional sufferings dominated more and more of my consciousness. Not only did these sufferings continue as they had before:

- (i) overall physical and mental exhaustion,
- (ii) oppressive heat in my head plus muffled hearing plus blurred vision and muffled hearing
- (iii) numerous aches&pains throughout my body

But in addition my arms recently became much more itchy than they had been for many months. This felt like the proverbial straw that broke this camel's back!

On Monday, May 11, however, something very heartening happened. I quote from a Journal I wrote that day:

I was listening to classical music on CBC-FM radio, as I often do in the mornings while I'm preparing food in the kitchen. Julie, the host, introduced a recording of Ravel's "Daphnis et Cloe", with an anecdote about its creation. Ravel was at a friend's estate and was composing it in a remote cottage. He was so concentrated on this that he hadn't even noticed that his feet were in water because of a sudden flood over the land!

As I listened to the music I was suddenly immersed in flowing-water-energy, as I had been during the piano concert. But my most immediate flash-back was not to the concert. It was a body-memory of an altered state one day in Cuba (February, 2008). I was meditating on my bed in the hotel, and suddenly I felt immersed in flowing-water-energy. I was moved to go outside into a public square and then I found myself doing what I call "Fake Tai-Chi" (I've never learned the movements!). But it was not fake. I was merely allowing my body to be moved in a way that

resembles Tai-Chi. This morning it happened again during the first five minutes or so of Ravel's Daphnis et Chloe.

At first I was only aware of my flowing bodily gestures expressing the energy in motion. Soon, however, I was seeng and doing quite ordinary things while the flow continued! Unlike in Cuba, on May 11, 2015 I was also very clearly aware of items in the "ordinary world" outside my window and in my apartment. And I was preparing food, not expressing the music in movement.

In Cuba I was happier than I'd ever been in my life but I was also not suffering a lot. Today I was similarly happy while also being acutely aware of my body's aching frailty!

Then Ravel's music became more and more agitated and agitating as it told the story of Daphnis et Chloe. I realized that only the first five minutes or so were meant for me, for they conveyed me into Mystery. When I turned the radio off, I continued to be in my extraordinary/ordinary state. This has continued for some time, even as I'm typing this out.

A few more reflections:

Reconciliation of seeming opposites was also a central theme of the experience on October 19, 2011, but what happened this morning feels somewhat different. It's more calm and settled, as if a resistance deep within me is being washed away - a resistance to being here in this body in this world.

When I said that only five minutes of the piece was “meant for me”, WHO meant it? I don’t know and I sense that I don’t have to know. I’m very grateful to whoever it was.

Soon after May 11 I tried without success to duplicate my *Daphnis and Chloe experience*. My music-store told me the disc I had heard (Montreal Symphony) was out of print. He ordered a different one. When it arrived I couldn’t find the part that stirred me!

I’ve been learning not to go on playing discs that I previously relied on to bring desired changes in me. I currently need to have a different approach: randomly picking a classical or non-classical music station to turn on, not requiring or expecting anything and deeply open to possibly being surprised.

Sometimes an unanticipated positive change within me would occur. Sometimes it wouldn’t. Instead of seeing *Daphnis et Chloe* as a piece of music that I could add to my list of musical-spiritual resources I’ve been changing my emphasis. I’m focusing on the inherent spontaneity of the whole event. I didn’t wilfully bring it about. I didn’t expect what happened.

A Note on July 19, 2015:

A similar spontaneous event happened this afternoon. I had been on the phone with one of my sons for a while, reached my energy-limit. I told him and he understood. I lay down for a brief rest and flipped on my radio.

It was the Venezuelan pianist Gabriella Montero playing an improvisation on a piece by Bach. Immediately my whole body felt intensely alive! I was writhing in pleasure and moving on the bed as if I were dancing! I stood upright by the bed and as this continued I began sounding. My voice resonated within my body as a rich baritone moving up into the tenor and down into the bass. Such joy!

When the music changed, I turned off the radio and the enhanced state continued for five minutes or more. For about an hour this gradually subsided but well into the evening I felt more hopeful and grateful and invigorated.

About five years ago I had met Gabriella Montero in person after her exciting concert with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. I managed to be second in line to have her autograph one of her cds and I used the opportunity to ask her about one piece: *Did you deliberately make the piano sound like a Flamenco guitar?* She confirmed this and appreciated my sensitive listening. We chatted further. Although she is an archetypal beauty her energies were humble and straightforward. She encountered me simply as one human being to another.

So when I flipped on the radio July 19 I brought memories of that encounter to my listening. But what happened was inherently spontaneous, completely unexpected and certainly not planned.

Continuing with Helene Grimaud

During the hour with Helene Grimaud and for about five days afterwards the meditative shift created within me seemed to be as momentous as the one on October 29, 2011 that started me writing my ebook and continued within me for over a year. But as I've indicated, what's been happening in me has been fluctuating, complex and somewhat bewildering. Only gradually has some clarity emerged.

I'm being challenged into letting go of my attachment to my tried-and-true ways of accessing spiritual resources. And my *Daphne et Chloe* experience encouraged me to hope that I may thereby find myself less resistant to being here and in this world – a central grievance in my life since conception, birth and traumas in infancy!

This shift has been happening as I write *New Grateful Reflections* to send to you. Writing this (like writing my ebook) is part of an overall process. Each day I've been drafting and re-drafting challenging questions and answers, reflecting on what I'm gradually learning from my experiences.

Some years ago I could often draw on various ways of accessing spiritual resources to healing, employing specific meditations or resonating with specific music. It was like pumping water from a well, a well within which I lived. I knew that doing a particular meditation or listening to a particular piece of music would usually bring a particular change in my bodily-emotional-

spiritual state. So my spiritual life had a pattern and my accessing became part of my identity.

Often an angel or a gifted fellow-human (whether a deceased spirit or embodied on earth) initiated a specific access in me, or modified it in me.. They helped me to “prime my pump”. It’s clear that one reason why I specially needed to develop esoteric gifts was that my personal history included traumatic sexual interference as an infant. In my 2013 ebook I wrote this up in detail, describing how the traumas were gradually uncovered and how I gradually realized that the traumas initiated bodily-emotional-spiritual tendencies to illness that emerged later in my life. I also described how my increasing access to spiritual resources helped me replace many of the tendencies.

Overall during the past three decades of my life, drawing on my spiritual resources has been very helpful and healing for me. And often I accessed my spiritual resources to bring help and healing to other people. This also helped me by reassuring me that my life has meaning. But recently my internal and external daily life has become less and less controllable and my direct access to esoteric gifts has gradually been disappearing. Now I see that I’ve been anxiously trying to go on drawing on my esoteric gifts to provide me with some measure of control.

In 1947 I was a student at the University of Toronto. My current piano teacher Weldon Kilburn suggested that I buy and apply a book on playing the piano by Robert Schmitz. The book was called *The Capture of Inspiration*. As Weldon guided me through the book, my playing

actually improved, for Schmitz was very perceptive concerning how to vary my use of arm weight and finger action.

At the time I was totally unaware that the title contradicted itself. *Inspiration* is not something anybody can *capture*! I'm remembering the book title as I'm realizing that recently I've been trying to "capture" my esoteric gifts.

IV Esoteric Gifts as a Means of Control

Previously I've been aware of using esoteric gifts as a means of control, but only as a possibility. Several years ago, while writing up my discoveries concerning Meditation&Music sessions with fellow seniors, I wrote this:

When we die, we have to let go of our attachments and to "move on" into what we can not control. And as we go on living we can only appreciate each present moment if we do not go on insisting that we remain in absolute control of changes within us and around us or insisting that we are superior to everyone else.

I also wrote about a key way of shedding obsession with control and superiority: shedding obsession with being unlovable. This requires a commitment to loving and accepting ourselves as we actually are, both glorious and ridiculous:

Indeed, although we need to shed obsession with control and superiority, we also need to shed obsession

with being unlovable. My own personal conviction is that the key to healing this state is learning how to love myself as I actually am, acknowledging that I have tendencies towards both being destructive and being creative.

Now, in June 2015, I'm looking back over my life, realizing that in relation to some people I've had an excessive need for control and an excessive fear-and-resentment at being controlled. I understand this in relation to my traumas in infancy, but now I also need I need to understand my control-obsessions in relation to the ongoing traumas of aging. I need to acknowledge this tendency to myself more frankly as I respond to receding access to spiritual gifts.

These days I've been asking "How can I let go of my attachment to my spiritual gifts as a way of control?" As I've pondered this question I've uncovered a disconcerting but understandable tendency within me. Part of me hopes that I'll find an answer by acquiring a new spiritual gift on which I can draw directly, at will! I'd be shedding an attachment by continuing in the attachment! Fortunately I can see this as something funny and I can laugh at myself in a kindly way!

Deliberate letting-in of spirit-helpers was part of my life. But now that my direct spiritual access to them has been disappearing I've been spontaneously and gratefully remembering them. That's what happened as Helene Grimaud's magical music took over my awareness. I also partly remembered in my body what each spirit-helper wrought in me. And I'm realizing that this is an indirect way in which I can shed my attachment to my esoteric gifts as ways of control.

A few people where I live help me with their esoteric gifts and I'm feeling increasingly grateful to them. But there are also many residents and staff who help me every day in "ordinary" ways by their kindness and respect and playful humour. Our encounters are mostly brief, but I'm grateful every time. And the more I rely on "ordinary" people the more I can humbly acknowledge that I'm mainly an "ordinary" person!

This encourages me to make my daily meditations minimally esoteric: only focusing on my breathing in-and-out as I focus on an area of tension in my mid-back. Then sometimes I'm revived and revitalized in an unforeseen way. Similarly, as I've said, flipping on a music station, open to being changed by whatever I hear, is itself an indirect way to foster shedding of my attachment to my spiritual gifts.

I should mention that sometimes what I hear I immediately discern to be agitated and agitating, so I turn it off. That's what happened after the first five minutes or so of *Daphnis et Chloe*.

As I go on, I'm not assuming that your experience is very like mine. For one thing, only a few of you are seniors. And probably none of you suffered sexual traumas in infancy. Nevertheless you may find that there are some similarities. I have two very different reasons for thinking this:

(i) Some of you are total strangers to me. But you downloaded my ebook and this may indicate that you are on a spiritual path of some kind.

(ii) Some of you I know with much gratitude. Not only are you on a spiritual path but your path enabled you to actively help me personally on my different path.

I've been attached to my spiritual gifts, relying on them to provide some measure of control in an unreliable world. And I've been very attached partly because I've connected my gifts with my sense of my distinctive personal identity. Do you need to deal with anything similar to this? Only you can discern whether any of this applies to you.

V Spiritual Gifts and Personal Identity

(1) Experiencing Total Disintegration in 2011

In my ebook I reported an event during March 2011. While I was meditating I had a crucial experience that enabled me to understand that I tend to become attached to whatever brings me a sense that I have a secure personal identity.

My body shook as if it were going to disintegrate, flying apart in all directions. This devastating body-terror was accompanied by devastating thoughts. I realized that nothing I consciously do or refrain from doing can guarantee that I won't continue to be deeply vulnerable to what happens in my life. Even more terrifying was the realization that some events could destroy me, in the sense of removing all sense of cohesion in my personal identity. All the ways I've relied on to identify myself as myself could disappear.

I'm vulnerable to complete personal disintegration. Such vulnerability is far more challenging than any fear of not-surviving death. The terror as I was feeling my vulnerability was acute. It was also strangely familiar. Indeed, I realized that I had first felt it when it when I was sexually traumatized in August, 1929 and almost died from mastoid infection. Yet paradoxically when I experienced the terror in my old age it lost much of its power over me. Hence in 2012 and even more in 2015 I can question attachments to whatever protects me from disintegration.

(2) Questioning my attachment to Jesus: 2012

In March, 2012 I began to realize that I needed to question my attachment to the risen Jesus in that I was using him for reassurance that my personal identity is secure. I'm going to quote from my ebook:

A friend who knows me very well said, "May I ask you a personal question? Don't answer if you don't want to." The question was something like this: "You've been changing in many ways, becoming more flexible and flowing, less attached in any of your previous ways. Why are you still attached to Jesus?"

The question was not presented as a challenge or a criticism. It seemed to arise from puzzlement and a friendly desire to understand me better. In fact my honest reply was, "I'm already beginning to wonder about this myself!" And for the next few weeks I tried to become clearer concerning what was going on within me in my relation to Jesus. These are my reflections:

In Chapter 1 of my ebook I outlined a meditation towards pure consciousness. We gradually empty our consciousness of contents, letting go of attachments to projects or possessions or people that provide us with a firm sense of personal identity. For me, arriving at pure consciousness is not an ultimate, permanent goal. It may occur. Indeed, on a few occasions it has for me. As long as one remains fully human, however, it's only temporary. For me what matters is the movement towards pure consciousness, the "surrender" that welcomes three kinds of change:

(i) whatever bodily-emotional changes are required for healing/transformation

(ii) whatever awareness of spiritual presences is needed for this to happen

(iii) whatever discernment/wisdom is appropriate for me at this time:

(a) concerning people to whom I should bring help or people who can help me

(b) concerning resistance within me to healing/transformation

© concerning healing/transformation that has occurred and and which I need to celebrate.

I'm continuing to quote from my ebook concerning March, 2012:

For many years in my daily meditations I have reminded myself of the presence of the risen Jesus within me and around me and then asked him to help me to

surrender toward pure consciousness. For the last few months, however, my initial intuition/guidance has been simply to exhale into a relaxation that is a different kind of surrender: I trust that within my body is already all that is needed, including the spiritual presences, for healing/transformation. I don't need to consciously invoke Jesus, or St. Teresa of Avila, or my friend Robin Noya or anyone else who has helped me, for after they gifted me they are now within me.

It's not that I would henceforth never ask Jesus to remind me of his presence again. Recently at an Easter Communion service I ate the wafer and drank the wine and thereby became intensely aware of his Real Presence in a bodily way. I sobbed in joy and shuddered in awe more deeply than ever before. Moreover, I'll call on him for help if and when I'm finding it difficult to surrender or I need his guidance concerning a choice I have to make. I'll also call on him and/or spiritual presences from other traditions to protect me or protect others from psychic invasion. In the past I've invoked Kali (Hindu) or Kwan Yin (Buddhist). I'll continue to do so when the context requires it. But usually I'll call on Jesus.

I'm realizing more clearly what it now means for me to be centrally Christian rather than definitively Christian. The risen Jesus is still distinctively significant in my life, but I no longer hold on to him as essential to my personal identity.

Nevertheless I'm still centrally Christian. Christian scripture, worship, music and culture still resonates more intimately and personally with me than the traditions of any other religion. I have not become a Hindu or a

Buddhist or a Taoist, living within these or other faiths in the way someone does who grew up within them, or in the way that a convert often becomes immersed in a new faith.

Yet although I am centrally Christian, from time to time I'm predominantly on another spiritual path, and I feel more free than ever before to switch temporarily. There's a new flexibility towards being multi-path:

(i) Sometimes I'm within a secular-humanist spirituality. What matters is whether my heart is present to myself and others in a light and loving way. Sometimes this is my spirituality. I'm finding happiness in purely-human love and laughter, with no awareness of Divine Love or the risen Jesus.

(ii) Sometimes I'm within a Aboriginal/Shamanic spirituality. For example, I meditate on the Cosmic Tree and my sense of bodily self expands to include my energetic connections with everything and everyone in the universe.

(iii) Sometimes I'm meditating within a Hindu spirituality. I begin to disappear into a no-thing that is everything, everywhere and everywhen.

(iv) Sometimes I'm within a Tibetan-Buddhist spirituality. I'm becoming especially open to Kwan Yin or the Dalai Lama . Or I find myself sounding with some monks. I sat alongside them (once in Toronto).Or I listen to them on a compact disc.

When I wrote this I was mainly preoccupied with my having a multi-path spirituality that is centrally

Christian. But I believed (and still believe) that Christians whose paths are single-path don't need to shift to multi-path, but they need to shed some traditional doctrines within Christian tradition, namely those that endorse punishment by eternal torture in hell. Even Matthew 25, with its inspiring request to reduce human hunger, thirst and loneliness in prison, includes this threat. Fortunately many Christians ignore the punishment-in-hell context in Matthew 25 and lovingly live their lives in merciful service of their fellow human beings. They are far less preoccupied with punishment than the God portrayed in both Testaments of the Bible.

In 2015 I'm not questioning my multi-path version of Christianity as such. Clearly it was and is appropriate for me, though probably it's not for others. Rather, I'm further questioning my attempts to maintain a secure personal identity by drawing on my distinctive spiritual resources.

(3) Specialized Personal Identities Considered in 2015

Some people have founded their personal identities out of their distinctive spiritual gifts. If these are very specialized the identity can be summed up in a phrase:

<i>persistent pilgrim</i>	<i>empathetic listener</i>
<i>innovative artist</i>	<i>witty clown</i>
<i>spirit worker</i>	<i>animal communicator</i>

And they may have a sense that they became this because Spirit called them to such a particular emphasis.

And when I see their gifts at work I'm usually thankful for their dedicated service. Indeed, over the

years I've often found myself saying, *I'm glad that someone is totally devoted to this, though I'm not. Human society needs their specialized service.*

Indeed, this applies to many people who do not see themselves or their service as “spiritual”. I appreciate their whistle-blowing on secretive governments and corporations, or their persistent activism about road safety, or their defiant disobedience of unjust laws, or their devotion to scholarly research. (As I list these services I'm thinking of particular individuals.)

In 21st-century society personal identity is often confused with public image. The latter is a concoction by and for the media. Some people and some institutions “reinvent” their public image to sell themselves to people whom they want on their side. Their image is their “camouflage” in a kill-or-be-killed world. It's understandable as a very-human way to try to find a safe “place” to be.

Yet some people do have an authentic personal identity rather than a public-relations image. And because it is authentic it can be meaningfully challenged by them in various ways! They are not simply making themselves up as they go along. If they were, the notion of being true to oneself would have no meaning.

It seems to me that if one's sense of authentic personal identity is very specialized it is more likely to need change in two ways:

(i) needing to heart-welcome more spiritual gifts.

(ii) needing to become more humble, including oneself mainly among the “ordinary” rather than mainly among the “gifted”.

I don’t have a simple label for my own identity. In my ebook I explained that in 2012 I was in a process of recognizing attachments to various projects and persons in my life that I needed to shed. One was my attachment to the risen Jesus actively at work within me. Paradoxically becoming less attached increased my openness to him in new ways!

Indeed I came to a paradoxical conclusion concerning my identity: I’m a mystery originating ultimately from Mystery and I’m also a particular human being limited by serious flaws and laughable foibles and buried self-deceptions. One expression in my ebook that resonated with some readers was my summary of my life as “glorious mess”.

If your distinctive spiritual gifts are cherished by you, it’s probably because, overall, they have been a good thing for you and for those you have influenced. Sometimes, however, people need to ask whether such a cherishing is an attachment that needs to be relinquished, a questionable clinging to their current sense of identity.

Do any of you need to ask this? I don’t know. Only you can discern whether you need to ask the question and if you do, what answer comes to you. .

In my ebook I made it clear that I was not writing a how-to-do-it book that sets forth a spiritual path for

everyone. Instead I was inviting readers to reflect on their own experiences, comparing and contrasting these with mine – and maybe share your reflections with me.

I was not writing a book in which readers would find a ready-made path to follow. Nevertheless some readers found the ebook inspiring, challenging and illuminating. I know this because some of you wrote to me. Your response encouraged me to continue writing.

VI Do I Need to Let Go of My Compulsion (or Calling?) to Write?

On June 22, 2015 I realized that some new circumstances quite beyond my control may actually force me to stop writing *New Grateful Reflections* or anything else I've been planning to write. This evoked much anxiety, even panic. My extreme response indicates that writing is part of my personal identity. For the first time in my life I've been seeing that writing has been very important since I was a boy and throughout my life. I'm asking *Why?* and *How?*

Since mid-April I've been trying to write *New Grateful Reflections* every day, determined to do this in spite of the extreme effort this requires because of my exhaustion and lack of focus. For example during the evening of June 22 I even lost from my computer all that I wrote during the past two days concerning writing. I mistakenly deleted rather than pasted! For several days after that I had to try to remember what I had written.

One thing I did immediately remember is that twice in the 1970s when one psychotherapist transferred me to another they said, *Make sure that Don keeps on writing!* They implied that if I stop writing my morale will sink.

My need to write is something I've never questioned until now. I've simply assumed it. I've questioned many other tendencies in me, but not this one. Maybe my resistance has been specially strong?

When I was a child my impulse to use my strong intellect in some way was expressed in a way typical of autism: memorizing the populations of many large cities as I read them in a book.

By the time I was ten, however, I had found a more creative outlet for my active intellect. In my ebook I quoted the first stanza of a poem that I wrote then:

*Oh to be in England
Now that April's here,
With its air-raid shelters
And its Hitler dear.*

I vaguely remember reading newspapers in 1937. They stirred my concern about Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) and about the threat to England from Hitler's military build-up. I was concerned in my mind, not in my heart. The detached, ironic tone of the poem indicates this

The same year I also wrote a prize-winning essay at school about the meaning of the Royal Visit to Canada.

I now see as a positive step my shift from being to some extent an “idiot savant” (memorizing city populations) towards becoming a creative writer connecting with the world. Writing brought some healing to the shock of the two-fold trauma in August, 1929: sexual interference combined with a nearly-fatal operation on my infected mastoids.

By the time I was about 14 (1941) I made a “discovery” at the public library: the atom and the solar system have some structural similarities. I then wrote an essay with a grandiose title: *A Theory of Life and Matter*. My theory was that the solar system is an atom in a larger system which is itself an atom in a larger system. This larger-and-larger expansiveness has no limit. But the universe also has a limitless smaller-and-smaller “direction”: each atom in the world we’re immediately aware of it is itself a solar system containing atoms. So there is a limitless overall system in each “direction”, larger-and-larger and smaller-and-smaller.

This theory starts from scientific facts, but it ‘s not a scientific theory. It’s entirely speculative. No experiment could support it or falsify it. It is a juvenile attempt at something like Leibniz’s ultra-rationalistic metaphysics. Leibniz argued that *this world is the best of all possible worlds*. My claim was very different but it, too, was a product of reason on its own.

I gave the essay only to my geography teacher, whom I thought would understand it. He handed it back months later without comment!

In 1942 I wrote a very different kind of essay and I delivered it at as a speech in an oratorical contest. The

title indicated a very different focus for my intellect: *Happiness is the Achievement of Success*. Through the 1970s and early 1980s my interest in finding happiness eventually led me to seek it in personal experience, in depth-psychotherapy and yoga and spiritualism and shamanism and meditation and mysticism: in my heart more than my head.

Through the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s I increasingly questioned my view of happiness as entirely an “achievement” rather than mainly a gift to gratefully receive. Since October 19, 2011 when a life-changing meditation launched me into years of new processing, this heart-receptive approach has become central. But the launching included much reflection and included WRITING down my reflections in my ebook!

My first published academic book was the doctoral thesis that I wrote in Oxford during my second time there, 1958-60 and also during 1960-62, my first two years at the McGill University Faculty of Divinity. What I wrote was not a grandiose metaphysical theory like my essay in 1941. Nor was it part of my personal exploration of happiness, first indicated in my essay of 1942. It was remote from both.

My thesis supervisor was J. L Austin, the dominant philosopher in Oxford at the time. His field was linguistic analysis of ordinary language. He once devoted a whole seminar-discussion to clarifying the answer to this question: *What is the difference between killing a donkey by accident and by mistake?*

In my book I applied this kind of approach to a theological topic: biblical language concerning Creation. At the time I still viewed biblical language as in some sense “inspired”, but Austin’s kind of conceptual analysis of ordinary language could be applied. When the book was published in 1962 it quickly became a hit among Christian philosophers of religion, particularly in Belgium, U.S.A. and (less so) Britain.

I hadn’t anticipated this. I had simply become fascinated with Austin’s brilliance. In my seminars at McGill 1960-64 and subsequently at the University of Toronto philosophy department I introduced this Oxford-analysis approach which had made me slightly famous.

But I also discussed something very, very different, the personally-engaging writings of various existentialists (Sartre, Camus, Buber, Marcel,) My search for HAPPINESS, signalled in my 1942 essay, was returning.

Nevertheless my passion to write as clearly as possible has continued to this day. And paradoxically, it now enables me to express in words a great deal that is essentially beyond words, experiences that are mystical, shamanic and musical. This gift is something that encourages me to go on writing. It’s not the gift that best uses words to convey what is beyond words. It’s not poetry.

In my ebook I quoted from T.S. Eliot, Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Sufi mystic Rumi. These poets mastered the art of expressing in words what is beyond words. I’m

also grateful to Henry Vaughan, Rainer Maria Rilke, the Sufi mystic Hafiz and the contemporary poet David Whyte

My gift is different. I combine conceptual clarity with experiential uncovering of buried mystery. This is what I can offer. And for some readers it is inspiring and illuminating..

I've been sketching my life-history as a writer, uncovering patterns and connections that I had not previously seen. But I must return to the theme of this whole section: Do I need to let go my attachment to writing?

I seem to be contradicting myself these days in late June, 2015. I'm trying to let go of my attachment to writing *New Grateful Experiences* as I go on feverishly writing it every day! Recently I remembered a Journal Entry for May 22, 2012 that may shed some light on this. I can be both letting go and caring passionately, provided that *I pledge in advance not to despair* if things don't turn out as I passionately hope.

A few days before May 22 , 2012 I remembered something I wrote in 2001. It's written as if it were a message to me from the Divine Mystery. This was not just a literary device. Back in 2001 I felt I was partly inspired as I wrote it. But it was not what people call "automatic writing", dictated by a spirit through me in a trance. I knew I was active in writing it. I contributed to the message. Spirit was active, but so was I.

Indeed, I wrote it as I was preparing a workshop. The message was included in my invitation to the workshop. The invitation went out to a long mailing list. Recipients could decide whether or not they wanted to explore this personally for a whole day. If they didn't, they wouldn't come. Some who participated were "veterans" on their spiritual paths. Afterwards they expressed their deep appreciation for the workshop.

Here's the message (quoted from my ebook):

*Let your heart be passionate, intensely participating in
life, venturing into new territory with people with
visionary projects and with Me.
And care deeply about outcomes, though paradoxically you
are also letting go of them.*

*If you only practice letting go, your detachment may bring
some inner peace, but only at the price of ignoring your
inner passion as a human being...
Trust in My ways with you.
Your letting go means simply that you pledge yourself in
advance not to despair if things don't turn out as you
passionately hope.*

This insight came to me sometime before 2001 as I was reading the great French existentialist, Gabriel Marcel's, The influence of his book *Homo Viator* is obvious to anyone familiar with Marcel . When I wrote the passage, I sensed that I didn't adequately understand what I was writing. My understanding was mainly in terms of my mind and my will.

As I probe the passage in 2015 I realize that I need to question it. I now realize that if I try not to despair I may nevertheless fall into despair! It's not something within my confident control. I still have a place for relying on mind and will. I still playfully repeat the words *I think I can*, quoting from a childrens' cartoon "The Little Engine that Could" to encourage me as I'm walking uphill, but I know that my energy is limited. Even if I think I can, maybe I can't! Thinking that I can and using my will-power may not suffice to get me uphill or to conquer despair.

What applies to me these days may not apply to others. I experienced radical despair as an infant, a despair which spiralled downwards into a terror that I would disintegrate. If others did not experience despair in infancy and did not experience anything comparably traumatic, their mind and will may suffice to keep them from despair.

One framework that some people use to support their mind and will is the belief that our thoughts create our sense of who we are, so all we need to do is think positively. There is some truth in this, and therapies based on it (e.g. cognitive-behavioral) have some success. Indeed, such an approach has been widely accepted within the Western-Scientific Medical establishment. But if it rules out any different kind of approach, it becomes a dogma. Much that I have explored is not permitted. No depth-psychotherapy, no yoga, no spiritualism, no shamanism , no mysticism etc.

Marcel distinguished authentic hope from optimism, which involves misusing our intellect to concoct a

thought-pattern that reassures us concerning our future. For him, authentic hope involves mystery, not in the sense of a “who-dun-it”, but what he calls *The Mystery of Being* (title of another book by him).

In June, 2015 I’m realizing that I need to rely more on grace than on will, more on receptivity than on achievement and more on spontaneity than on control.

Is any of my confusion or my clarity relevant to issues on your path? That’s for you to decide.

VII Special Entry: Visit by Shaman-Friend June 18, 2015

Today I had a visit from a friend who is a shaman who has apprenticed with many aboriginal shamans. She had had an intuition to come and see me and had let me know about a week ago. If she had asked me prior to that in 2015 I would have said “No”, for I was not open to receiving healing from anyone else. The only exception to this was my long-time colleague and friend, Robin Noya. When he visits me each Thursday he fixes problems in my kitchen but he also meditates with me, helping me to drop down into his stillness with him. But I didn’t want to risk being “invaded” by anyone else’s energies. I’m far too “porous” these days,

All that I “did” today to initiate a meditation was focus on breathing in and out as I focused on tensions in my mid-back. I don’t know what my shaman-friend did. But as soon as she and I began to meditate together, I

found that I was celebrating her unusually powerful earth-energies,

First I was remembering in my body how I experienced her energies two decades ago at a retreat when I could feel her presence over thirty feet away. It was awesome! Unlike today, I was witnessing them, not receiving them for my own personal healing.

A moment later I felt pervaded by her mature Mother-Earth energies as they are today. And I was also celebrating them with immense gratitude and new humility as I received them on this momentous day. Then I asked her whether she would SOUND. When she did, everything going on was intensified.

The experience with her differed from recent encounters that have brought me WATER-energies. She brought EARTH-energies. During May and June I had occasionally managed to get to some nearby oak trees to connect with as I dropped down into their roots. This was only a brief and shallow version of the “Cosmic Tree” meditation that had been my favourite personally and as a meditation-leader during 1990 to 2009..

But my responsiveness to musical SOUND continued to be crucial for me through May and June. I was inspired to ask her whether she would “sound” her earth-energies. When she did, my awareness of her presence became even more intense. When she first came into my room, I had just been watching an old movie called “Naughty Marietta”, starring singers Jeanette McDonald and Nelson Eddy. Many decades ago this movie had stirred much in me. Seeing it again, this time on TV (Turner Classic Movies), re-stirred me. The movie was still in the

forefront of my consciousness when my friend arrived, so I needed to mention this so I wouldn't be confusing her. This involved my SINGING a song that was the key to the whole movie: *Oh sweet mystery of life at last I've found you.*

During recent years I've often found myself spontaneously bursting into non-verbal soundng. It always revives and revitalizes my body and makes me feel more joyful and light-hearted – only temporarily, but significantly.

In my teens I learned from my piano teacher how playing the piano enabled me to connect with my (mildly-autistic) self and with other people. About five years ago my hands could no longer function because of arthritis. My voice became more prominent as a way to connect with my self. Only rarely could my sounding connect me with others, for I was too weak to do so.

VIII Sessions of Meditation&Music with Fellow Seniors 2009-2011

(1) Introduction

My ebook began on October 19, 2011 with a transformative meditation. The central theme was reconciliation of opposites. During the meditation I remembered listening to contrasting musical excerpts with my fellow seniors. Soon I was writing about six experiences that prepared me for October 19.

Two of the six preparatory experiences were musical in origin. One was Kempff playing Schubert's Impromptu #3 in G-flat major. The music helped me feel at home in this body and this world. The other arose from various pieces by Rachmaninov. These helped me to appreciate two different states: purely-human love and light-hearted creativity. A third preparatory experience was of being re-born by being in the flow. I immediately it linked with flowing music. And later in the chapter I offered a whole section entitled "Musical Harmonizing of Opposites", where I contrasted three states (purely-human happiness, mystical pure consciousness and shamanic connection with everything) and proposed musical reconciliations.

I am not claiming that harmonizing of opposites never takes place without music. Sometimes in my own experience it does. But for me music is often the catalyst. This may be because of my personal history. Certainly I need to refer to that history as I explain the origin of the meditation&music project.

As I go on I'll be drawing on both my ebook and my outline of Meditation&Music on my website.

(2) Comparing and Connecting Meditation and Music

In 1940-46, decades before I ever learned to meditate, music stirred me deeply. Now, in my eighties, bodily-focused meditation stirs me deeply and in similar bodily ways. Similar subtle or dramatic breakthroughs arise from both. How can they both do something similar? In the summer of 2009 I decided to explore this experientially in a meditation&music project at St.

Hilda's Towers, a residence for seniors where I arrived on February 19, 2009.

My 80th birthday (September 21, 2007) was the occasion for me to write a "mini-memoir" in which I looked back over my eight decades, trying to make sense of my life by looking for coherent connections, patterns and trends. So when I launched the project with my fellow seniors in September, 2009 one motive was my personal interest in making more sense of my life by understanding the similarity between meditation and music. I would do this by connecting them in new ways.

It now seems obvious to me, however, that I would not have launched into the project as a purely-private exploration, all by myself in my room. Offering it to my fellow seniors was crucial, for it was a way to connect with others in my new community.

Another conscious consideration was that in July I realized how mature the group was when I led them in a very advanced meditation. This encouraged me to explore new territory with them, combining meditation with music. In June when I began introducing them to various meditations my main concern was to provide tools that would help them to be less overwhelmed by the physical pain and the emotional stress that aging brings to so many seniors. It was with that intention that I led them in a mystical meditation towards emptying consciousness and sinking down towards Mystery. (See my description in Chapter 2 of the ebook.) Perhaps it would help them by distracting their attention.

To my surprise, the seniors entered more deeply

into this than any of the hundreds of groups I had previously led in this meditation! In their daily lives most of them had already learned how to let go of attachments to people and projects so as to live in the present, appreciating whatever arises!

When I introduced music in September, 2009 I had a hunch that both meditation and music can provide access to a wide variety of similar bodily-emotional-spiritual states. It took me over a year, however, to identify and distinguish these states in a clear way. Here are some examples:

- (i) inner harmony**
- (ii) feeling at home in my body**
- (iii) feeling excited to be alive**
- (iv) feeling a love that is mostly longing**
- (v) childlike playfulness**
- (vi) feeling expansive in my heart.**
- (vii) loving self-acceptance**

Appreciating a piece of Western classical music by responding bodily/emotionally/spiritually requires no knowledge of its structure, its place within the Western musical tradition, the distinctive gifts of the composer and the musicians, etc. Moreover, one need not have previously listened to a lot of such music. This approach opened up meditation&music to many seniors in the meditation group who had not previously included much classical music in their lives. It also turned out to be very accessible even to the growing minority of seniors who had moderate or severe dementia.

It was obvious to me that not all classical music is

appropriate for “gut-response” listening. Some of it, especially during the last 100 years, is composed in such a cerebral, expert, musically-knowledgeable way that a listener cannot appreciate it without having had a comparable background in musical education. Most classical music, however, though open to such musically-knowledgeable appreciation, has a dimension that is also directly accessible in a bodily-emotionally-spiritual way. In the project I’ve tried to select excerpts of music that are very accessible in this way. Often I’ve drawn on 19th-century Romantic composers whose central intention was to create such music, but I’ve also drawn on composers from other centuries, especially Mozart and Bach.

As an amateur musician I’ve become somewhat knowledgeable in Western classical music, but since my teens what has always mattered most when I’m listening has been enjoying the transformation of consciousness that occurs. Indeed, I am convinced that what is true for me is true for all human beings, though in varying degrees. The bodily-emotional-spiritual dimension of music is what makes some music accessible in similar ways to all human beings, in spite of immense differences in language and culture and religion and musical education.

For the seniors, however, the selections were almost all from Western classical music. This was partly because my own musical experience from other cultures is limited. But my main concern was that I didn’t want the music to seem too strange to the group. For another group, a broader range might have worked well.

Sometimes the meditation that preceded the

listening to music evoked a state similar to what the music then evoked. For example, after a mystical meditation I played specific music that evokes mystical states, e.g. parts of Beethoven's late quartets or some pieces by Messaien.

Often, however, we prepared ourselves to listen to the music, whatever it happened to be, by focusing on our breathing as a physical process. The breathing-meditation enabled us to become more receptive bodily. Then the music could do its magic more easily as we breathe the music into our bodies.

The preparatory meditation drew our attention to our bodies. We didn't observe ourselves breathing as we might observe someone else. And we didn't think about our breathing as we might think about eating our next meal. We attended to our own bodily sensations as the air/breath passes through our mouth or nostrils or both. We also attended to changes in our rib-cage and abdomen. I said, *This is me, breathing. I'm more than my breathing, but right now I'm mainly aware of me, breathing.* When the music starts we shift our attention from breathing in air to breathing in sound. This enhances our body- resonating with the music.

(3) Varieties of Meditation

In the 1960s "meditation" entered the main-stream of popular culture in a very specific form. The Beatles drew on Transcendental Meditation, a Hindu practice involving sitting very still and inwardly repeating a "mantra" (sacred word or phrase). This, however, is only one kind of meditation among many.

From about 1985 to 2005 I led hundreds of groups in meditation. I introduced them to a great variety of meditations, for my experience with people learning meditation enabled me to see that no one kind of meditation is best for everyone at every stage in their life. For example, some people are very scattered and seek a meditation that will enable them to focus on one activity such as breathing or on one item such as a candle. Other people are too rigidly focused to be spontaneous and recognize their need for loosen their tight grip on themselves. But the same person may need to change their main meditation later on.

The context for leading a meditation group varied greatly: universities, health-care settings, interfaith events, Christian seminaries and shamanic gatherings. I developed list of 18 different meditations, ranging in difficulty from introductory to advanced. One-hour sessions usually focused on one meditation.

Several times in Toronto I offered a series of eight evening sessions under the title “Varieties of Meditation”. Participants could try out many of the 18 meditations during the eight sessions, sometimes twice. If they found themselves resonating with one of these, they’d found a meditation appropriate for them at the time. Immediate access is a good indicator of what’s appropriate. But I also suggested the possibility that what they really needed was a meditation they had found initially difficult.

At St. Hilda’s towers almost all the residents came from a Christian background and many of these were churchgoers. Some attended Anglican services in the beautiful sanctuary that is part of the St. Hilda’s complex. On the other hand,

some from Christian backgrounds had become largely secular in outlook. So in my approach I have tried not to impose any religious beliefs on participants. Again and again I stressed that what matters is their own experience, which they are free to interpret in terms of their traditional Christian faith, OR their secular world-view. And it seemed to others that the experience itself is what gives rise to the interpretation.

When a meditation involved repeating a mantra, I never used a Hindu mantra. If there had been a Hindu in the group they I would have suggested one as a possibility for him/her. I invited participants to use a Christian mantra (for example *Lord Jesus come*) or to create their own mantra (for example, *Love* or *Peace* or *Inner Calm*).

(4) Meditation, Music and My Need for Control

As I began to realize in 2015 that I no longer had easy access to my spiritual resources in meditation or music I became confused and alarmed. I could see that I had relied on my access partly to bolster my sense of being in control and to define my personal identity. But as I've been pondering my motivation in creating *Varieties of Meditation* and the *Meditation&Music* project it's clear to me that it was mainly and genuinely altruistic. I invited participants to try out a meditation or a piece of music, but their response was up to them. Of course their presence in a group could influence them in various ways, but I had minimal attachment to their responding this way or that. (I was nevertheless pleased when I heard from one resident that during a recent horrendous time in hospital she not felt totally overwhelmed because she had meditated again and again. She thanked me for introducing her to meditation.)

At the end of June, 2015 I'm realizing that I'm being called into a deeper "surrender" into Loving Mystery as my situation and my future become less and less certain. I'm also being called into a more humble acceptance of my increasing disability. Every day various people, out of conventional habit, say "Take care" to me. I sometimes I feel like saying, "That's all I can do. I'm breathing, eating, digesting, urinating, having bowel movements, exercising, applying skin lotions and preparing food."

But that's not quite true. I'm also writing *New Grateful Reflections*. And it seems that I'll go on writing until I have to stop!

I'm also signing protests online, including many from Avaaz and Amnesty International and environmental organizations that I've learned to trust. In the 1970s and 1980s I was very active organizing protests, getting people to share my concern about unjust wars and incursions on civil liberties. Now my involvement is entirely online, merely adding my name (not my body!) to the thousands – even millions – of others doing the same thing. Several times a week I set aside a few minutes to participate in this way. Often the protests are effective!

IX Appreciating Helene Grimaud

(1) Introduction

In Section II I described my powerful response to Helene's water-energy piano concert at Koerner Hall, Toronto on April 19, 2015, including the body-memories and gratitude it evoked in me. In Section III I described the after-shocks that followed.

In this Section I'm going to talk about my own experience of playing the piano and then about Helen Grimaud's.

Since June 15, 2010 the arthritis in my hands has prevented me from playing the piano. But from 1940, when Margaret Grant became my teacher, I had been an amateur pianist. By 1941 she had enabled me to play piano in a teen-age band. (In July, 2015 I was reminded that I learned how by the studying the harmonies in a wonderful song *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes*. On Turner Classic Movies a film called *Roberta* somehow drew my attention and immediately I was listening to that song!)

More generally, and crucially, I also began to learn how to feel and express my buried emotions, connecting with myself and with her as we played two-piano music. We presented a memorable two-piano concert in 1946 and then I went off to university.

In 1969 we were both living in Toronto again and we began 20 more years playing together. Every week we met for a precious hour. We explored two-piano scores and we also created our own, discovering which songs "worked" when transcribed for two pianos. Once she said, knowing that I was currently meditating and involved in the Church and undergoing depth psychotherapy, *Don, this is my religion and my therapy*. When she said this, I realized that for me playing piano was a complementary "religion" and kind of therapy.

So I feel an affinity with Helene Grimaud, though she's an internationally-famous musical genius and I'm

not. (I never even had the potential of becoming one!) But from what she writes and from her way of responding to applause at the end of her water-energy concert it's obvious that she cherishes playing the piano live to others because it continues to connect her with herself and with others. She is grateful to an audience when she discerns that they are resonating as she resonates with the musical sounds she is creating.

What about when she records her playing in a studio? I don't know what she experiences then. But I note that she is usually moved to write interpretative cd-notes to reinforce her communication through music. In her autobiography she describes what playing the piano feels like to her:

"Playing seemed perfectly natural to me, an extension of myself...The tactile pleasure of playing, of seeking inside myself the emotion that I never, ever, in any way had been able to express or bring to a peak, this delicious pleasure completely satisfied me. I experienced the simultaneous pleasure of conveying my feelings and of receiving an echo of them through the magic of those black and white keys, of breathing in the presence of something perfect. I had the physical feeling of being a part of the music. (Wild Harmonies: A Life of Music and Wolves Penguin 2003. page 4).

I resonate with these words. They articulate what I experienced as I studied with Margaret Grant as a teenager and what I've experienced ever since, up to 2010. My experience was not comparable in depth, but I feel an affinity with Helene Grimaud.

We have another affinity. I became a shaman, connecting through energies with human beings and trees and water and animals. She connected intimately with a particular wolf and then with many—in a sanctuary she created for them in New York State. I've not connected with wolves in such a passionate way. At most I've howled with them when I'm in cottage-country, and I'm at a safe distance! But I don't see wolves as magically-evil, though most human beings in many human cultures have done so.

She documents this pervasive prejudice in her autobiography. But she differs from most human beings in that her presence calms any fears a wolf might usually have. Many people, including me, like to connect with animals in nature. And, if we can be very still, a deer may pause and connect with us for a moment. But the picture on the cover of her book shows her being nuzzled affectionately on her neck by three wolves!

(2) *"Death, where is thy victory?"*

This biblical quotation appears at the beginning of her very lengthy notes for her cd recording of the Second Piano Sonatas composed by Rachmaninov and Chopin. (Deutsche Gramophon, 2004). In its biblical context the quotation is not about music. It's entirely about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. St. Paul is proclaiming that he has no hope unless Jesus is his Divine Savior, whose sacrifice on the Cross makes everlasting life possible. And he is claiming that everyone else must believe this. Otherwise original sin damns them to hell..

But in her lengthy notes Helene Grimaud completely

ignores these traditional Christian teachings! Here are some quotations:

Truth in music, reflecting that of all existence, comes not from simulating happiness but from defining its tragedy in a burst of flame....

They (the two composers) disclose the soul of true love, for love is the cause of great sorrow. When it is gone, all the heart can do is repeat to itself "It once existed" and "It exists no more".

Of what, then, does their music sing? Ineffable sadness: beloved is a word written by passion and erased by fate – a frenzied hope that those who die will not have lived in vain. They disappear as themselves only to live again in the form of the eternal spirit...

Ultimately, these works tell us so much about death that they open our eyes to an eternity within us.

In 2015 as I ponder her words again, I remember reading them after I first heard the cd. I felt that she was somehow conveying in words much of what I had experienced through wordless sound.

I'm very different from her in that I've had so many contacts with the dead that I'm not grieving their non-existence. But I do grieve their non-existence as they were. And in advance of my own death I do grieve my own ceasing-to-exist as I've been. I've had many past-life experiences so I believe it's possible, indeed likely, that someone in the future will have a past-life experience of me. But that person will not be mainly me. He or she will

not be mainly Don Evans.

Nevertheless, like Helene Grimaud, I do find that some music brings a kind of bodily joy that transfigures me. As she says about the two composers:

They convert anguish into hope, transfigure our vision of sorrow, and offer us the chance of a reconciliation....Suddenly death seems like the reverse side of a music of purest essence.

For me in 2015, music sometimes takes over, taking me inside it's realm, so all I'm aware of is music. But my musical dimension is not the whole of me. Part of me would love to live only within music, but that's neither feasible nor appropriate for me.

Yet music keeps dropping into my life, helping and healing me wondrously.

(3) Helene Grimaud's Wolf-Story in Her Own Words

The first wolf I met was in Florida. I was walking my friend's dog in the middle of the night, and I saw this pair of silhouettes, a man with an animal was was apparently canine but not a dog. The animal was obviously interested in me although extremely shy.

We met again a month later, and by then she'd started to roll over for me. It was the aura she exuded that intrigued me – it was the sense of mystery, of meeting a free spirit trapped in the net of human dominion.

Wolves epitomize the challenges of our relationship to

nature and are therefore a keystone for larger conservation efforts. Wolves play a vital role in the environment, they are engineers of biodiversity in their ecosystem.

In an effort to make a difference, I hit on the project I am now helping to run near my home in New York – an education centre where wolves live, and where groups of children come to learn about wolves and the environment.

Education is the only long-term hope for conservation, and as with classical music, the best way to ensure survival is to reach children. We owe them as complete a wilderness out there as possible, because it will have a tremendous impact on the quality of life of generations to come.

The quotation is from the notes for a cd called “Credo” (Deutsche Gramophon, 2003). The interviewer then commented

It sounds as though you’ve created your own community.

This was her reply:

My problem was always that I never felt I belonged anywhere.

One more very significant quotation:

Very much like my relationship with music what started as a passion then became a mission, which brings an irresistible burden of responsibility.

(4) Mozart, Nature and Child/Animal Innocence

In her notes concerning her experience while playing Mozart's Nineteenth Piano Concerto (Deutsche Gramophon DVD, 2011) she speaks of how Mozart enables us to enter into Nature:

"Entering into Nature means relinquishing control, shedding self-consciousness and finding breath in the moment".

These words are similar to words I've used to invite people into a meditation that helps us let go of attachments. For her and for me such letting go can also come as we listen to music.

She also comments that although the piece is not technically difficult to play, it is difficult because it requires simplicity:

Finding simplicity or, I should say, finding it again, because we play him a lot as children, as teenagers, and there it seems to have this naturalness, this self-evident quality. Later on, it's much more challenging to get back to this purity of expression...The natural gift that we lose as adults, that all children have and animals as well: to live in the moment and not ascribe secondary meanings to things. Shedding everything which isn't essential.

(5) Remembering Eden or Finding It

The opening words of Helene Grimaud's autobiography:

I have no nostalgia at all for childhood. Throughout the passing years, I have never had the feeling of a paradise lost, but rather of a paradise to be found, elsewhere, one that was waiting.

A paradise inside me, buried.

She makes it clear that her need to find access to a paradise within did not arise from defective parenting. Her parents found it difficult to discern what she needed to find, but they did not cause traumas (as mine did).

My hunch is that her plight arose because she was a gifted genius coming into the world. Like quite a few others who have come to be called “Indigo Children”, her gifts needed to be uncovered by herself. Such children usually do need recognition by others – not necessarily their parents – as persons whose puzzling behaviour needs to be understood in terms of their quest to uncover their paradise within. Finding that will help them find what they are to be and do in this life.

Helene Grimaud discovered that her paradise within is music and wolves. Her passion for these
then became a mission, which brings an irresistible burden of responsibility.

I remember one young man who came to me for psychotherapy. Fortunately I quickly discerned him to be an “Indigo Child”. I didn’t ask him about Mom and Dad and siblings, hoping that eventually he could uncover buried traumas if he needed to do so. . I approached him as someone needing to uncover his buried gifts and thereby uncover his calling in this life. I think I met other

Indigo Children who came for help, but I don't remember them individually.

My own process for myself has combined both approaches. I was uncovering both trauma and gifts. And for many of my clients I've tried to provide a safe context for all this to happen. Often, however, my impression has been that a client needs to face some trauma-material before he or she can progress much in uncovering gifts.

What approach works for you, downloader of my email?

I hope that this section has encouraged some of you to listen to Helene Grimaud's piano and to read some of her cd notes and perhaps her autobiography. Maybe she, not me, is why you've been drawn to read all this!

X Confirmation of Esoteric Intuition and Healing by Others

On April 4. 2015 I experienced an esoteric intuition and' I consulted others who are also esoterically gifted. This was not a first time, for since about 1980 I've occasionally consulted others because I wondered whether my intuition was accurate. (Or others would check with me because they were wondering about their intuition.) Usually, however, especially since about 1990, I've been quite confident about my intuitions, for they were similar to what had happened many times before.

Sometimes psychics concur in a striking way. For example, at least thirty years ago I was at a gathering of psychics and when one noted writer on life after death came into the room many of us were aware of a throng of earthbound human spirits surrounding him, asking him for help! I remember because it was so amusing.

Empirical confirmation by other psychics proves nothing to those who are very sceptical about paranormal experiences. Some sceptics accept only Western-Scientific testing as proof. They even refuse to consider evidence discernable in the public world that is relevant though not proof.

This Section is in two parts. First I'll report a remarkable instance involving evidence discernable in the public world. Then I'll be reporting my experience on April 4th.

For me and for many others whom I've known the only convincing/clinching evidence for paranormal knowing and life after death is one's own personal experience. But my reports may shift a few agnostics a little towards becoming more open to possibilities.

If any of you downloaders of my ebook have personally experienced anything like my two events, please let me know. Or maybe a few of you are curious, but not yet convinced by your own experience. My testimony may be relevant to you.

First I'll report the incident involving change discernable in the public world:

(1) Incident with “Fred”, Invaded by His Own Father

I wrote this up. not in my ebook but in a sequel to my ebook. For many years I’ve been convinced that sometimes I can bring healing at a distance to someone in torment. But one experience convinced me in a very special way.

Some years ago someone I knew worked as a counsellor at a family mental-health centre in another city. I’ll call him “Alex”. He was distressed and puzzled by the suffering of some of the children whom he was asked to help. He was somewhat psychic and suspected that psychic invasion might be involved: “Would I please tune in?” I did so for several days and I found that several were indeed being invaded.

Alex told me more about one 12-year-old boy (I’ll call him “Fred”) who was often in terrible distress. Fred had been repeatedly violated sexually by his father, so the police had denied the father physical access. The man was a sexual predator, who was known to have molested other children. Society had done what it could to keep him away from Fred physically, but society could not prevent him from gaining access psychically.

One day I phoned Alex on his personal phone while he was working at the centre. As we talked I suddenly heard horrifying sounds. Alex told me “It’s Fred, writhing on the floor”. I could hear the boy screaming in terror and bodily pain. What then happened in my consciousness I wrote down soon after:

The father is not in a demonic state (Lady Macbeth's "Evil be thou my good"), but very destructive, sadistically enjoying as he tortured and terrorized Fred in a sexual way. I called on the Hindu goddess Kali to invade the father so that he felt disoriented, almost crazy, scattered, with no centre. I threatened him: 'Stop invading Fred or you'll get a much worse shock'! (Kali protects women and children from men who harm them intrusively – in my experience Kali often scares them even more than the risen Jesus.)

Alex, still on the phone with me, reported that Fred stopped screaming and writhing. He was OK. Indeed, on my phone I myself had heard Fred stop screaming! Obviously the boy still needed further help from people at the centre, but only when his father's invasion ceased could they provide any help except sedation. People at the centre saw Fred stop screaming and writhing, but they didn't know why.

Esoteric deliverance at a distance had not previously been empirically confirmed for me as it occurred. That didn't impress me at the time but now it does. At the time I was too intensely focused on Fred's plight. As I write this in 2015 I realize it's significance as testimony to sway sceptics.

If Alex had not happened to know me as someone to consult, Fred's horrendous suffering would have continued. How many other children need esoteric help? Mental-health centres are usually dominated by a scientific-medical culture that denies the reality of negative psychic invasion. Indeed, Alex's phone calls to me could have gotten him into trouble.

Even if a centre were to venture into forbidden territory, they would need to screen those whom they consulted, for some psychics are unethical and irresponsible. Nevertheless my hope is that some progress concerning this will occur in the 21st century.

Some further reflections:

Negative psychic invasion by nasty humans does occur. But so does constructive help from benign spiritual presences. I've benefitted much personally from this over many years. The risen Jesus has been a central presence, but other presences both inside and outside Christianity have also been very helpful.

I realize that many people live exemplary lives without being aware of positive spiritual presences. I have "come out", not concealing my own awareness, but I don't urge people to try to become aware. I do hope that they don't rule out the possibility.

I do challenge anyone who rules out the reality of of any spirits, whether nasty or nice because he/she accepts the dogma that only Western Scientific Method can establish what's real. And I also challenge anyone whose religion rules out (as unreal or as sinful) most of the experiences of spirits that human beings have.

Why have I received spiritual gifts? Not as a reward for my goodness, for one of the gifts has been an ability to uncover many of my hidden flaws! It's been clear to me that one reason for receiving conscious access to spiritual resources is to receive healing of sexual traumas in infancy.

This may be true for many others who had sexual traumas early in life. Indeed, it may also be true of many others now diagnosed in Western Scientific Medicine under the label “PTSD” (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and treated with no acknowledgement of any need for access to spiritual resources.

Now I report what began on April 4, 2015.

(2) Responding to Someone’s Extremely Traumatic Death

Sometimes a traumatic death prevents a person from moving on into the spiritual realm. They remain earth-bound. If the trauma is not extreme, they can be helped to shed their fear and guided to welcome deceased persons or angels who love them and who will accompany them into the spiritual realm. (In the early 1980s I apprenticed to an excellent spiritualist teacher. She helped me to experience this work first-hand.)

If the trauma is extreme, however, work with the earth-bound person sometimes requires a very energetic process involving “containing” their spirit in one’s own body. In the next section I’ll describe this, quoting an email that I sent to seven friends on Easter Saturday, April 4, 2015. Here’s the email:

Help the deceased German captain of the plane deliberately crashed into a Swiss mountain

On Good Friday evening , April 3, 2015, CBC Newsworld’s Peter Mansbridge interviewed a veteran commercial pilot, inviting him to share his feelings as a

captain concerning the captain who was locked out of the cockpit by his pilot as the plane was deliberately being deliberately crashed into the mountain. The media have understandably emphasized the emotional impact on the passengers, but CBC also expanded our empathy to include the captain, who is responsible in a special way for the safety of his passengers.

In the past I felt deeply moved to assist someone whose specially-traumatic death has made them earthbound: A little girl who was savagely kidnapped, raped and murdered. I reported this in my ebook. (See Section 8 of Chapter 3 entitled “*Containing Another’s Traumatic Suffering*”.) I was moved to to assist her as I watched CBC Newsworld on CBC in May, 2012.

As Peter Mansbridge’s interview was ending I felt moved to ask Spirit whether the captain needs assistance. The answer:

Yes, but not through you. These days you have so little vital energy that you could not help him by containing his suffering within your own body. The way you help requires a great deal of your own energy. Even if you heroically try, you won’t succeed.

My first thought was to post a request on Facebook, but then I realized that this might move someone to leak the story to the media or to respond partly out of a desire for publicity. This would not help the captain. Instead I’m creating a short list of people whom I know and trust who – this is my impression – might feel personally called to help. If you don’t feel such a call, don’t get involved personally. My request is that you CONSIDER the possibility.

I'm whimsically calling you "The Group of Seven", though you are not a group and your gifts are not in painting. Please let me know immediately if you sense that the captain is no longer earthbound. whether it's because I was mistaken in intuiting that he is, or because someone has assisted successfully). I'll immediately pass along any such message to the others in The Group of Seven.

Is the Group ongoing? I don't anticipate calling on you again, but Spirit might surprise me again before I die, as Spirit did Good Friday evening But some of you (and others) may be on hand to assist me as I undergo the great transition, helping me to hand over my life to Spirit/Mystery more deeply. Meanwhile, my current radical change of diet to include far more animal protein may revive me so that I can do much more each day than simply look after myself.

Maybe my new diet will even enable Spirit/Mystery to use me to contain and deliver another earthbound spirit! But if not, that's OK to!

That's the end of my email.

Several of the friends reported their findings and by April 6 I sent the following email to all seven:

Hi Friends,

My intuition is now quite clear: the plane captain is no longer earthbound.

By Easter Sunday my intuition (less clear) was that he was earthbound, though one of you sensed that he was not. Today a message from one of you reported a very clear confirmation. I don't know whose assistance was successful. Someone's assistance deserves the credit - but none of you are out for credit! Indeed, it may have been none of the "Seven"!

Blessings and best wishes, Don

This email expressed my overall personal approach in such esoteric work: I have not felt a calling to devote my life mainly to helping the earthbound. Rather, Spirit or spirits, often assisted by people on TV or in everyday life, occasionally move me to intervene.

Some spiritualists are very dedicated to this task, waking many mornings at 4 a.m., opening their awareness to earthbound human spirits, and helping them make the great transition! It's wonderfully generous work and I'm glad that someone is doing it!

For me, however, esoteric work is not primarily preparing for life AFTER death or helping earthbound human spirits to move on. Rather, esoteric work is primarily for bringing changes in my life and human life BEFORE death.

SECOND PART

Transition to the Sequel-Chapters Part of this Book

1. Comments Welcomed by Me

In my original mailing on July 6, 2015 I told the downloaders that I would welcome comments from them. Now I'm also asking other readers to comment. At various points I had invited downloaders to respond and here I mentioned four kinds of comment, but other kinds are also welcome. Here are the four kinds I mentioned:

- (i) enthusiastic or critical overall
- (ii) requesting me to clarify some particular point
- (iii) reporting your resonating or not-resonating with me concerning something I reported
- (iv) if your creativity is more visual than musical, how does this bring different experiences and reflections?

2. Do you need to read my 2013 ebook first?

You do not need to read it first in order to understand this new book. Indeed, I actually quote from it where necessary and elsewhere I try to explain what you need to know about that ebook.

If you nevertheless want to read some portion of my ebook, I suggest the ebook's Introduction, which summarizes much of the ebook in advance.

FIRST CHAPTER: DIMENSIONS OF SELF- DECEPTION

Introducing John Veltri, Friend and Mentor

I'm going to begin this chapter and this section with words passed along to me by John Veltri, S.J. a spiritual director and empathic ear for hundreds of people, including other spiritual directors. It was both a privilege and a delight to be with him for many years as close friends and confidants. I appreciated the words back then, but now I realize what depth they have for me at this time in my life: letting go of various attempts to pin down the Divine Mystery or my own personal identity, recognizing my ongoing tendency to deceive myself, and experiencing the Mystery's ongoing Love.

The words "the Mystery's ongoing Love" express a paradox: the Formless whose form includes caring for me. But the contradiction makes sense to me within my experience in so far as it is embodied mystical experience.

The phrase "the Mystery's ongoing Love" implies that all experiences of Mystery involve Love. Much later on in this chapter I'll have to reluctantly acknowledge that some do not. But many of my experiences of Mystery do!

*Holy One, Mystery, Caring God...
Now I know that you are always greater
than anything I can think or imagine,*

*and for this I am most grateful.
I am glad that I can not locate you, define you, describe
you.
I used to worry about self-identity, about who I was.
Now I am glad not to know,
And I can thank you for the mystery of my being...
I do not know how much longer I shall live,
Nor what shall become of me.
I do not know if the way I am trying to live now really is
your will.
You have shown me something of the depths of self-
deception that are in me,
And I may still be deceiving myself.
But what I do know is that you are
The God of every situation,
God in our darkness drawing us to light,
God in our sinfulness offering us healing,
God in our self-deception leading us into truth,
God who is for us, even when we are against ourselves.
So I know that even if I am unwittingly deceiving myself,
If I follow what truth there is in me,
Then you will draw me further into your truth,
And there is no situation, no state, no place I can reach
Where you will not still be closer to me
Than I am to myself.*

John Veltri notes that he has adapted this from "Gerard W. Hughes in "God, Where are You?" (Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1997, pp.269ff). I haven't looked up his source, for what matters to me is the words I have quoted. I hear John's voice in them. For me they express his unhesitant honesty, humility and humanity and his rigorous, sensitive spirituality. The words also provide

an excellent introduction to this chapter on self-deception. Already in *Grateful Reflections on Experiences that Change Me* I reported many experiences that changed me where the experience involved realizing that I was deceiving myself about something.

Whenever I uncover and recognize a self-deception I gain access to some new truth, which I then try to live by. This occurs in four contexts:

(i) My bodily-emotional self: my feelings and motivations.

(ii) My spiritual self and spiritual energies and spiritual presences.

(iii) My Inner Mystery and Divine Mystery.

(iv) My environment: in the social structures and/or in nature

In this chapter I'll be looking at each of these four contexts in turn.

In both the past and the present my experiences sometimes occur within a mystical context, but sometimes they do not. In the past I aspired to live continuously in conscious awareness of God, though most of the time I was not.

In the first chapter of "*Grateful Reflections...*" I explained how a musical experience helped me realize that it's quite OK not to be aware of Mystery. I accompanied Rachmaninov on his musical exploration of a limited, purely-human happiness: limited human love, limited human creativity and limited light-hearted playfulness. That helped me realize that for me it's quite

OK to live at times without any awareness of Divine Mystery.

This realization was further confirmed after my experience on October 19, 2011. I learned how to include such opposites as purely-human states and mystical states. It has also been confirmed by my recent experience of living light-heartedly with an orgasmic “hum” going on within my human body.

John Veltri, as I knew him personally, was often in a purely-human state. That was part of what made him such an empathetic counsellor and friend. He was very much in touch with our purely-human self-deceptions and discoveries.

But his sense of human fallibility in relation to the Divine Mystery was crucial in the way he lived his life. And I hope that many readers are inspired by his words, as I was.

1. Bodily-Emotional Self-Deception

(1) Some Examples

(a) From 1974

My first report and reflection is about an experiential process from January to September, 1974. Gradually I realized that I had been deceiving myself concerning the emotions that I was really feeling.

In January arthritis suddenly crippled my whole body. I was in Toronto Western Hospital for a lengthy period. After discharge I gradually regained some limited mobility and obediently took 16 aspirins daily, having

been told that this regime would probably continue for the rest of my life.

By early June I rebelled. By late June I had found a fast-supervisor and a body-psychotherapist to work with and I ventured into a non-medical healing process. For two months I ate only grapes and I drank only water and lemon-juice. Concurrently I had regular sessions of hands-on bioenergetic psychotherapy to stir up the emotions that I was refusing to let myself feel.

The emotions were despair and rage. First I had only obscure glimpses of these, but with the encouragement of the therapist I was able to allow more clarity into my awareness. Eventually I became aware that part of me had wanted to kill a particular person. As a “nice guy” I had found it intolerable to acknowledge such destructive rage within me. Instead, I had immobilized myself so that I could neither kick nor hit! The person was never in danger of violence from me. Instead, I had been unconsciously violent towards myself, inflicting the arthritis. Unconsciously that had seemed better than acknowledging my destructive dark side.

The treatment of my arthritis was very effective. In a few months my overall health was better than it had ever been. I’m of course not advocating a similar treatment for everyone who has arthritis. But the experience showed me that in my case the arthritis arose from unconscious factors. From then on I realized that such factors might be affecting me if another serious illness takes over.

During that summer of 1974 the self-deception that I uncovered only had to do with my emotions in 1974. Not until the 1980s, after I remembered the traumas in August 1929, did I realize that some of the intensity and confusion of my despair and rage arose from repressed memories of traumas when I was an infant. Such self-deception is very different from self-deception concerning one's current emotions, though it may be a hidden factor in these emotions. In the first chapter of *"Grateful Reflections"* I presented many examples of gradually uncovering repressed trauma-memories from the past. The worst trauma, involving Nellie and Dad abusing me together, did not emerge in my body-memory until 2011.

Between 1981 and now, as I gradually remembered infantile traumas, I also gradually realized that they secretly affected my responses to challenges in everyday life. For example, not until the 21st century did I question the melancholy that often swept over me during my adult life whenever I was confined to bed with a minor illness. To me the melancholy seemed quite "natural". Eventually I realized that the melancholy was a muted version of the deep despair I felt in August, 1929:

- *most of me wanting to die,**
- *abandoned by my parents with Nellie, who then sexually abused me,**
- *almost-dying because of infected mastoids,**
- *saved from death by a skilful surgeon who unfortunately traumatized bones in my skull.**

My melancholy mood had been arising mainly from trauma-feelings in infancy, repressed into my unconscious and secretly affecting me.

(b) An Example From 2012 to 2015

In my 2013 ebook I reported many other examples of bodily-emotional self-deception that were remote from being exemplary! One report from 2012 was incomplete:

I was...unconsciously seeking a nurturing mother who would provide a reassuring acceptance of my male genitals and heal them in relation to Nellie's abuse.

I didn't include how I manifested this unconscious need. I did so in a way that was understandably very confusing and upsetting to a particular woman. Out of the blue I asked her to lay her hand on my genitals for a few moments, not moving it.

My impression is that this did not permanently harm her. For one thing, I hear that her life since then has apparently been both happy and successful. Of course my impression could nevertheless be mistaken. But it's clear to me that I did distress her and whenever I remember what I did I feel some of the painful anguish of genuine remorse.

But I as I began writing about this in September, 2015 I also felt shame, a narcissistic response that is focused on having undermined my own pride. Why was I so stupid I couldn't see that my request was obviously bizarre and disconcerting? Everyday common sense

should have been enough for me to recognize this obvious truth.

In a Chapter on Self-Deception it's important to acknowledge many of my flaws so that readers realize who I have been and still am though perhaps to a lesser extent. Like most or all of you, I'm a mixture. My mixture differs from yours, but we're all in this together.

(In the next Chapter I'll be exploring ongoing issues concerning judgment of others and of myself and concerning my need to forgive.)

(2) Three kinds of Bodily-Emotional Self-Deception

I distinguish three kinds of bodily-emotional self-deception. These involve unconscious resistance to experiencing

- (i) what is happening in the present or**
- (ii) what happened in the past or**
- (iii) the connection between what happened in the past and (a) what happened later on OR (b) what is happening in the present. When each kind of deception is uncovered, the uncovering is different. Here are three examples:**

(i) Uncovering what is happening in the present: In 1974 I uncovered the rage that was immobilizing me with arthritis.

(ii) Uncovering what happened in the past: In 1981 I began to uncover the abandonment and terror I felt in 1929.

(iii) Uncovering how the past is influencing what is happening later on:

(a) As I noted above, in the 21st century I began to uncover the connection between my trauma in 1929 and my melancholy response to minor illness.

(b) As I noted in my ebook, in 2012 I uncovered the connection between my trauma in 1929 and my troubled emotional life during my puberty in 1940. (Although memories of the trauma remained completely buried in 1940, the trauma affected me very strongly in 1940.)

Elsewhere in my 2013 ebook, I provided many examples of these three kinds of bodily-emotional self-deception, so I won't cite more here. Instead, my next step is a necessary digression from reflections on various experiences. I want to explain my position concerning "positivism", a dogmatic view that totally excludes my experiential-process approach to uncovering dimensions of human reality. If you, the reader have read this far into my books, it's very unlikely that you agree with positivism, though you may be interested in considering its flaws, in which case you'll read on.

If, however, you are not interested, you can easily pick up my story in section (4) where I stop being philosophical and return to being experiential.

(3) Philosophical Digression Concerning "Positivism"

In this chapter I'll be considering three kinds of unconscious: bodily-emotional, spiritual and mystical. For me all three are real. This means that I reject "positivism", the dogmatic assumption that scientific method is not merely a very important way way to gain

knowledge of reality but the only way. Positivism denies the reality of the human unconscious because the reality of the unconscious can only be established by using approaches that are not scientific.

Scientists rigorously apply scientific method in their scientific work. At the core of this method is the requirement that knowledge-claims must be based on technical procedures that are replicable impersonally, by anyone who has the appropriate scientific training. Personal differences between investigators must be irrelevant.

Outside their scientific work many scientists remain open to the possibility that non-scientific approaches to reality may be legitimate. But if they are positivists they dogmatically assume that only scientific test-procedures can be accepted as “objective”. All other truth-claims are dismissed as merely “subjective”. This restriction excludes the possibility that reality can be uncovered by undergoing various processes of personal change. Such processes make possible various the experiences necessary for understanding and for confirming what is thereby uncovered.

One example of an uncovered reality is the unconscious murderous rage that moved me to immobilize myself with arthritis in 1974. But positivism excludes all reality-claims based on deep-psychotherapeutic processes, for these can not be replicated impersonally; one must undergo such a process personally.

A similar total rejection of the spiritual unconscious and the mystical unconscious is made by positivists. On the basis of my own experience I believe that these three dimensions exist in me and other human beings and that we are prone to deceive ourselves concerning what, specifically, is going on within them. Positivism excludes all such self-deceptions and the realities that are uncovered when the self-deceptions are exposed. So positivism is a mind-set that shrinks our range of insight concerning who we are as human beings. If a psychiatrist is a positivist he is appropriately called a “shrink”! Positivists dogmatically deny much that is real in human beings. Positivism is in itself a colossal self-deception!

Positivists typically don't let themselves have experiences of repressed bodily emotions, spiritual presences or mystery or, if they do, they dismiss them as merely-subjective hallucinations.

Positivism is a dogma, an intellectual position which is unshaken by any counter-evidence because no counter-evidence is permitted. The positivist claim that the only truth is scientific truth is an unfalsifiable claim. Yet many scientists hold that any scientific theory that is unfalsifiable by counter-evidence is itself dubiously scientific!

As for myself, I do not dogmatically exclude “objective” data concerning human beings that can be established by technical procedures replicable by anyone trained to repeat the procedure. Obviously such data are very important, but in this book I'm not exploring them. I have neither the expertise nor the interest to write about genes or brain functioning or experiments on people.

There was a time when I was interested in scientific parapsychology, but no longer. For example it was interesting to investigate the causal relevance of other people's belief in spiritual reality to the healing of their physical diseases. Now, however, especially in this book, I'm interested in my own experiences of spiritual reality and how they changed me.

Of course some scientific or broadly-empirical investigations can make it seem more plausible to non-positivists that the unconscious might be a reality. This applies to all three dimensions, the emotional, the spiritual and perhaps even the mystical. But for me the only convincing proof is experiential. And I don't see why anyone else should believe in any kind of human unconscious unless they have experienced it at work in themselves.

Some kinds of self-deception concerning the unconscious are comparatively unimportant. They mainly involve constricting the range and richness of one's personal experience. Often the constriction is necessary. For example, uncovering of childhood trauma before the individual has the resources to cope with it can precipitate a breakdown from which recovery is difficult or even impossible. Similarly, a sudden awareness of spiritual presences can overwhelm some individuals even if all the presences are benign.

Some kinds of self-deception, however, are very destructive to both self and others. They foster and foment conflict between humans who belong to "Us" and humans who belong to "Them", viewing "Them" as

therefore not really human. In Chapter 2 I'll be exploring how we can reduce "Us-Them" conflict.

My next step is to explore the many different contexts in which I have uncovered bodily-emotional self-deceptions. It was not until recently, in February 2012, that I clearly realized the variety.

(4) Contexts for Uncovering Self-deception

(i) Intervention or confrontation by another person

Fortunately for me, this did not happen in the late 1970s in relation to my infantile sexual traumas. Several psychotherapists wisely deflected my questions concerning whether perhaps I had been sexually abused in infancy. I now realize that they probably sensed this, but doubted that I would benefit from trying to dig up such memories. In retrospect I now realize that before 1981 I did not have the necessary spiritual resources to respond positively. These psychotherapists, in their professional work with me, helped me to uncover other traumatic memories from infancy and childhood, including memories of my mother's reluctance to accept my gender and my sexuality. They also often helped me to uncover emotions and motivations currently hidden from me. As I've indicated, one of them did so during the summer of 1974 in a decisively helpful way. Other help came from many fellow participants in psychotherapy groups between 1969 and 1980.

Fortunately for me, in recent years I've also learned from friends who challenged my current emotions or motivations. I mentioned one example in Chapter 1 of

“Grateful Reflections...” My friend Shauna Switzer asked me to consider whether spiritual ambition rather than pure dedication was motivating my zeal to embody Divine Love. This was an “ideal” confrontation, easy for me to acknowledge as true. I had asked her for help in dealing with my state of feeling “overwhelmed”. She spoke to me simply as one human being alongside another, with no hint of superiority or authority. And she had no hidden personal agenda at work.

Sometimes, however, as I’ll be reporting later on in this chapter, the person who intervenes to confront me has mixed motives and emotions. For example, a woman might not acknowledge to herself that her rage towards me is mainly fueled by her rage towards another man or towards men in general. That makes it difficult for me to learn from their confrontation. Sometimes I have been able to avoid becoming defensive, but sometimes I have not.

Throughout my psychotherapeutic work with clients or in workshops since 1981 I helped many who have suffered sexual abuse, but I do not recall telling anyone this who did not already know it. And, more generally, with friends and acquaintances as well as clients, I’ve tried never to confront them concerning their motivations unless they were requesting this. I’ve failed when I’ve become defensively judgmental in response to their harsh judgments of me! Since 2011, however, I’ve become less defensive overall, and thereby also more accepting of others and their human flaws and faults, often quite similar to mine.

Sometimes the context in which I become newly aware of a past trauma or a current emotion/motivation is a confrontation by another person. Often, however, the context is a shift within myself, an “early warning system”. When I find myself in a distinctive kind of troubled state, this is a signal-in-advance that unconscious material is close to the threshold of consciousness. I’ll give some examples.

(ii) Troubled States as Signals for Unconscious Eruptions

In the first chapter of *“Grateful Reflections...”* I noted that on July 14, 2010, prior to re-experiencing the sexual trauma involving both Nellie and Dad, I “stole” a cart from a fruit&veg store, for my mind was mostly elsewhere, distracted by something I was not yet aware of. A similar dissociation occurred two decades earlier. I visited the most important person in my life, Margaret Grant. She was living in a seniors’ residence and her health and mind were declining. During this visit she talked a great deal about receiving phone calls from various friends long dead. I knew that when people are close to dying they often become aware of the spirits of deceased persons who come to help them through the transition. I thought that Marg was experiencing this in a distorted way. After I got home I suddenly broke down, sobbing in anguished grief. I had absolutely no memory of driving home or doing some chores there! For about an hour I had been in what clinicians call “shock”, unable to feel what I was actually feeling.

On that occasion my “early warning system” didn’t actually warn me, because I was in shock. Often, however, it works in a way that I can recognize and respond to. I

find myself feeling confused and overwhelmed, unable to cope with daily life, but I'm aware that I'm in crisis and I'm able to make a decision to phone someone or to lie down to meditate or to ask for a dream when I go to bed.

Sometimes my intense state of being overwhelmed and confused does not seem to arise from anything going on in my daily life, but on other occasions I can link it to an emotional entanglement with others. For example, in the second chapter of *"Grateful Reflections..."* I noted that dismissive remarks from two people upset me unduly, and moved me to meditate so I could uncover what was really going on inside me.

Whatever the signal that unconscious material is close to the threshold of consciousness, my movement into meditation is usually crucial. For it is when I'm in a meditative state, or something similar, that I've usually become aware of what has been hidden. Not always, for sometimes material simply "erupts" into consciousness, for example my repressed grief concerning Margaret Grant. My crucial first memories of sexual trauma in infancy began after some dramatic changes, but not until I meditated. (You may recall that I consulted a psychic concerning protection against invasion and was told, incidentally, that my deceased mother was earth-bound in spirit. Then I meditated concerning her, freed her from Nellie. Then I began to remember being violated as an infant.)

(iii) "Threshold Relaxation"

I mentioned "something similar" to meditation. This needs clarification. I'm really talking about two kinds of

meditation. Before I began meditating daily towards conscious union with the Divine Mystery my personal practice was sometimes closer to a non-mystical meditation in which I would sink down towards my hidden “centre”. I called this “Threshold Relaxation” (TR). This was the practice that I taught clients to use with me or on their own as a way of becoming more receptive to new material from their unconscious. Both mystical meditation and TR involve sinking down below one’s everyday consciousness and both involve emptying and letting go.

Almost two decades ago I published lengthy descriptions of TR in two places:

Donald Evans, *Spirituality and Human Nature*, chapter 3, especially pp.72-74 (State University of New York Press, Albany, N.Y, 1993).

Seymour Boorstein, ed., *Transpersonal Therapy* 2nd edition (State University of New York Press, Albany, N.Y., 1996): Chapter 25 “A Shamanic Christian Approach in Psychotherapy”, by Donald Evans.

I won’t repeat any of that here, with one exception. The exception is a very important part of my exploration of self-deception. It is an analogy that I used, and still use, to describe what happens in consciousness when something unconscious is uncovered. Initially the analogy helped me as a philosopher to explain how it can make sense for me to say that I resisted becoming aware of X though I was not yet aware of X. Without the analogy I would still have appealed to my experience in claiming that as I became aware of X I also somehow realized that I was resisting awareness of X and that I had been resisting

awareness of X. But the analogy helped me to understand how this could be so. It still helps.

Imagine that your consciousness is like a room in which a cocktail party is happening. Many conversations are going on at the same time. You are the host, responsible for letting new guests come in at the open door on the other side of the room. For a guest to come in, you need to focus your attention clearly on that guest. If you don't, he or she remains there for a while and then withdraws. As you glance around the room you may notice that someone is at the doorway, but the noticing is fleeting and obscure. You feel some reluctance to become clearer. If in spite of this you gaze directly at the person, so he or she comes into the room, into consciousness. Then another person may step from a corridor into the doorway, the threshold.

The analogy includes another intuitive element. Somehow you sense that there is a line-up down the corridor. Some are close to the threshold, others very remote from it. In the analogy, all of them are items within the unconscious that are currently inaccessible. Some will never reach the threshold because too many are ahead of them in the line-up and have to pass through it first. Others will never reach the threshold because in your dogmatic mind you have prohibited such a person (item) from ever doing so.

Occasionally, however, someone by-passes the line-up and "crashes the party" without any permission from you, the host. You suffer a breakdown that may, or may not, become an opportunity for a breakthrough.

One feature of the analogy is especially important: the “reluctance” to uncover the repressed memory (to acknowledge the guest at the threshold). Whenever an uncovering occurs you realize that you have been resisting the uncovering. The realization is sometimes strong and sometimes weak, but it is the experiential basis for belief that we human beings “repress feelings into our unconscious”.

The analogy is too tidy to fit all that goes on within psychotherapeutic explorations of the bodily-emotional unconscious, but I’ve found it useful as I’ve reflected on my own experience and the experience of many clients. It is also often applicable to what I call the “spiritual unconscious”, to which we now turn.

Second Section: Spiritual Self-Deception

(1) Uncovering both Emotional & Spiritual Unconscious

I’m going to begin with a story that includes uncoverings from both the emotional unconscious and the spiritual unconscious.

One evening in the 1990s I offered an evening meditation where I led participants in Threshold Relaxation with the conscious intention of becoming open to positive memories thus far inaccessible. I knew the story of one middle-aged participant, the most horrific I had ever heard. As a child she had suffered many terrible traumas, including being tortured by her mother. I had wondered how she had managed to avoid being institutionalized. Instead, although troubled, she was currently functioning in society.

At the end of her meditation she listed seven different positive memories that had emerged for her. The memories included human beings who had loved her and deceased spirits who had loved her and still did so. Retrieving these memories provided a great boost in her morale. It also made it clear to her and to me that even when the memories were unconscious, they had been a source of strength. They had to some extent counteracted the influence of traumas, whether these had remained unconscious or had been uncovered in psychotherapy.

For many years in my own daily meditation I've asked whether there is anything I need to discern right now. Sometimes I realize that I've been resisting becoming aware of something faulty going on within myself. Other times, however, I've been resisting becoming aware of something positive going on within myself. For example, I'm not adequately celebrating some spiritual transformation that recently occurred.

Often when I'm being therapist/counsellor for someone else I invite them to go into TR, open to positive memories that have been repressed. Such repression may seem puzzling, but there are many different reasons for it. They all amount to, "This doesn't now fit in with my current experience". The repressed memory may be ordinary, for example, feeling loved and appreciated by a grandparent, so very different from one's parents. Or it may be a spiritual experience: "seeing" a relative as they were unexpectedly dying 3000 miles away, or becoming aware of one's guardian-angel, or being filled with mysterious light as a child.

Sometimes during my very first session with a client I ask them to talk about early life with Mom and Dad and siblings. Often, however, I also ask them to talk about any experiences they've had that were especially important because the experience helped them to feel that their life is meaningful. I don't use the word "spiritual", but often what they recall is spiritual in nature. We both then know what spiritual resources they can draw on as they respond to difficult emotional challenges.

Sometimes a client's focus is not on psychotherapy but on difficulties encountered on their spiritual path. Then I may ask them about Mom and Dad and siblings, so we both know, roughly, what emotional issues may need to come up!

Although I try to respect a client's initial conviction that only emotional or only spiritual issues are involved, I usually have found that the approach they initially set aside is needed to supplement their main approach. Sometimes something spiritual arises in consciousness, for example an awareness of receiving maternal love from Mother Mary, and this provides an additional source of the pervasive trust that enables a client to retrieve from infancy an otherwise too-painful emotional memory concerning his/her human mother. Sometimes the retrieval of such an infantile memory is a precondition for being able to find access to a hidden nurturing spirit such as Mother Mary. As long as the client's fear and anger towards mother remains unconscious the client is unable to receive mothering love from Mary.

(2) Self-Deception Concerning Spiritual Energies and Spiritual Presences

In our Western “civilized and enlightened” culture, two spiritual dimensions are often excluded from awareness:

- (i) spiritual energies (often also called “life-energies”)
- (ii) spiritual presences (disembodied humans and/or angels)

Both exclusions involve self-deception, but the dynamics are usually quite different. We’ll consider each in turn.

(i) Spiritual/life energies.

Here the exclusion arises from two intellectual theories that shape the “common sense” of many people: positivism and/or “mechanical causation”.

Most people have experiences involving awareness of spiritual/life energies, but they don’t acknowledge the reality of what they are experiencing. For example, you’re on a bus or in a crowded room and you sense that someone behind you is staring at you. And you actually turn and see that this is so. How could you sense this? It’s puzzling, but if someone offers an explanation of this in terms of spiritual/life energies (curious or hostile) coming from the person, you reject it.

Another frequent and puzzling experience occurs at-a-distance: somehow you sense that your parent is dying, many miles away. Even if the time of death is

corroborated, an explanation in terms of reverberations through spiritual/life energies is often rejected.

Why do many people in our culture not accept such experiences as ways of knowing reality, even when it's their own experience? It's because the causal connection between such "coincidences" can not be established using scientific method. Or it's because causal connections have to be "mechanical", that is, like one billiard ball hitting another one. Many people in our culture do not realize that physics has changed since Isaac Newton's time, so that physical causation is not limited to immediate physical contact.

Even when people directly experience a vibration or tingling in hands or spine while listening to music or while learning how to meditate, some will dismiss its reality as an awareness of life/spiritual energy. The awareness is viewed as "merely subjective", for the reality of such energy can not be established scientifically. Moreover, the sensations reported can allegedly be completely explained in terms of (mechanical) neurological stimuli from the brain.

So self-deception concerning the reality of spiritual/life energies does not typically involve repressing an experience into the unconscious. Rather, people typically set the experience aside because they impose positivistic and/or mechanistic dogma on it, belittling its significance. After a while, they simply forget it. (If, however, the experience upset them a lot, they may repress it.)

(ii) Spiritual presences

Self-deception concerning spiritual presences does sometimes occur in a similar way, but two other factors are also at work. One has to do with experiences in early childhood. Many children report dealings with what adults call an “imaginary friend”. Such a label makes the reports acceptable to adults, but to the children the presences are usually real. Only a few homes in our society tolerate talk about “seeing Grannie after she died”, or “feeling an angel beside me at night”. Why the intolerance? Because of the second factor at work: a metaphysical scepticism. It seems obviously irrational to believe that human beings really continue to exist without a body after death or to believe that angels really exist.

Such a dogmatic this-worldly metaphysical view, rejecting the reality of spiritual presences, is held not only by people who reject the reality of spiritual energies but also by people who previously believed in spiritual presences! Often people who deny the existence of human spirits and/or angels experienced them when they were children! They had to repress the memory of such experiences in order to feel accepted and safe in their families.

Exclusion of spirits and angels is common within the current scientific-medical world-view. I had first-hand experience of this a couple decades ago when I was in hospital overnight to be tested for sleep-apnea. In preparation for this I had to fill in a questionnaire that covered a surprising range of possible indications of ill-health, both physical and mental. The very last question was obviously designed to reveal psychosis: “Do you

often experience the presence of spirits and if so do you believe they are real?"

My answer was, "Every day, and yes I believe they are real!" Fortunately the psychiatrist who interviewed me was not a dogmatist. I told him about my daily experiences of Jesus and other spiritual presences who help me and my frequent experiences of deceased persons needing help from me. Obviously, apart from such aberrations from the norm, I showed no other signs of psychosis, so the interview ended with some chuckles! Nevertheless many people in our society restrict reality and sanity to what conforms to medical-scientific dogma.

I have mentioned angels but I'm not going to talk about them here. I've have already done so briefly in Chapter 3 of *"Grateful Reflections..."* (March journals) and I'll follow up on this in the second book-sequel, *"New Spiritual Experiences That Changed Me"*.

(3) Importance of Experiences of Spiritual Presences

For me the most important kind of spirituality has to do with the development of heart-present connection with other human beings, seeing them with a love that combines compassion and appreciation. I've known many people who are exemplify that kind of spirituality without ever experiencing the presence of a spirit!

It's not true of me, however. Experiencing the presence of spirits has been crucial in directly transforming me towards becoming a more loving human being. The risen Jesus has been the most important, but there have been many others. Some have been within the

Christian tradition: Mother Mary, St. Francis (especially when I was in Assisi during June, 2003) and St. Teresa of Avila (March 1, 2012). Over thirty years ago I first encountered the deceased Hindu guru, Ramana Maharshi, when I gazed at his picture and glimpsed his state of pure consciousness. After that, on several occasions, further awareness of his union with Divine Mystery contributed to significant changes within me. And beginning in 1983, various deceased aboriginal shamans (whose names I never learned) have healed some of the rifts within me between masculine and feminine, enabling me to give and receive love more freely, with less constriction.

Experiencing the presence of spirits has also been significant in other ways. For example, beginning in 1983 and accelerating in recent years my spiritual encounters with my father and my mother have changed not only me but also them. We are fully reconciled, and all three of us continue to support each other's growth. It is wonderful not only for me but also for them that they can now provide the positive-parenting energy that they did not have to give when I was an infant. Now it is their contribution to the healing of infant-Don. Perhaps one reason for my being gifted with discernment of spirits is that this was required for me to triumph over trauma.

Another reason for the gift is related to what I'm now seeing as a special personal calling in this life. Since October 19, 2011 I've gradually been realizing that my particular contribution to humanity at this time is exemplify a "multi-path" kind of spirituality, centrally Christian but also experientially including much from many other religious paths and from secular humanism.

(As I write this on April 17, 2012, I've also been writing it in Chapter 3 of "*Grateful Reflections*" as a journal)

In my service to others I have often encountered spiritual presences from various traditions. For example, I remember counselling a devotee of Krishna. A "fringe-benefit" as I meditated before and during sessions with this gentleman from India was learning to appreciate Krishna: his delightful, light-hearted humour and his distinctive radiant energies. After all the sessions ended I never called on Krishna to help me, but when I meet a devotee I can empathize with his/her spiritual enthusiasm.

Sometimes a spiritual presence who I got to know while counselling a client does later become an occasional helper for me. For example, after I got to know Kwan Yin while I was with a Chinese Buddhist I asked for her help several times. I also connected with the Dalai Lama in a similar way. He is of course still very much alive on earth, but connecting with such a spiritual giant at a distance is very similar to connecting with him after he dies.

On March 10, 2012 I was at a spiritual-sexual workshop and I had an intimate meditative exchange with someone I had not met before. Afterwards I learned that a Hindu Swami called "Nityananda" had been blessing us. Over thirty years ago I had connected in spirit with him powerfully for a short time. I had not thought of him since, but he had not forgotten me!

(3) Negative Intrusions by Spiritual Presences From "Graffiti" Mischief-Makers to Ultra-Nasty Haters

In the first chapter of *"Grateful Reflections..."* I reported that in 1981 I first remembered Nellie the housekeeper molesting me as an infant. Immediately before that memory came to me, an image had come to me concerning what was currently happening in the spiritual realm: I saw Nellie riding on my Mother's back, chortling with malevolent glee as she tortured and humiliated Mother. I was able to evict Nellie and to reassure Mother that hating Nellie was understandable and easily forgivable.

Nellie was intruding into Mother's consciousness in a wicked way. This was my first experience of stopping a psychic intrusion. It was not typical. Since then, I've responded to hundreds of intrusions but I don't recall any others involving one spirit intruding on another spirit. The rest have involved either (a) a spirit and an embodied human being or (b) two embodied human beings.

Nellie's intrusion on Mother was untypical in another way. Only a very few intrusions have involved comparable wickedness in intention and destructiveness in outcome. Nellie's tormenting of Mother was demonic or almost demonic. What I call "demonic" goes beyond vengeance and sadism. A demonic human spirit has made a commitment to being and doing evil for its own sake. He or she is dedicated to destroying love and light in human beings and to recruiting others to join in this destructive project.

In my experience, demonic intrusions are very, very rare. They are at the utterly-evil extreme of a spectrum-

scale that begins with intrusions that are merely mischievous. In this section I'll first be giving examples of a spirit invading an embodied human being, Eventually I'll give some examples that don't involve spirits.

One purpose in presenting such negative experiences is similar to what moved me to give examples of positive experiences of helpful spirits: overall, my awareness of spirits has become part my calling in this life. Counselling distressed or destructive spirits has not been central, but it has not been merely incidental.

A second purpose in providing examples of the various kinds of psychic intrusion is to encourage readers to consider the possibility that nasty invasions do occur and cause severe suffering. Later I'll be noting examples where someone thinks they are being invaded but they are mistaken. Often, however, if you feel that you are being invaded you are. You need to seek out help from someone who is at home in the spiritual realm. Most psychiatrists and psychologists deny that psychic invasion exists, so you are not likely to find help there. Sometimes they can help a client reduce his or her psychological vulnerability to being invaded. Only rarely, however will this by itself be enough. (Later on in this chapter I'll explore these issue.)

Although I raise the possibility that sometimes nasty invasions occur, my third purpose in describing varieties of psychic invasions is to make it clear to readers that most invasions are not nasty or horrifying. Rather, they are similar to offences by ordinary people against other people in everyday life. I begin with a

typical spirit who typically haunts a house. He or she does not resemble a terrifying spook in a horror-movie but rather a teen-ager who paints graffiti on a wall.

(i) Haunting a House

Sometimes a deceased human being does not “move on” to a spiritual realm but remains “earthbound”, confined in the house where he or she once lived. The spirit feels restless and tries to gain the attention of the inhabitants in various upsetting ways, usually by “spooking” them with an obscure awareness of his or her presence. The obscure awareness reported to me has rarely included paranormal physical phenomena such as doors slamming. Usually what is reported is similar to the sensation people sometimes feel in a bus or a restaurant that someone behind them is staring at them. Or it’s a fleeting visual impression, similar to half-catching a glimpse of a shooting-star crossing the night sky.

Like a teen-ager painting graffiti, they are clumsily trying to get attention. In my experience most house-haunting ghosts respond easily to gentle counselling. I appeal to their sense of not wanting to remain stuck where they are. They usually welcome guidance concerning how to leave this earthly plane. Often they loved and trusted a grandparent who predeceased them. I suggest that they ask this person to assist them. When this person immediately comes in spirit to show them the way, the house is no longer haunted!

(ii) Haunted Land

A few years ago a friend consulted me concerning a haunted house. My friend sometimes does this kind of work, but she could not get a clear “read” on what was going on. (Sometimes I, too, ask a colleague for a “second opinion” when I’m puzzled.) When we tuned in together we found that the house was on land where, centuries ago, an aboriginal community had lived. In a terrible tragedy they all died from plague brought by the white man. The disaster was so traumatizing that they all had been earth-bound ever since. They had no ill-will towards the people in the house, but the energies of their shock and sorrow pervaded the area.

Together my friend and I brought their plight to the attention of a nearby aboriginal community and asked them – in spirit – to assist the earth-bound community to leave their land and the earthly realm. We “witnessed” this happening and gave thanks.

I realize that for many readers this story will seem “far out”! For me, however, what happened evoked no “Gee Whiz!” I was merely somewhat surprised. Such esoteric spiritual events had become part of my life. I didn’t seek them out or advertise my services, but if anyone asked for help, I readily obliged.

Digression: I should note an important distinction here. Sometimes what a tragedy leaves behind is negative energies (in this case, terror and grief but sometimes also hatred). Sometimes it leaves behind the spirits of the people who experienced the tragedy. This distinction applies both to both areas of land and houses. (A similar distinction applies where the energies and the spirits are positive. For example, a “holy” place or

building may retain either the energies or the spirits of holy persons who resided there. Or both the energies and the spirits may remain.)

Very important: Sometimes a person's body may still retain the negative energies of a person who was cruel to them. This is very different from being currently invaded by that person, who may still be alive or may now be a spirit. Evicting energies involves a different process from evicting invading-persons.

(iii) Vindictive Intruders

In section (i) I reported what usually happens when I respond to a request to deal with a haunting. It's merely an immature individual clumsily trying to get some attention. In section (ii) my example was not what I had expected, not a typical haunted-house story. In this section what I report is also untypical, but in a very different way. When I tuned in to one haunted house in response to a friend's request I soon realized that I was dealing with a spirit who was not merely mischievous. On the contrary, if we think of a spectrum of invaders from mischievous to nasty, she was beyond nastiness, not far from the demonic!

I found that the spirit haunting the house was full of obsessive rage and hatred because she had been badly treated by a previous occupant of the house during the spirit's earthly life. The nasty "vibes" of this vindictive spirit's presence in the house were very upsetting for the current occupants. Though the previous occupant had moved, the nasty spirit's base of operations was in the house. Her relentless purpose was to invade the

consciousness and the body of the previous occupant who had harmed her, making her physically and mentally ill. It became obvious to me that my central task was not to de-haunt the house for the current occupants. Far more important was stopping the invasion of the previous occupant.

I soon realized that it was useless to try to appeal to the spirit's conscience or enlightened self-interest. Only frightening threats would stop her ultra-nasty invasion. Indeed, she began trying to intrude on me for interfering with her vendetta. I called on the risen Jesus to pervade my whole body and to protect me in all six directions. Then in the name of Jesus I commanded her to leave not only the house but also this earthly realm. As I did so I felt the overwhelming energies of Jesus pass through me to her, terrifying her. She left this realm, knowing that any return would elicit more of the same self-shattering onslaught.

At no time did I feel any fear, not because I am typically a brave man, but because I had previously learned from experience that the spiritual presence of Jesus vastly exceeds in power any malevolent spirit invading a human being. When I call on Jesus as warrior, I remember his vigorous cleansing of the Jerusalem Temple. He is similarly vigorous and angry when he deals with a spirit desecrating a human body, a temple of spirit.

Sometimes, however, depending on the specifics of the invasion I call on a spiritual presence other than Jesus to evict the invader.

If I am trying to help a woman to learn how to protect herself, I've often explicitly called on Kali, a

Hindu “goddess”, who is especially scary to most male persecutors of women and children.

With a Jew, I once called on the God of Moses.

With a Buddhist, invaded and tormented by her pseudo-Buddhist teacher for daring to leave the group, I called on Kwan Yin, a “goddess” in that tradition.

With a Muslim, seriously ill because of an ongoing black-magic “hex” from enemies in Iran, I’ve asked Allah to send an angel to expel the invaders.

With an aboriginal, invaded by a power-hungry medicine man, I’ve called on spiritual grandfathers and grandmothers.

In all these cases the invader flees and the person’s suffering is eased. And for this reason Jesus was pleased. In my experience Jesus does not care who does the healing.

(iv) Persuading harmful spirits to leave

I rarely kept records of my dealings with invasive spirits. Typically I would receive a phone call, deal with the problem, and then get on with my day. So now in 2012 I don’t remember the routine cases, only those that were especially memorable. In the most frequent cases (now blurred together in my memory) the invader was harming someone, but all that was needed for this to stop was an appeal to his/her own rational self-interest (“What you’re doing is not getting you anywhere”) or to his/her conscience (“Do you think that what you’re doing to that person is fair?”). The counselling was similar to what some social workers or executive coaches provide to individuals within communities or corporations. Only a minimal personal change is required in the person

doing the harm. The counseling elicits a shift in perspective which in turn elicits a shift in behaviour.

In the next section, however, I'm going to draw on my memories of two occasions that moved me deeply because they involved personal change sufficiently deep to bring healing and reconciliation: (a) between a brother and his dead sister (b) between a husband and his dead wife.

(v) Healing Rifts Across the Grave

(i) "John" (brother) and "Jane" (sister)

As children, John and Jane grew up in a family within which they both felt very unsafe. Often they would fearfully hide together, finding solace and strength in their caring connection. When they became adults they went their separate ways, though they often connected with each other psychically. After several decades, however, Jane died. John was in psychotherapy with me at the time, and he let me know that he was very aware of Jane in spirit. This often happens during a period of mourning, after which the deceased person "moves on". Jane, however, kept on appearing to John, and it became evident that she was earth-bound. Indeed, neither she nor he was willing or able to disconnect. Meanwhile in his daily life John was becoming increasingly distracted, unable to get on with his work.

During several sessions with John we talked with Jane in spirit. The process was very similar to psychotherapy sessions with two people in this world who need to free each other from constricting co-dependence. John and Jane were both very upset, even

angry, concerning her death. It re-traumatized them, stirring up childhood fears. For the crisis to be resolved, three things had to happen:

First, although their caring-love for each other involved much attachment. each eventually realized that they were harming the other because of the attachment and they lovingly let go of it. .

Second, John eventually realized that in his adult life he now had the resources to get on with his life without being connected with Jane.

Third, Jane eventually realized that she could “move on” to a spiritual plane, drawing on the support and guidance of loving spirits with whom she had connected.

I’ve oversimplified what actually happened, for the process involved much emotional turmoil. There were many swings into hope and back into despair. Eventually, however, they parted in reconciliation and peace.

(b) “James”(husband) and “Joan” (wife)

After a funeral service I was being driven home by a friend. I began meditating and immediately became aware of James, the husband of the deceased. He was still alive, but had not been at the service. They had separated quite a few years before and neither had been able to forgive the other. The rift between them had seemed to be final. In recent years, however, Joan had changed radically, no longer dominated by her alcoholism. Apparently James had changed too, for he was asking me to contact Joan in spirit and give her a message: *Can we be reconciled? I want to let go of my hurt and hate. Is it possible for you?*

Joan's answer was *Yes, I love you*. I passed it along to James. Then I emerged from my meditation and told my driver what had happened. We gave thanks together.

(vi) Invasions within this world

I began this section on negative invasions with a story from 1981: I became aware of Nellie tormenting Mother in the spiritual realm and then had my first memory of her molesting me. This all arose when I consulted a psychic because I felt that I was being angrily invaded, not by a spirit but by someone in this world.

I was already convinced that we human beings influence others at a distance, affecting them by our positive or negative thoughts and feelings concerning them. Sometimes the influencing is very conscious and deliberate. When such influencing is positive it is called "white magic". When it is negative it is called "black magic". Usually, however, we influence others unconsciously, without intending to do so. Such influence is nevertheless real.

Since 1981 I've become increasingly intuitive concerning psychic influencing of all kinds. Often people consult me concerning negative invasion, asking, *Am I being invaded?* and then, *By whom?* and then, *Consciously or unconsciously?* I claim no infallibility. Indeed, sometimes I'll consult someone who has similar gifts if I'm puzzled concerning what seems to be a possible invasion of myself or others. But usually I feel quite confident.

Probably many readers of this book have personally experienced some psychic influencing. If they haven't, testimony from me shouldn't persuade them that it's real. What I'm going on to consider, however, is self-deception were someone thinks he's being invaded and is not.

A few decades ago a man, whom I'll call "George", came to me with an alarming story. At a previous work-location a co-worker verbally threatened him every day. George had moved his place of work to avoid this abuse, but the co-worker continued to threaten him, though this time psychically. When I "tuned in" I could intuit no such invasion, so I invited George to go into a meditation to see what was happening within himself.

What emerged was some long-repressed rage, previously disowned, and projected on to the co-worker as if it came from the co-worker. To George, the co-worker seemed a probable source although probably he had forgotten George by this time. As George claimed and sounded forth his rage, it gradually changed into a very positive, confident self-assertive roar. George later explained to me that he felt himself becoming a lion. When filled with lion-type energy George ceased being a victim. Nor, contrary to what he had unconsciously feared would happen if he released his repressed rage, was he a vicious victimizer. (Note: George's transformation occurred through a process of shamanic psychotherapy involving a lion as his power-animal. I was surprised when it happened, for I was not consciously intending anything shamanic when I met with him. My hunch is that some spirit-helper initiated the process.)

It is important to realize that even if George were really being invaded, all this repression and projection could also have been going on. In such a case, even if the (real) invader had been dealt with, the long-repressed rage within George would have remained, not dealt with. Esoteric work with spirits, though sometimes very significant, is not a cure-all. George would have needed further depth-psychotherapy of some kind.

Indeed, consideration of this example makes it clear that sometimes depth-psychotherapy can, by itself, so effectively reduce a person's vulnerability to invasion that a potential invader can not find any point of entry. Moreover, if a client is attached to his/her negative invader, only a transformation from being a victim to becoming one's own man/woman can prevent recurring invasions. As I write this I'm remembering the anguish I felt when I had to stop seeing one perennially-victim client whom I had been trying to help for many years.

(vii) Self-deception concerning invasion

Earlier I discussed George's self-deception concerning being invaded by his former co-worker. Now I want to present another, rather different, example of self-deception: a woman whom I'll call "Mary". Mary's priest invited me to join with some others to do what Roman Catholics call "deliverance-work" for her. Originally the invasion was no delusion. She was actually being invaded by a very destructive spirit. That afternoon, however, the spirit was forced to leave by the power of Jesus Christ. All of us involved in the deliverance were certain that the nasty spirit had gone.

Mary, however, was not! When we told her that whatever distress she was now feeling arose not from a spirit but from within herself, so that she would now need to do some psychotherapeutic work, Mary clung to the belief that she was still being invaded. Taking on some personal responsibility for dealing with her state was repugnant to her.

(viii) Approaches Different From Mine

(a) Christians. On a few occasions I have joined Roman Catholics in “deliverance” work for people who have been invaded. This was not, strictly speaking, what they call an “exorcism” for someone who is “possessed”. Some Roman Catholic workers in this field do not confine their work to exorcisms. I welcomed the opportunity to contribute my gifts in some “deliverance” work. . I found, however, that they are constricted by the rigid theological and institutional framework to which they are committed. My lack of orthodoxy understandably upset them, though I called only on Jesus while working alongside them.

I never tried to work in this area with evangelical Christians, though sometimes in other contexts I’ve appreciated their genuine love for people. My impression is that in the context of psychic invasion scripture is their only authority and for them it says that any spiritual presences other than Jesus are instruments of Satan, the Devil. I do not believe that such an entity exists. I have no basis experientially for believing in the reality of a specific fallen angel who is the supreme source of evil coming from the spiritual plane. Moreover, I have experienced many non-Christian presences whom Jesus

welcomes as co-workers. Also, my experience is that the appropriate response to most negative invasions is compassionate counselling, not spiritual warfare. Only a few invaders are nasty, and only a very few are demonic.

Within my own liberal United Church of Canada, my impression is that only a minority is open to the reality of spiritual presences, whether positive or negative. The dominant metaphysic in the Church is strictly this-worldly, ruling out life after death. Stories about Jesus' appearances after his death or about his evictions of nasty spirits tend to be understood in symbolic ways. Preachers interpret scripture in ways that inspire us to be more imaginative in our approach to conflicts within humankind.

I regret the way in which this liberal Christianity "shrinks" reality, but if I had to choose between it and typical conservative Christianity, I would sway towards the former. Fortunately, however, I can select what I value in both approaches, denying neither my connections with spirits nor my solidarity with humankind across ideological boundaries.

(b) Non-violent Practitioners.

Although my usual approach is compassionate counselling, occasionally I resort to spiritual warfare if an invader is nasty or demonic. Some practitioners, however, like Ghandi or Martin Luther King in their dealings with earthly oppressors, try to touch the conscience or awaken the soul of a nasty invader. (Typically they deny that demonic invaders exist.)

Since you, the reader, have been hearing only my approach, you should know that this pacifist alternative exists.

© Reducing Vulnerability to Invasion. I mentioned my own experience of clients who are not able or willing to reduce their vulnerability to invasion. Even if the invader is evicted, he/she soon or eventually returns. With such clients, the main focus needs to be psychotherapeutic. For some practitioners, unlike me, this approach seems appropriate for most clients or all clients. Rarely or never do they evict the invader. Their reason is not a commitment to non-violence but a commitment to helping the client find the resources to transform from being a victim to becoming their own man or woman. Another reason may be that the practitioner is reluctant to fall into the role of “rescuer”.

Most of this section on spiritual self-deception has been devoted to negative psychic invasion. My reason for this emphasis is not that its reality has been more important for me than the reality of positive help from spiritual presences. Rather, my reason arises from recognizing that some people live exemplary human lives without being aware of positive spirits, whereas much human suffering will continue to arise from negative invasion if most people continue to deny its existence.

Having considered bodily-emotional and spiritual self-deception, I now turn to a third kind: mystical.

3. Mystical Self-Deception

1. Mysticism, Longing-Love and Rumi's Poem

In 2002 my understanding of the “mystical” was different from what it is in 2012, but I’m going to begin by quoting from a sermon I preached back then.

“Many of us, like me, go through life with the delusion that some other human being can complete us; but at best this is a way through to realizing, eventually, that only God can complete me, only God can satiate the longing that has been built into the very fabric of our human being. As St. Augustine famously said,

You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till we find our rest in thee.

The Muslim mystic poet Rumi had a similar awareness of the longing-love of human beings for God. Here is one of his greatest poems:

*One night a man was crying, Allah! Allah!
His lips grew sweet with the praising, until a cynic said,
So! I have heard your calling out, but have you ever gotten
any response*

*The man had no answer to that.
He quit praying and fell into a confused sleep.
He dreamed he saw Khidr, the guide of souls, in a thick
green foliage.*

*“Why did you stop praying?”
“Because I’ve never heard anything back”.*

“This longing you express is the return message.

*The grief you cry out from draws you toward union.
Your pure sadness that wants help is the secret cup.
Listen to the moan of a dog for its master.
That whining is the connection.
There are love-dogs no one knows the names of,
Give your life to be one of them."*

In the summer of 1999, while on a brief vacationing retreat in cottage country with two friends, we read this poem aloud and then went out in a canoe. It was close to sunset, the lake was calm and silent. Suddenly we heard a sound that penetrated the stillness again and again, pervading the whole lake and the surrounding forest. It was an animal sound, but one with which we three human beings could resonate from deep within ourselves. It was the howl of a dog anticipating the imminent return of its master or mistress. That dog helped each of us towards becoming one of Rumi's 'love-dogs'.

In 2011 I was helped in a similar way, not by hearing a dog, but by listening to some music: four Russian songs that express stages in our human longing-love, beginning with mostly-longing and culminating in mostly-loving. The stages in between are for me like being a love-dog. As I become aware of how intensely I long to re-connect with the Mystery that will fulfil me, I become aware that the Mystery is at work within me.

I discussed this mystical longing/connection in the second chapter of *"Grateful Reflections..."*, contrasting two kinds of happiness: complete happiness within Loving Mystery and incomplete happiness in loving humans. In both the first and second chapters it was obvious that

infantile traumas in relation to Nellie and Mother produced in me an intense longing-love to find a woman who would somehow complete me. This hidden motivation led to many distortions and disappointments.

A sceptical psychotherapist could plausibly try to explain my longing-love for Mystery in terms of my creating an imaginary substitute for the woman who never turned up in my life. Such an explanation is relevant in understanding what I often brought to my experiences of Mystery until very recently. Indeed, it helps me understand why I resonate so deeply with St. Augustine and Rumi and the Russian songs. But my experiences of Mystery have been too powerful for me to dismiss them as totally illusory. Even back in 1950 I was stirred by T.S.Eliot's words concerning Mystery, though I did not know why. In recent decades I have occasionally experienced momentary pure-consciousness of Mystery. In recent years various alternative modes of access to Mystery have become more clearly significant in my life.

Moreover, as I reported in the third chapter of *"Grateful Reflections..."*, my liberation in January 2012 from having to find "the woman" who would complete me or fulfill me or bring supreme happiness is linked with a shift in my liberation from having to find fulfillment in one particular experience of Mystery.

I can connect in many ways diverse with various women as women and I can connect in many diverse ways with various versions of Mystery.

2. Living within Mystery in 2012

(1) Flexible Inclusiveness

In 2012 living within Mystery implies a very different notion of “completeness”. I expand towards completeness in so far as I include a variety of human Mystery-possibilities within my life and celebrate these possibilities in others as they live them. One of these, but only one, is being momentarily in a state of pure consciousness (“There is only God/Mystery.”)

Near the end of the second chapter of *“Grateful Reflections...”* I resolved not to define my personal identity in relation to one particular kind of transformative experience, excluding all others. In the third chapter I reflected concerning this flexible inclusiveness in a different context, not in terms of varieties of personal identity but in terms of varieties of ways in which I experience Mystery. All these ways of experiencing Mystery involve different ways of being human and of being humanly conscious.

In saying this I’m not denying the reality of Mystery. With the possible exception of mystical pure consciousness, where human consciousness is (or seems to be?) replaced by divine consciousness, every experience of Mystery occurs within human consciousness, however transformed that consciousness may be. Nevertheless our human experience can include various hints of that which is beyond our comprehension and our control, beyond all our ways of knowing things. Mystery is nothing in particular, no-thing, yet Mystery is real.

(2) On Asking “Who Am I?”

On May 5, 2012 I suddenly remembered briefly participating in a Hindu meditation movement that was prominent in Southern Ontario and elsewhere during the 1990s. The movement sponsored retreats called “Enlightenment Intensives”. Participants worked in pairs taking turns asking each other one question, “Who are you?” The questioner would pose the question and then remain silent but attentive as the responder speaks. After ten minutes (as I recall), a bell would ring. The roles would reverse so that the responder would become the questioner. I seem to remember that there were also walking-meditations during the day, but the central emphasis was on answering the question again and again...until, perhaps, Enlightenment would occur. That is, one would suddenly experience Light or Mystery: the reality of what is utterly beyond any description in words.

Within a non-dualist Hindu context, Enlightenment is pure consciousness. I realize that the self that I’ve been describing is not real. Only Mystery (or Light or Brahman or Self) is real. Only pure consciousness is true.

As I participated in Intensives, however, I knew that it was possible for me not to bring such a Hindu context to it. For one thing, I had been deeply influenced decades before by passages in Gabriel Marcel where he invited readers to go on asking “Who am I?” Then if a breakthrough-insight occurs, what I realize is that I am more than my curriculum vitae, more than my self-description, more than my personal history. I am also,

and centrally what I become aware of as an existential participant in “the Mystery of Being”.

Marcel’s philosophy had prepared my mind for recent experiences that have been transformative.

(3) Rumi’s poem no longer definitive for me

What I’m now proposing is that I am more than the various ways of being human and being humanly conscious that I explored in “Grateful Reflections...” as I’ve been exploring various approaches to Mystery. In the third chapter I presented five such approaches:

- (i) relaxation into my body,
- (ii) Taoist contrast-harmonizing,
- (iii) I-Thou encounters,
- (iv) orgasmic meditation,
- (v) cosmic-tree-orthodox-liturgy.

Each of these involves a different hint of “more-than”. That is, each is a hint of Mystery, in the broad sense of that which is beyond my comprehension and beyond my control.

In 2002 and even in 2009 Rumi’s poem tended to define Mystery for me. Now in mid-May, 2012 its clear to me that not all hints of Mystery involve longing-love. Whether or not they do depends on the approach to Mystery that the individual and/or the culture brings to Mystery. Jewish, Christian and Islamic mystics tend to emphasize experiences of Mystery as limitlessly loving; hence they long for intimacy with Mystery and partly-find intimacy in this very longing. Outside these three religious cultures there are religious or secular cultures that emphasize longing-love less or not at all. And it’s also

clear that some individual human beings in every culture deviate from the norm in their culture in the way they experience of Mystery.

Some sceptics understandably view these humanly-originated variations in experience of Mystery as evidence that “Mystery” is simply a human concoction. I say “understandably” because only an experience of Mystery could possibly convince them that it Mystery is real.

Many mystics whose experience of Mystery is for them definitive also reject the view that legitimate variations in human experiences of Mystery originate from variations among human beings. My impression is that such “territorial ownership” tends to be reinforced in all the great religions. For example, my own Christian background has made it difficult for me to acknowledge the reality of Mystery experienced without longing-love.

Buddhism is often touted as a supremely-inclusive religion, but recently I’ve encountered rigidity in some Buddhists who dogmatically exclude any mystical experience that includes being aware of one’s self as real. My own very limited experience of Taoism on October 19, 2011 helped free me of much exclusivism, but I won’t be surprised if someone points out evidence to the contrary concerning Taoism! And secular humanists who experience Mystery tend to confine it to what seems compatible with their world-view.

I hope it’s clear that I firmly reject any restriction of Mystery to one allegedly definitive experience of Mystery. But this does not mean that I should not

emphasize one approach to Mystery more than any other in my personal life. What matters is being open to learn from other approaches.

(4) Awareness of Mystery differs from Psychic Intuition

I've described awareness of Mystery as awareness of that which is beyond our comprehension and control. Does this include psychic intuition? Initially it may seem so, for if I or someone else somehow intuit your unexpressed thoughts or intuitions from a distance that you are deeply distressed, such paranormal awareness evokes a "Gee Whiz!" response. And theories that claim to explain how it can happen don't make it fully comprehensible for they require many questionable assumptions.

What a psychic intuit, however, is something particular and quite comprehensible, whereas Mystery is no-thing, Nothing. Mystery is what I've called "more-than" or "beyond" the comprehensible. In my own experience of acting on the basis of both normal knowing and paranormal intuition, I can control some things (though I'm unable to control most things),

Mystery, however, is totally beyond my control. Why? Because Mystery is totally beyond my comprehension. As Eliot said, "But what or whom I loved, or what in me was loving, I do not know". Awareness of Mystery involves being agnostic. Being agnostic can mean realizing there is Mystery beyond knowing and beyond comprehending, learning to unlearn much that I have learned. In so far as I'm aware of Mystery I can let go of my need to control.

(5) Mystery and Self-Deception

On the basis of my own varied experiences of Mystery I have provided a basis for claiming that people deceive themselves if they claim that only their (or their religion's) kind of Mystery is real. Similarly they deceive themselves if they claim that all human beings have a mystical unconscious within which resides the capacity to experience their kind of Mystery.

What remains for me to explore, given my more inclusive account of Mystery, is whether all human beings have a mystical unconscious within which resides the capacity to experience some kind of Mystery.

Such a claim could only be established if every human being were to experience some kind of Mystery! Since some people rigidly exclude the possibility of taking any hints-of-Mystery experiences as indicators of reality, this is very unlikely. Dogmatic positivism and dogmatic "common sense" successfully shrink human awareness.

Is there a mystical unconscious in all human beings? Although I can not establish such a claim in a way that convinces everyone, several considerations move me to propose it.

(i) In my own personal experience I have uncovered a mystical unconscious, as I also have uncovered a bodily-emotional unconsconscious and a spiritual unconscious.

(ii) A minority of human beings in many cultures throughout recent millenia have reported experiences of Mystery.

(iii) Although I have found that some of my experiences of Mystery have needed correction in so far as I treated them as definitive for me and for others, I nevertheless go on trusting that the more rigorously and deeply I go on uncovering self-deceptions the more likely some universal truths will emerge. And the same applies to anyone else who does likewise in their own way.

(iv) Hence I view dialogue, especially between human beings committed to uncovering self-deceptions, as a necessary and productive process towards understanding and possible agreement.

(v) A majority of students in my undergraduate seminar on human nature described themselves as neither spiritual nor religious, yet after they viewed a video presenting the Sufi mystic Rumi almost all the students said something like this: "If that is what's involved in being spiritual, then I'm spiritual".

Their experiences of course varied, but what they cited in the video usually included some of these mystical elements:

** Rumi uses words to suggest what is beyond words.*

** Not only the poetry but the music and the photography suggest mystery.*

** Our creativity arises from something within us that is mysterious.*

** Rumi connects with everyone regardless of religion in a way I don't understand but I like.*

Of course the several hundred students in the course between 2000 and 2008 were not a “fair sample” of humankind. They usually chose it because they had a deep interest in “meaning-of-life” issues. Few of them, however, had previously experienced, or experienced strongly, what Rumi evoked in them. For me their response confirmed to some extent my hunch concerning a universal mystical unconscious. Some students may have been telling the professor what they they sensed he wanted to hear from them, but I’m convinced that many were being authentic in what they said.

(6) How Humanly Important is Awareness of Mystery?

Although some human beings may be easily reminded that they previously had some glimpse of Mystery, most human beings don’t seem to have had any awareness at all. How humanly important is it that they should become aware?

If it were important that every human being become aware of whatever is real, knowing all truth, then awareness of Mystery would obviously be important. But obviously no human being can become omniscient.

If, as some non-dualist mystics claim, the only truth, overriding all other alleged truth, is the truth experienced in pure consciousness, then nothing else matters. But for me that claim is merely a dogma that needs to be set aside. Not only are there other ways of experiencing Mystery, but various kinds of human self-deception (bodily emotional, spiritual and social-environmental) need to be explored.

When I reflect on my own experiences of Mystery there are two distinguishable reasons for regarding it as important.

(i) First, awareness of Mystery has immeasurably enriched the quality of my life, enabling me to love myself and others more spontaneously and more deeply. Moreover, when I've encountered men and women who live their lives within Mystery I've been inspired by their capacity to love.

(ii) Second, awareness of Mystery has expanded the range of my spontaneous love for myself and for other human beings. Moreover, I've met fellow-mystics for whom this expanded range is also true. If the Ultimate is not a Deity defined by dogma but rather Mystery, this shatters ideological justifications for dividing humankind into "Us" (acceptable) and "Them" (not-acceptable). Mystery similarly undermines secular ideological dogmas such as positivism, free enterprise capitalism, or communism.

Earlier I noted that for some mystics Mystery includes loving agency and thus can obviously enhance human loving. What about experiences of Mystery that involve no agency? I think for example of two Buddhist mystics whom I've met: a Sri Lankan monk and a Tibetan monk. Their heart-presence warmed me with profound compassion and joyful appreciation. There are many other examples where a Mystery that is not a loving agency enhances human loving.

Of course on every path there are many examples of mystics whose loving is seriously distorted and even

destructive. Being on a mystic path and having experiences of Mystery does not by itself guarantee anything. Egoistic mystics often attract and flatter a community of devotees. Together the guru and followers smugly contrast themselves, the “enlightened”, with everyone else, the “unenlightened”.

My own conviction is that what matters most is reducing individual and group egoism and enhancing our human capacity for compassion and appreciation. Awareness of Mystery can contribute to this, but so can many other transformations of human consciousness.

4. Self Deception Concerning Society and Nature

(1) Self-Deception Promoted by Dogmatic Versions of Religion and Science

Self-deception concerning the social injustice and the environmental destruction perpetrated by human beings is very important. Indeed, it is more obviously detrimental to humankind and to all life on earth than the instances of bodily-emotional, spiritual and mystical self-deception that I have presented at length in this chapter. Nevertheless this section of the chapter will not be longer. I have less to contribute experientially concerning this kind of self-deception.

Uncovering self-deception concerning society and nature is usually and mainly a mental process in contrast with the experiential processes that I have been describing thus far in the chapter. Although I have a few

personal anecdotes to illustrate self-deceptions that I've uncovered in myself, the changes were mostly intellectual. Indeed, I'll be drawing on my skills as a philosopher when I explain how people deceive themselves by not recognizing the "ideological" element in their assumptions. Later on I'll explore some experiential ways which help me and others to challenge ideologies. First, however, I need to be more philosophical in my presentation.

My first step is to I remind you concerning the self-deceptive ingredient in positivism, which can successfully prohibit experiences of repressed emotions, spiritual presences or Mystery. Positivists assume that only scientific method can establish true beliefs concerning what is real. Positivist self-deception is very different from self-deception as I have presented it thus far. The following is the pattern thus far:

We experienced something that was traumatic or unfamiliar and we could not bear continuing to experience it, so we repressed it into our unconscious. Typically we are unable to become aware of it again until it becomes obscurely accessible at the "threshold" of consciousness. If it does, we have a choice: we can wilfully ignore it or we can allow it to become less obscure and more conscious. (I say "typically" because occasionally the repressed reality crashes into consciousness.)

There are, however, instances of self-deception where we have not previously experienced a reality but we have somehow resisted becoming aware of that kind of reality. A strong intellectual assumption can shrink the range of possible experiences and related beliefs

concerning what is real. I'm going to call these instances of self-deception "mental-blockers".

Positivists are not the only dogmatists who hold a very strong intellectual assumption that is a mental-blocker, excluding the very possibility of having any experiences or beliefs that conflict with the assumption. Religious fundamentalists are similar in this respect. They exclude the very possibility of experiences and beliefs that conflict with their sacred scripture. They assume that their scripture comes directly and entirely from God and is therefore infallible and immune from questioning. One 19th-century fundamentalist even proposed the following theory: God created the world about five or six thousand years ago, but with all the geological and evolutionary evidence that seems to indicate an origin millions of years earlier. God did this to test the faith of those who believe in the Holy Bible! The theory can not be falsified by any contrary evidence!

In addition to scientific positivism and religious fundamentalism there is a third kind of "mental-blocker": an ideology.

(2) Self-Deceptive Ideologies

Every human society has structures of power. That is, one or more groups of people have power over other groups. It is now obvious to many human beings that various structures that prevailed in the past were unjust: slave-owners over slaves, medieval lords over serfs, and 19th-century capitalists over workers.

During the 20th century many began to question the power-structure of privilege enjoyed by men over women, by empires over conquered peoples, by one race over another, by heterosexuals over “deviants” and by totalitarian rulers over citizens. There have even been challenges to the totalitarian rule of human beings over other species.

During the past decade many have begun questioning the disproportionate political and economic power wielded by the extremely-wealthy 1% over the 99%, turning democracies into blatant plutocracies.

Usually each unjust structure is legitimized by an “ideology”: a system of thought that provides a way of looking on the structure of domination as normal, not open to question and just. The ideology typically did not originate as a theory deliberately concocted by those in power. Rather, it arose unconsciously within the society as a way of understanding a structure of domination once it had settled in. Occasionally parts of the ideology were created by individuals who helped to usher in a change in the structure of power. One example is the contribution of Adam Smith. He created the pseudo-religious myth of an unseen hand that benevolently regulated the market forces of emerging capitalism as it superseded the previous feudal order.

Ideologies provide dominant groups with a system of thought to justify their domination, but they also tend to be accepted, though usually less enthusiastically, by those who are dominated. Everyone is thereby encouraged not to recognize the injustice that the system involves. Ideologies inculcate an involuntary self-

deception in both the oppressor and the oppressed, neither of whom realize that they are deceiving themselves when they don't recognize an imbalance of power that is unjust and unjustifiable.

Some people, however, are able to free their minds from the unconscious control of the ideology. They come to see that it is merely a human concoction that excuses oppression. This enables them to recognize the injustice that the ideology had previously rendered invisible.

Some individual oppressors cynically appeal to the ideology to legitimize for others what they themselves realize is merely a nasty institution enabling them to exploit other human beings. But an oppressor is not usually conscious that he is an oppressor. This is especially true if he is in many ways a "decent human being". He may sincerely believe what he sees through the "lense" of his ideology. When I say this I'm thinking of some 19th-century slave-owners in the American South who were quite humane, reducing some of the evils done to slaves.

And I'm also thinking of myself during the 1960s when I was being challenged by feminists to question my assumptions concerning the subordinate place of women in society. In some societies, especially those pervaded by traditional religion, women are still virtually slaves to men (father, male kin, husband). Academic and religious ideologies were not as extreme in Toronto and I was not an extreme patriarch. Nevertheless it seemed normal for me as a man to put my professional work first and my wife's aspirations second. I was immersed in traditional marriage as an ideology that legitimizes considerable

subordination of wives to husbands. Only gradually did I question this ideological dimension in marriage and come to see the injustice it involved. As I uncovered this truth I gradually realized that I had been resisting becoming aware of it, for I was reluctant to question what had legitimized my advantageous position as a man and what had seemed familiar and normal and “natural”.

Although traditional marriage subordinates women to men, many women resist recognizing the unjust dimension within it because such marriage seems familiar, normal and “natural”. For some women it is also decreed by God in the scriptures, and that settles the matter.

Seeing how ideologies legitimize structures of domination within the social arrangements of humankind is in some ways a new viewpoint. Indeed, it was Karl Marx, followed by European sociologists as as Mannheim, who introduced “ideology” to Western thought. Marx focused on the ideology that legitimized 19th-century capitalism, but he didn’t realize that his own version of Communism would eventually provide an ideological justification for totalitarian oppression by the commissars who would lead the “dictatorship of the proleteriat”.

All human institutions, large or small, religious or secular involve some degree of power-over others. Recognition of this fact has moved some people to become “anarchists”, hostile to all institutions. Some anarchists are pacifists, committed to non-violence. They typically initiate communities that attempt to eliminate power-over. Sometimes they have some success in

reducing it. Such communities work best if most people in the community share similar personal ideals such as the importance of sharing and of mutual respect. But some institutional power-structures are usually needed to enforce compliance to rules.

Many anarchists, however, are not pacifists. On the contrary, they are committed to destroying institutions by violence, whether against property or against people. They are the people who typically turn peaceful protests into attacks on buildings and police, provoking brutal responses that allegedly show the intrinsic evil in all institutions.

In recent years a new kind of anarchism has emerged in the U.S.A.: the “Tea-Party” movement. This is a complex ideological system that somehow combines three ingredients:

(i) Ayn Rand’s libertarianism, refusing to allow any communal concerns to restrict individual creativity by communal concerns.

(ii) the capitalist fiction that billionaire corporations are “persons” who have the same rights as individual persons.

(iii) the exclusion of scripture-based religious institutions from criticism.

This leaves only government and its advocates as institutional oppressors. Although the movement overall is non-violent towards fellow Americans, some zealots within it commit violence, encouraged by the violent language of many “Tea-Party” leaders.

In many Western democracies (but not the U.S.A., or Canada under Stephen Harper), the prevailing view is that although governmental power in undemocratic countries often becomes tyrannical, in democracies it often rightly prevails over corporate power to promote the rights of citizens to education, health, and employment and also to protect minorities. Social democrats have demonstrated that such governmental power can be exercised without jeopardizing the rights to free speech, peaceful protest and free media. Governmental power is also increasingly accepted as necessary to protect the natural environment against destruction by corporate power. And some ecologically-sensitive people even speak of the “rights” of non-human species and of the Earth.

The sociological concept of “ideology” is for me an important tool in coming to see that various power-structures which communities have accepted as “normal” need to be questioned. Their “normality” arises from ideologies that legitimize them, ideologies that can be exposed. In my view, however, we need to question an over-reliance on such exposure of structures of domination!

(i) Some people who understand evil in society mainly in terms of structures of domination tend to see political activism as more important than individual one-to-one deeds of compassion. They might be somewhat inspired by Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan who had practical compassion for the man who had been robbed and mugged on the road to Jericho from Jerusalem. But they would probably re-write Jesus’ parable so that the report of the mugging becomes an inspiring occasion to

lobby Jerusalem City Council to put more street lights and police on the road and to expose the dominant political elite who benefit from their own inaction concerning the safety of travellers!

I applaud such political activists at work within society and I also applaud other individuals who emphasize compassionate personal encounters. Both are needed. What matters is that neither approach disparage or dismiss the other. This sometimes happens when disagreements arise concerning how best to help those who need help, for example, “Aids-orphans” in Africa or hungry aboriginals in Canada.

(ii) My second reservation concerning became clear to me when I reflected on a conversation I had with a Muslim taxi-driver in 2011. He was curious in a very friendly way, drawing me out first concerning my current life as a senior and then concerning my previous work as a university professor. I described the seminar-discussions I led. First-year students coming from a world-wide diversity of cultural/religious backgrounds engaged in dialogue concerning human nature. Many conflicting views were freely expressed. The only rule was that no student could put down or humiliate another student personally, for example by saying “How could you be so stupid?”

I told him the story about a young woman whom we all identified as a Muslim because she always wore the typical head-scarf. During the first three months she participated in the discussions in ways that gained her much respect for her intelligence, sensitivity and insight. One day, issues concerning feminism arose. For the first

time she was moved to explain why she wore her scarf. She herself had decided to do so, even though her secular-Muslim parents disapproved of her choice! She had chosen to dress modestly so that no men would be attracted to her simply for her body. Eventually she would marry a man who was drawn to her for her personal qualities. Most of the late-teen girls in the class dressed in ways that displayed their bodies. They disagreed! The ensuing discussion was both intense and illuminating. As moderator, I didn't take sides, though personally I didn't agree with the extent to which she seemed to me to be splitting off her sexuality from the rest of herself.

Taxi-driver: "She must have had a great deal of courage."

Me: "Yes indeed, I admired her greatly."

Then he spoke about his pride in his son. Both he and his son have a policy of tolerating other people's values. Then to my surprise he confided to me that recently his son had asked him to find him a wife and he had accepted the task! During the remaining minutes of the drive we discussed some of the pros and cons of arranged marriages. We disagreed in our emphases but we parted as friends!

Afterwards, when I reflected concerning our dialogue, I realized that most of what seems familiar, normal and even natural to me and other human beings originated in what can be viewed negatively as "ideologies". Our human sense of living within an interdependent community has depended on unquestioning adherence to a questionable legitimizing

of unjust power-structures. For decades I had been criticizing the non-communal liberal view in which we are all isolated individuals who only have obligations when we assume them by creating social contracts. My argument was that obligations arise because we realize that we have to acknowledge our interdependence within communal institutions such as families, economies, nations etc. Yet our acknowledgement often involves a self-deceptive acceptance of ideologies!

On the other hand, those who see all alleged communal values as nothing but ideologies have a dogmatic ideology concerning ideologies. They are dogmatically assuming that they have a monopoly on the truth. Their reduction of all traditional values to ideology rules out any dialogue with traditionalists. They are as fanatical as traditionalists who, unlike the taxi driver, prohibit any discussion of traditional values.

The taxi-driver and I, like the students in the seminar, were open to a process of dialogue through which we might together come closer not only to agreement but also to truth concerning what we human beings have and don't have in common. Through dialogue we can not only uncover but also create truth concerning human nature, for in some respects human beings can and do change through dialogue.

When human beings change the changes are sometimes in my view mostly negative. They arise from increased self-deception of multitudes by ideologies. Sometimes, however, the changes are mostly positive, for they arise from dialogue where participants are willing to revise their views as they listen receptively to others.

Now, however, I will return to my exploration of self-deception concerning society and nature to consider an example that does not involve ideology. The example is a true story concerning my history: I inadvertently contributed to the beginnings of the ecological movement in Canada!

(3) Ignoring New Informations's Call for Action

In 1965 there was a Teach-In at the University of Toronto. The focus was not the environment but the ongoing war in Vietnam. The Teach-in was very successful, even financially, and a Fund was set up to help launch other Teach-ins. Teachers and/or students who proposed a topic to the Fund Committee needed to convince the Committee to that the topic deserved endorsement and seed-money. Since I had played a major role in organizing the first Teach-In I was a member of the Committee.

A few years after the first Teach-In two zoology professors sent us a proposal for a Teach-In on the environment. At first we were very luke-warm in our response. We asked ourselves, "What serious issues concerning the environment would draw a large crowd?" The only controversy I could think of was the population explosion in relation to the Vatican's opposition to contraception. Nevertheless I offered to meet the zoologists for lunch and report back.

It took them less than an hour to "convert" me! They clearly had an ecological cause: human destruction of animal species and animal habitats. Moreover, they

clearly had the informed passion and the dedication to organize a Teach-In. I reported back and they went on to organize a very successful educational event. And it turned out to be the beginning of a monumental movement in Canada, transforming the consciousness of many Canadians in relation to ecological issues.

Almost all of what the professors told me was completely new to me at the time. I had never known it previously. I had not been ignoring it. I was ignorant concerning it. They referred to empirical facts gathered in first-hand, on-the-spot reports by many zoologists. I'm not a zoologist and the reports had not made known to the general public

Nevertheless after that lunch I was no longer totally ignorant. If I had simply ignored the zoologists, whose concerns had been thrust into my path, continued ecological ignorance and inaction would have been culpable. I would have been deceiving myself concerning the natural environment.

In the 21st century our situation has changed. The media flood us with information from countless scientists concerning how we human beings are destroying our natural environment in a multitude of unprecedented ways. We deceive ourselves if we ignore or deny all this information and if we do nothing in response.

I should do something, but I can't do everything. It's folly for me to try by myself to consider all this information and to try by myself to do everything in response. That way leads to despair and burn-out. With a few others or many others, however, I can select this or

that particular cause and do my small bit for it. For me personally at this phase of my life, my involvement is necessarily minimal, but I can support others whose involvement is maximal.

I've been focusing on ecology, but a similar pattern has emerged in this century concerning society. An overabundance of information is available concerning the terrible things human beings do to each other. We can no longer plead ignorance to excuse ourselves for doing nothing, but there are limits to what we can achieve, even when we act together with others in targeted ways. Our limited efforts, however, are better than ignoring or denying all this information and doing nothing in response.

Self-deception concerning human destructiveness in society and in nature involves ignoring both empirical/scientific facts and the actions that we need to take in response to these facts. The glut of information available makes it necessary for all of us to ignore most of what we could theoretically get to know and act to remedy. As vulnerable, limited individuals we have to have some "mental-blocker" protection if we are to avoid becoming overburdened by facts and tasks.

Many human beings, however, protect themselves excessively. They refuse to consider, for example, the growing scientific evidence concerning global warming and its origins, at least partly, in human reliance on fossil fuels for energy. They also refuse to consider the ways in which global warming affects adversely both human beings and other life on the planet.

“Adversely” is a value-term. Fortunately there is considerable agreement among human beings that some human conditions need to be reduced. But this agreement is not logically-implied by the empirical/scientific facts. Such facts are value-neutral. Objective investigations as such involve no commitment to any value except the value of investigating objectively.

Agreement concerning such humanitarian concerns as reducing hunger, plagues, homelessness and terror arises spontaneously among human beings because they seem “natural” to most of us. I won’t try to prove this here. All I can do is ask each reader to consult their own experiences of “gut-reaction” concerning this. My writing since October 19, 2011 has been designed to promote dialogue.

Where there is much disagreement it arises from ideologies that legitimize inflicting such misery on other human beings because they are necessary to win a war, or to bring in a more productive economy or to punish evil-doers.

There is also much ideologically-driven disagreement concerning what human states are necessary for human well-being. If there is to be movement towards some agreement more people will need to engage in dialogue. Obviously if someone is willing to engage in dialogue he or she must begin by being willing to shed ideology to some extent! Fanatics don’t dialogue. When the taxi-driver and I had our dialogue, neither of us were fanatics!

(4) Putting oneself “inside the skin” of another

Some anthropologists and zoologists involve themselves in an approach that does not claim to be totally objective. They become “participant observers” of an indigenous tribe or an extended family of apes, living with them for a considerable time so as to understand better how it feels to be an aboriginal or an ape. The understanding can involve some objective observation similar to what a scientific investigator might report, but at core it is experiential and empathetic. To some extent the investigator is getting “inside the skin” of another, experiencing the other’s pain or pleasure, suffering or happiness, ailing or flourishing.

Such an experiential understanding can help an investigator to crash through ideological mental blocks that conceal the evil being inflicted on an aboriginal tribe or on an extended family of apes.

Soon I’ll consider what happens when we human beings try to get “inside the skin” of apes and other non-humans. I’ll also consider various other experiences that help us to challenge our self-deceptions concerning nature. First, however, I’ll explore other attempts to get “inside the skin” of other humans.

Sometimes a social-activist-in-training tries to experience what it’s like to be a homeless person. He dresses up in tattered clothing and with only a dollar in his pocket mingles for a weekend with homeless people. More dramatically, there was a white man who temporarily changed the pigment of his skin so as to learn what it feels like to be a black person travelling for

months through the Southern U.S.A. Such immersions, like the investigations of participant-observer academics, have a serious limitation. One knows that, soon or eventually, one will return to one's privileged life. The marginalized person has no such knowledge.

But there are other ways of trying to get inside the skin of another person that are not so limited. I'll give two kinds of examples:

(i) Some people claim that only a recovering alcoholic can really understand another alcoholic so as to be able to be of help. An alcoholic does not need to get inside the skin of another alcoholic; he's there already! The same claim is sometimes made concerning other addictions or concerning people suffering from various other illnesses or disabilities: Only someone who has learned how to respond creatively to leprosy or multiple sclerosis or loss of all limbs can deeply help another person who is ailing in the same way.

Alcoholics Anonymous and other groups modelled on it have amply shown that someone who is already "inside the skin" of a person ailing in exactly the same way can understand and help the person. But there is a second approach that also works. But understanding and helping can be provided by others.

(ii) A second approach involves an experiential understanding in which the helper has experienced an analogous problem. Two very different examples:

* A person who has been a heroin addict or a cigarette addict and is responding creatively to this can sometimes deeply help an alcoholic.

*** Some Jews oppressed by the Nazis have a deep experiential understanding of black Americans oppressed by the Klu Klux Klan and of homosexuals oppressed by fundamentalist Christians. A few Jews in Israel even come to such an understanding of Palestinians oppressed by Israel.**

Oppressive ideological frameworks vary. Some reject drug addicts and outlaw “clean needle” clinics. Others reject Jews or blacks or homosexuals or Muslims or other groups and ignore the suffering that this rejection causes. When a person in a marginalized group experiences such suffering this may move him/her to challenge ideologies that exclude other groups from full humanity.

Personal experience can move us to challenge ideologies. That’s been true for me in my own life. Indeed, the more I’ve exposed my own self-deceptions in relation to the bodily-emotional, spiritual and mystical unconscious while experiencing my resistance to such exposure, the more I’ve become aware of mental blockers, including ideologies.

But I’ve also become aware of a pervasive human need for an ideology that provides a framework within which one’s personal identity seems obvious. As I noted in my ebook, on May 29, 2011 I was shaken to my roots by a radically new experience of body-terror, accompanied by a feeling of total vulnerability that goes beyond loss of physical existence to total disintegration of myself in my personal identity. All the frameworks I had relied on to identify myself as myself could be shattered.

Since I faced this hidden fear I've been able to loosen my attachments to whatever seems to provide a definition of my personal identity. But I've also realized why so many people cling fanatically to ideologies that reassure them concerning their personal identity. Deep down they have a similar radical fear. This helps me to check my impulse to condemn them for refusing to see the injustices their ideology blinds them to. When I remember how the taxi-driver ventured to confide in me, telling me that he was currently finding a wife for his son, I realize in retrospect that it was partly because he sensed that I would not dogmatically denounce all arranged marriages. Of course my "gut-feeling" imposes limits. Some atrocities legitimized by ideologies must be stopped, for example cutting off a female infant's clitoris or murdering a daughter who has damaged "family honour". But I try to find some compassion within me for the individual, blinded by the ideology, who commits the atrocity.

In the next chapter I will be exploring issues that arise when moral outrage, the great compassion-killer, moves us toward demonizing individuals or groups who seem to lack all sense of empathy for their fellow human beings.

But my next step here is to shift from human self-deception concerning society to human self-deception concerning nature. A variety of human experiences can challenge our blindness concerning our destruction of our environment.

(5) Uncovering self-deception concerning nature.

Earlier I noted that some objective investigators provide us with empirical/scientific facts concerning how human actions are affecting human society. One example is increased use of fossil fuels for energy. This affects climate change, which affects ocean water-levels, which in turn affects human vulnerability to tsunamis. Increased use of fossil fuels also causes air pollution. The facts are value-neutral, but fortunately there is some “gut-level” agreement among human beings concerning what counts as an adverse effect on human beings.

There is unfortunately no such agreement, however, concerning what counts as a violation of nature, quite apart from effects on human beings. Among aboriginal peoples not recruited into maximizing the Gross National Product there is considerable consensus, but they are a minority in the modern world. The rest of humanity tends to view nature as something for humans to dominate and exploit. For many, what matters most is the GNP. Environmental concerns, if any, arise as concerns about effects on society. Nevertheless the prevalence of “gut-level” empathy with living creatures in aboriginal societies indicates that it may exist unconsciously among “civilized” societies, though deeply repressed. Perhaps the hidden aboriginal in all of us can gradually be awakened.

This possibility is supported by various current trends in our society. I’m going to distinguish several kinds of human experience which involve recognizing value in nature and exposing our destructiveness towards nature.

(i) Participant Observers. Earlier I mentioned that some zoologists become participant observers of mammals such as apes, living with them in order to better understand them, experiencing their pain/pleasure, suffering/happiness, or ailing/flourishing. There may also be some objective observation similar to what a scientific investigator might report (e.g. tagging them so as to trace their movements), but the central purpose is empathetic.

(ii) Preserving Wilderness. Many zoologists and most naturalists, however, have no such purpose. Their objective observations are accompanied by wonder and appreciation concerning the very existence of this animal or bird or plant or insect. For them, the continued existence of wildlife is valuable in itself and so is the continued existence of contexts in nature where wildlife can thrive. In November 2012 when the Nature Conservancy of Canada celebrates its 50th Anniversary it cites its success in preserving a bog that has 22 species of orchids!

My friend Robin Noya has a similarly detailed appreciation of nature. I remember his return to my rented cottage after considerable time down on the dock. When I asked him what he'd been doing all this time his response was, *Watching a spider spin a web!*

(iii) Feeling Better in Nature. In contrast with Robin, my own appreciation of nature is not specific. Like many people, I feel better when I'm in nature rather than in the city. For me, "Better" is a very general adjective, implying that my well-being is increased when I'm in nature. But

“better” is also an adverb, for I feel in a better way when I’m in nature. I’m more in touch with my bodily emotions and hence more alive.

(iv) General awareness of energies in nature. I also feel more alive because I’m also consciously aware of life-energies/spiritual energies within my surroundings. Sometimes I’m aware of a particular tree or bird, but mostly I’m aware of energies in a general way, in “rocks and trees and skies and seas” (to cite a hymn I sang as a child).

(v) Experiences of empathetic identification with living creatures. In “Grateful Reflections...” I introduced you to someone whom I called “Laura” When she was four years old her father invited her to go fishing with him. She had no idea what this would be, but she loved doing anything with him, as she still does. When a fish was brought into the boat, wriggling and writhing, Laura began to wriggle and writhe, feeling pain and panic. She identified empathically with the fish. It was an extreme version of what I’ve called “getting inside another’s skin”.

Now, in her thirties, she often identifies empathically with non-humans, but she is not overwhelmed. It hones her intuition. Much of her work is with dogs, cats and horses. Owners seek her help as an “animal communicator” for she can intuit what, specifically, their animal is feeling, whether it is panic or sorrow or terror or jealousy or anger. An appropriate response is then possible.

Many human beings have not identified empathically with living creatures to the extent that

Laura has. Nevertheless they have become precisely sensitive to what their pets are feeling. In recent years some of them have been spurred by the animal-rights movement to extend their empathy to cows, sheep and chickens suffering from their treatment by agro-business, which is replacing family farms. When animals are viewed simply as commodities like gold or oil, cruel treatment seems quite legitimate.

I sign many of the petitions initiated online by animal activists, for I too include in my “Us”-community not only human beings but also other living beings, especially higher species such as dolphins and whales. Some animal activists, however, seem to have an “Us”-community that is largely non-human. They exclude most of humanity except for other animal activists. Where the rights of humans conflict with the rights of non-humans no compromise is possible. For some animal rights activists the rights of non-humans must prevail. (For examples, they ignore the rights of individual farmers or fishermen to cull some advanced species.) This extreme position is an understandable response to a situation where the rights of humans have previously prevailed. Indeed they increase as as farming and fishing become corporate businesses.. Perhaps some people need to be fanatical if the situation is to be remedied. But I’m not drawn be one of them. Although I sign several protests online every week, only a few come from animal activists.

This may be because of my personal history. As I entered adolescence I became allergic to the family dog. After that I discovered that I’m also allergic to cats and horses. I like them, but I have to steer clear of them! And although in my healing work I’ve often identified

empathically to some extent with clients, I can only recall one time when I did so with animals. Nevertheless my bodily identification with suffering horses was more intense than it has ever been with any human being!

Sometimes with a client I felt something in my own body that provided a clue concerning something the client was not yet clearly aware of. Typically it was an emotion that they were on the verge of feeling. Sometimes my intuition was to ignore the clue and wait for the client to become aware of the emotion spontaneously. Sometimes my intuition was to mention my clue to the client, open to whatever response or non-response arose in him/her. Occasionally, however, if my intuition was that it was safe for the client, I would allow myself to go deeply into feeling the emotion and expressing it in sounds. When I did this in the presence of clients this often helped them to become aware of the emotion within themselves. The terror or rage or anguish erupted from their own unconscious.

What happened with the horses was very different. I had been asked by another psychotherapist to be present at a session with a client. The client had various personal issues that she was successfully working through with the therapist. One issue, however, was continuing to cause her much distress. It seemed to have an esoteric dimension where my approach might be helpful.

The client was very involved in raising horses. This was both her livelihood and her central passion. Some time previously she had moved to a new location. Since then several horses had died each year. Veterinarians and other scientific experts could not explain it. Other

explanations such as nearby power-lines had been explored and set aside. Did I have any intuition?

When I tuned in to the horses at their location many miles away, I found myself in the middle of a terrible battle. Many soldiers and many horses were being slaughtered. The location was still full of horrifically unsettling energies, though the battle had occurred a long time ago. The client's current horses were constantly being terrified by these energies. I began to feel their terror and soon I was on the floor, overwhelmed by their terror, shaking and crying out, my body filled with horror. This lasted for about five minutes and then subsided. While still lying on the floor I asked Spirit to clear the whole location, evicting all the negative energies.

After the session, for many months the therapist passed along reports from the client concerning her horses. No more inexplicable deaths! But since then I've had no more empathetic identification with horses!

(vii) Empathetic Identification with Mother Earth. I have known quite a few people, mostly women, who identify with Mother Earth, feeling her suffering and her renewing strength. I've been in their presence when they were especially open to this awareness. Often this enabled me to share in it to some extent. Obviously such an experience is an immediate source of intense ecological concern, challenging corporate-technological violations of Mother Earth's natural harmonies. It is the experiential basis for claims concerning the "rights" of the Earth. Although I have glimpsed it from time to time,

it has not been a central motivator in my own life, though I deeply respect it in others.

One reason for this may arise from my personal history. It has been very important for my own healing to experience Earth as Father Earth, grounding me and supporting me and energizing me bodily as a masculine model for me as a man. This was part of my process in the "Men's Group" 1983-2005.

(6) "Sometimes laughter is the only thing that can help."

As I was finishing this chapter I happened to see "Sullivan's Travels" on Turner Classic Movies. A big-shot Hollywood director of lightweight comedies suddenly wants to create a movie called "Brother, where art thou?", a realistic presentation of the plight of tramps who travel endlessly on freight trains from town to town, looking for crumbs of compassion.

Sullivan decides to go on their journey himself for a while so that he himself can experience comparable hardship and suffering. His butler challenges his naïve and patronizing project, but Sullivan finds some shabby clothes and with ten cents in his pocket joins hundreds of bums at a freight-yard to begin his journey.

Eventually he is mugged, loses his memory and ends up as a convict in a chain-gang at a privately-owned prison. The prisoners' spirits are broken by day after day of meaningless slave labour and sadistic, degrading punishment. One evening, however, a nearby black church opens its doors to the prisoners so they can see

some Mickey Mouse cartoons. What follows is one of the most memorable episodes I've ever seen on the screen. As Mickey and Pluto begin doing their thing, all the convicts begin laughing,. For the first time in years, they are happy! Seeing the change in their faces is deeply moving. Something wonderfully human has been released in them.

The movie has a happy ending. As he watches the cartoons, enjoying all the laughter, including his own, Sullivan's memory returns. He realizes who he is. He is a celebrity whom people assume to be dead, probably murdered. He also realizes how he can escape his hell. He confesses to everyone that he murdered Sullivan. The prison-owners announce this to the authorities. When his picture hits the news he is recognized and he returns to Hollywood. There he announces that he no longer wants to create "Brother, where art thou?". His reason? Again we see the prisoners laughing as he says, "Sometimes laughter is the only thing that can help". He's going to direct a comedy!

CHAPTER 2 JUDGING SELF & OTHERS

1. Richard Weisman and "We're All in This Together"

My friend Richard Weisman and I met in 1970 as participants in "Therafields", a controversial commune in Toronto. During the next ten years or so we both benefited in similar ways from our experiences in personal psychotherapy and group psychotherapy. I still remember being in my first group with an ex-convict who listened carefully to what I was saying and then blurted

out, "You and I got the same problem. We're both hung up on our old man!" He was a wonderful leveller for me, the cultured, sophisticated, Oxford-trained philosopher. He and many others helped me to uncover much murky stuff in my dark side. I came to realize that in my unconscious I had much in common with other people. Richard also went through a broadly-similar process.

Richard and I have continued to deepen our friendship to this day. A professor of sociology, he also took a degree in law. He then involved himself both academically and personally in issues concerning "Law and Society".

A few years ago he told me that he had joined a "Circle of Support and Accountability" to meet regularly with serious sex-offenders. An agnostic Jew, he was nevertheless drawn to this program initiated by Mennonites.

Each meeting begins with members of the circle speaking about problems they are currently struggling with in their daily life. Then the offender is invited to talk about his problems. Often these have to do with living within the terms of his parole. Sometimes he fails, but it's usually in minor matters. Overall, the program is one of the few that "works".

I still remember being deeply inspired by Richard when I asked him what had moved him to join the circle. He said something like this:

We all have destructive tendencies within us. I've taken out my destructiveness mostly on myself. Some people

harm others in terrible ways. But we're all in this together.

Most people in our society tend to demonize sex offenders, excluding them from humankind. Richard is as horrified by their deeds as the rest of us are, but he refuses to exclude them completely. And he expresses his refusal not only in words but also in deeds. He is of course not alone in this. But since he is my friend, I'm especially inspired by him.

2. We need to discard belief in Divine Retribution

In the Introduction to my ebook I deplored the Christian depiction of a Last Judgement in which many people are damned to everlasting torture in hell. In Matthew 25 such a punishment is allegedly justified by failure to perform acts of mercy. Elsewhere the failure is not in conduct but in not believing that Jesus is one's personal Saviour through his bloody sacrifice on the cross.

Recently I've been trying to read the "Inferno" section of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The Christian mind-set that he expresses is for me remote from the teachings of Jesus in the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son! The whole point to Dante's depictions of various punishments for various misdeeds is that he can see them as "suitable" retributions.

On November 21st, 2011 I had a conversation with a Muslim taxi driver. Most of the cabbies in my Toronto taxo company are Muslim, and often I've enjoyed their company and appreciated their wisdom and their

compassion for their fellow human beings. This fellow, however, was difficult to be with. When I asked him whether he is a practicing Muslim, he said, "Yes, I believe in Divine Judgement, dividing those who are good from those who are bad. Look at that driver. He didn't even stop at the intersection. Even within our human law he should be punished. As for me, I obey all the laws."

He reminded me of an incident in Toronto many years ago. I was standing beside a man, waiting for the lights to change to cross Spadina at Bloor. He pointed to someone selling pencils and singing near him and said, "I'm now a born-again Christian. I wouldn't sink to begging like him". The singer, full of his usual songs about Hollywood, was familiar to many at that intersection. He was obviously mentally ill, but he radiated a gentle, happy good-will to everyone. I let loose a tirade at the contemptuous "Christian". I started with "You're a disgrace to Christianity" and went on in a similar way! In the back of my mind I was thinking about how Jesus condemned the Pharisee who spoke in the same self-elevating way concerning a publican. In retrospect part of me still feels that the man "deserved" my words, but I regret demonizing him!

Maybe I'm improving somewhat, for I was able to refrain from judging the judgmental taxi-driver. Instead, I was able to disagree politely with him, saying that the societies I most respect are those that try to promote reconciliation where someone has seriously harmed others. I was thinking of Archbishop Tutu's "Truth and Reconciliation" process in South Africa and similar procedures in some aboriginal communities.

Such reconciliation, however, is not possible if the offender neither feels nor expresses remorse. Moreover, remorse can include within it some sense of “I deserve punishment but I can nevertheless be forgiven”. In recent years, however, as I look back on my life I feel remorse less frequently than regret.

As I recall my relation to my two ex-wives I often feel regret. If only I had been as aware of myself as I am now! One example of this I mentioned in the Introduction to my 2013 ebook. I now realize that even a non-serious illness often triggered within me some irrational melancholy, a left-over from my illness-trauma in infancy. That made me difficult to live with! I feel regret rather than remorse because at the time I could not recognize what was going on in me. Only later on did I come to realize this clearly. At the time my emotional state seemed to arise quite “naturally”.

Sometimes, however, as I remember an incident I feel remorse. I was in a situation where I felt overwhelmed and confused but I was obscurely aware that I was to some extent wilfully remaining obscurely aware rather than trying to gain clarity concerning my responsibility. One example was an incident when both I and one of my sons were in similar turmoil concerning a situation. I decided to leave the situation but when he pleaded with me to take him away with me I felt too desperate to comply, even though I was obscurely aware of his desperation. Later when I faced up to what I had done I felt remorse. I was able to apologize to him, ask him whether he could forgive me and somehow begin to forgive myself.

Another occasion for retrospective remorse was when I didn't stick by a close friend who was going through an all-absorbing therapeutic process. I let my own "stuff" dictate my response, feeling abandoned and angry, even though I was obscurely aware of what I was doing. There, too, I later felt remorse and was able to apologize, ask for forgiveness and begin to forgive myself.

Remorse is appropriate when to a considerable extent it's true that I could have done otherwise. After I began psychotherapy in 1969, I realized more and more that my own self-deceptions had frequently limited the extent of my freedom and hence my responsibility. And I began to realize that this is true for others as well. In varying ways and to varying degrees their range of freedom-and-responsibility is limited by what they conceal from themselves. As I've uncovered self-deceptions the range of my freedom and my responsibility has expanded. In the present the possible range for remorse has corresponding expanded. Overall, however, I've been enabled to be more responsible, so I rarely feel have to feel remorse.

Remorse is an interesting state. It involves a sense of deserving punishment but there is also a more central ingredient: a feeling of anguish, an emotional pain that arises when we realize that we've in some way violated another human being who matters to us. This feeling arises in most of us, but not in psychopaths. It is sobering to realize that if we have a strong sense of Us-Them division, people who belong to "Them" don't matter to us. We become psychopathic in our dealings with them!

In relation to remorse, forgiveness has two aspects. In relation to punishment it removes the requirement. In relation to anguish it provides healing.

When I distinguished remorse and regret I did so on the basis of my own private sense of the limits on my own freedom-and-responsibility at the time. Obviously this awareness is not infallible, but it's better than simply assuming that I've always had radical freedom or that I've never had any freedom. Sometimes in retrospect I'm not clear concerning the extent of my freedom at the time of my misconduct, so I may slide back and forth between remorse and regret. But overall I can apply the distinction with some confidence.

Concerning another human being, however, he or she has the private access. I don't have any access unless I'm empathic. As I look back over my life I realize that there were times when someone seemed to me to be in charge of their conduct, which was causing me much distress. He or she simply needed to "snap out of it". In retrospect I now realize that the person was understandably overwhelmed by uncontrollable emotions. I realize this because the range of my possible empathy has expanded. To take an extreme example, since I experienced a state of radical body-terror and personal disintegration, I realize that so-and-so was in a comparable state, desperate for my empathetic support. Instead, I was angrily demanding "Snap out of it!" Looking back on that incident I feel regret, but not remorse. Back then I could not have been or done otherwise.

Nor could the other person. Neither of us could have done otherwise because of self-deceptive limitations on discernment that can make destructive behaviour seem “natural” and “justified”. Looking back on the incident there is no need for either of us to forgive or to feel remorse. Regret is appropriate. Ideally, both of us would compassionately accept and excuse both self and other.

3. “To Judge or Not to Judge, that is the Question”

In this section I’m going to consider a number of issues concerning moral judgment, starting with the most extreme instance.

(1) If “Judging” means “Demonizing”, Judging is Almost Never Appropriate

Three quick questions, with answers based on my own experience over many years:

(i) Is it ever appropriate to demonize a whole group? No. Individuals in the group probably differ considerably in relevant ways.

(ii) Is it ever appropriate to demonize another individual? Yes, if they are demonic right now.

(iii) Is anyone permanently, irretrievably demonic? Maybe, maybe not.

If an embodied human or a disembodied human spirit has become demonic they have consciously adopted Lady MacBeth’s mantra: *Evil be thou my good*. More specifically, they have committed themselves to destroying light and love in anyone they can gain access to. They also try to recruit others to the demonic cause.

Fortunately my experience leads me to believe that very few human beings, living or deceased, are demonic.

My experience of Nellie the housekeeper after her death, however, was an experience of the demonic. At the end of this chapter I'll be reporting my dealings with her.

I have never experienced the presence of a demonic angel as depicted in scripture, so I do not believe in the existence of Devil or Satan.

In the rest of this chapter until the section on Nellie my focus will not be on the demonic but on less extreme judging. I'll be discussing moral outrage: Is it ever appropriate? If so, how can it be restrained from its potential destructiveness.

(2) Is moral outrage ever appropriate?

Many spiritual teachers rightly see moral outrage as a major menace to human compassion. Whenever we condemn somebody for their misconduct we are likely to have no compassion for them. So these teachers propose that we understand that human misconduct arises from ignorance rather than wilfull choice. I agree that much misconduct arises from ignorance. Also I share their desire to promote among humankind the sense that "We're all in this together". Nevertheless on the basis of my own experience I believe that moral outrage has a legitimate place in human life.

Many depth psychotherapists also dismiss moral outrage but for different reasons – which I also share to a

great extent. They view human misconduct as completely determined by the unconscious. As a patient becomes aware of what has been shaping various emotions and motivations and choices a paradoxical freedom emerges: freedom arising from knowledge of necessity. I accept much of this, but I deny that the freedom emerging is “paradoxical”, for it is similar to the freedom we experience in making many ordinary, everyday choices that are not determined by our unconscious.

It seems to me that those who try to eliminate moral outrage are ignoring an essential ingredient in human experience. If we are not psychopaths we tend to feel moral outrage when someone violates another human being who matters to us. My own experience when I’m watching movies or current events on TV is that I want the villain to be exposed and punished. Perhaps some unacknowledged anger in response to being violated as a child remains in my unconscious, intensifying my moral outrage. At core, however, moral outrage seems spontaneous and natural.

Insert on August 2, 2015

In my first ebook I had a “Discussion” button concerning issues arising from the ebook. In one discussion I commented on my view that although moral outrage needs boundaries it has a legitimate place in the human psyche. I quote from what I said:

In response to an atrocity I have a gut-feeling of moral revulsion, horror, shuddering and abhorrence.

I now realize that if I were to place my response to atrocities in a philosophical framework it endorses a

“deontological” perspective in which some kinds of action are inherently wrong. But I don’t locate such actions in scripture among the Ten Commandments but rather in a Moral Sense that many human beings have. And sometimes even “inherently wrong” actions have to be done if the consequences are especially of inaction are especially disastrous.

(End of Insert)

As I said, moral outrage seems to me to be natural and spontaneous. That’s also how lust seems to me. If someone tries never to feel moral outrage or to feel lust they are pursuing a perfectionist purity, though both tendencies – for quite different reasons – need boundaries.

It’s also like me trying to live completely within divine love. In all these examples spiritual ambition is replacing genuine spiritual surrender.

Instead of trying to ban moral outrage we need to impose very strict boundaries on it. In section (5) I’ll be proposing several different ways in which these boundaries can be developed in us.

But first I want to explore further the topic of psychopathy and remorse, telling some stories about experiences that illuminated this topic for me over the years.

4. Psychopathy and Remorse

Sometime later on in the 1970s I was in a therapy group that included a young man who identified himself as a psychopath. This already distinguished him from most psychopaths , for they don't acknowledge what they are. For many group sessions I watched him growing in affection and respect for the leader. One evening, however, he said something very hurtful to the leader. When he saw the suffering in the leader's face, he broke down in tears of remorse. From then on the young man continued to change in his demeanour not only towards the leader but also towards others in the group.

In stark contrast with this was my experience, about the same time, talking with a social worker whose clients were mainly psychopaths, especially ex-convicts. The social worker was not in general a cynic concerning humankind, but he was a cynic concerning psychopaths: "I can't get them to change into people who stop conning others because doing so brings remorse. They have no conscience and they can't acquire one. But I can get them to avoid doing things that get them into trouble with the law."

A general compromise between these two attitudes seems to me to be both appropriate and feasible. On the one hand it's important to remain hopeful that loving intuition might sometime facilitate a breakthrough in a psychopath as it also sometimes can in a psychotic. On the other hand it's important not to let oneself be manipulated by someone who has no scruples and has ample skills in feigning sincerity. The compromise involves both not giving up all attempts to touch the person's heart and not letting oneself be conned by

conning oneself concerning one's own prowess as a heart-opener!

Although the incident in the psychotherapy group occurred over thirty years ago, I was reminded of it very recently when I watched a TV program called "Merlin". The boy Merlin is the wizard-servant of Prince Arthur in Camelot. Arthur's father, King Luther, has been enchanted and possessed by a hideous troll whom he continues to see as a beautiful woman. She is about to be proclaimed Queen so that she can rule Camelot as a ruthless psychopath. Meanwhile she rules relentlessly through Luther, taxing the starving poor and torturing those who don't comply.

The only way the troll's spell can be broken is if Luther cries tears of remorse. Merlin persuades Arthur to take a poison that will simulate all the indications of death. (There's an antidote that will restore him to life if administered in time.) When Luther sees Arthur dead, he cries tears of remorse and Luther is freed from the enchantment. Celtic legend sometimes conveys psychological truth!

The legend also has implications for humankind. Earlier I noted that if we have a strong sense of Us-Them division, then we're psychopathic in our dealings with people who belong to "Them". Our tendency to be ruthless can only be remedied if we cast off the "spell" that blinds Us (our nation or religion or political group).

And this will only happen if we become one of "Us Humans", crying tears of remorse alongside Mandaza.

5. Various Boundaries on Moral Outrage

The first two ways to bring boundaries to moral outrage we have already been considering. They are contrasting ways but they are compatible:

(i) Forgiveness. This involves a recognition that some destructive human actions can not be totally excused. Indeed, some can not be excused at all. If we or someone we love or some innocent person has been violated the hate-impulse towards revenge can take over. Only forgiveness can free us from being inwardly destroyed by obsessive hate, which eats away at our capacity for love and inner peace.

(ii) Resisting demonizing. Another way is exemplified in Richard Weisman and a few others. About five years ago I read a passage in a book by Jean Vanier in which opens himself up to the very worst within himself. He does so not through undergoing deep psychotherapy but by taking on an extremely-challenging task within L'Arche, the community that he himself founded.

This passage moved me so deeply that I now place it alongside the quotations from Eliot and Carpentier that I quoted in the Introduction to my ebook. The experience of reading it changed me. I hope it does so for you too, in whatever way is appropriate for you:

*In 1980, when I left the role of community leader in Trosly,
I lived a year at "La Forestiere", one of our homes
for ten men and women with profound disabilities.
Lucien was born with severe mental and physical
disabilities.*

He cannot talk or walk or move his arms.

*His body is a bit twisted
and he has to remain in his wheelchair or in his bed.
He never looks anyone directly in the eyes.
Lucien's father died when he was twelve.
He lived the first thirty years of his life with his mother
who cared for him and understood him and his needs;
she could interpret all his body language.
He was at peace and felt secure with her.
One day she fell sick and had to go to the hospital.
Lucien was put into another hospital
and was plunged into a totally strange and unknown world,
he had lost all his familiar points of reference;
no one seemed to understand him.
Screams of anguish rose up in him
which were unbearable to hear.
Finally he came to "La Forestiere".
When faced with his constant screaming we felt quite
powerless.
If we tried to touch him to calm him down,
this very touch seemed to increase his anguish,
There was nothing to do but to wait.*

*The pitch of Lucien's scream was piercing
and seemed to penetrate the very core of my being,
awakening my own inner anguish.
I could sense anger, violence and even hatred rising up
within me.
I would have been capable of hurting him to keep him
quiet.
It was as if a part of my being that I had learned to control
was exploding.
It was not only Lucien's anguish
that was difficult for me to accept
but the revelation of what was inside my own heart,*

- my capacity to hurt others –

***I who had been called to share my life with the weak,
had a power of hatred for a weak person!***

**That experience, and other similar experiences helped
me towards
a better understanding of the mothers of “battered
children”;
women who have been abandoned by their husbands or
partners;
an abandonment which gives rise to loneliness, anguish
and depression with them.**

**They usually have to work for a living
and are bringing up their children alone.
When they come home from a full day’s work, they are
tired;**

**they have just enough energy to make dinner
and to put the children in front of the television!**

**The children of course need more than that.
They are yearning for love and attention and presence.
So they start crying, even screaming.**

**The mother is exhausted; her “inner well” is empty.
Their cry for attention and love reveals her own need for
love.**

**There is so much anguish and inner pain in her
that she ends up by hitting one of the children
in order to make him be quiet
- and especially to liberate her own anguish!**

**(“Befriending the Stranger”, published by Novalis,
Toronto, 2005. ISBN 2-89507-633-2, pp. 91-93)**

**Vanier responds to exposing his own capacity for hatred
in several ways:**

(a) The first way directly imposes boundaries on moral outrage. His range of empathic understanding is extended towards mothers who beat their children, people whom society tends to demonize. He refuses to “cast the first stone”. Moreover, any moral outrage that he might have had is transformed into a compassionate identification with such a woman. Like Mandaza he has an “us-humans” identification with not only with victim but also with victimizer.

(b) Vanier finds someone with whom he can speak about “*these shadows of our being*”, someone who can “*help us not be controlled by them*”. He is shocked when he realizes that although he didn’t hit Lucien, he was very close to doing so. He realizes that he needs to acknowledge this to a fellow human being.

(c) Vanier takes time “*to be alone with Jesus*” in silence so that “*little by little we can become a friend of our weakness*”. This spiritual practice enables him to become more compassionate towards himself. He sees this as necessary if he is to be more compassionate towards Lucien and towards mothers who beat their children. For Vanier, Jesus is the spiritual presence who accepts him “*faults and all*” thereby helping him to accept himself and thereby helping him to accept others.

For me as for Vanier, the spiritual presence of Jesus enables me to become more compassionate towards myself. But people on other spiritual paths have comparable resources. We all need ample spiritual resources if we are seriously committed to uncovering the hidden destructiveness within ourselves..

It's true that neither Richard Weisman nor Jean Vanier nor Don Evans have committed any serious crimes that appropriately call for severe punishment, a punishment that is not only a deterrent to others but also deserved in a retributive way. This difference between having comparable destructive tendencies within myself and actually harming someone is important. Society must have a legal system to deal with the latter. Sometimes, however, if the system is dominated by considerations of deterrence, comparatively- innocent people can be deported or imprisoned or killed. And if the system is dominated by moral outrage, ruling out reconciliation and restitution, many people are permanently banished from society in solitary confinement or execution.

Sometimes, however, such banishment is, in my view, appropriate in extreme cases. For example, I admire those in Germany who tried to assassinate Hitler. Moreover, I am not a pacifist. I still believe that World War I was not justified, but I still believe that World War II had to be fought.

I've already indicated my admiration for legal systems that include the victimizer as a human being within "us-humans". The "Truth and Reconciliation" process in South Africa , the ancient legal code of medieval Celts and the practices of some aboriginal communities are examples. But now I move away from considering just-war issues and back to understanding oneself as an individual.

Trying to Understand a Saying by St. Francis

Can true humility and compassion exist in our words and our eyes unless we know we too are capable of any act?

My own interpretation of this saying is that true humility and compassion preclude having any sense of being superior to another human being and any judgment that anyone who could do such-and-such is beyond compassion. My hunch is that, like the saintly Jean Vanier in our time, St. Francis had uncovered impulses within himself similar to those that motivated people to despicable destructive actions. And, like Vanier, he realized that although he himself had not as yet performed any such actions he could understand how, in extreme circumstances and/or with a different personal history, he could do so.

A less immediate interpretation, but one based on the life and teachings of St. Francis, is that “any human act” includes not only the worst but also the best, not only what seems sub-human but also what seems too saintly to consider as possible. If we are to have true humility and compassion we must become like Jesus. And we won’t become like Jesus unless we know that, deep down, we are capable of becoming like him. This involves coming to know the divine reality at work in him.

My own experience of some people who are not devoted to Jesus but to the Dalai Lama or Ghandi leads me to believe that their spiritual mentors provide similar access to saintly possibilities. This for me is confirmed by my own limited experience of their mentors. (Indeed, St. Francis himself viewed some non-Christian paths in a similarly appreciative way!)

This positive appreciation of one's own saintly possibilities involves being willing and able to appreciate a similar inner mystery within other human beings, however hidden this may seem to be to them and to oneself. Indeed, it is only to the extent that one is actually truly humble and compassionate that one can discern the saintly possibilities in others. I'm still not able to discern this in some people, but I'm beginning to understand how St. Francis could. And I'm beginning to move towards this in my remaining years. What a blessing!

Does anyone deliberately renounce their own saintly possibilities? In Shakespeare's play, Lady Macbeth seems to do so when she says *Evil be thou my good*. In my experience, my housekeeper Nellie seemed to do so after she died. (My first image of her was chortling with glee as she road on Mother's back as she tortured her!) I was enabled to forgive her, no longer poisoning myself with hate towards her. But I was instructed not to trust her by connecting with her. I simply left her for Mystery to deal with. More recently I had an experience that seemed to come from Mystery, showing that she had shifted into remorse.

Do I believe in "universal salvation"? That is, do I believe that, in the End, everyone will become saintly? No, I don't. Such a belief, like belief in an End-judgement separating humans into Us and Them, blessed sheep and damned goats, requires belief in an omnipotent God who micro-manages the universe, permitting or causing everything that happens.

Trying to Understand a Poem by Richard Grossinger:

*Guess what:
God created beings
not to act in a morality play
but to experience
what is unfathomable,
to descend into the darkness
of creation and reveal it to him,
to mourn and celebrate
enigma and possibility.
The universe
is a whirling dervish,
not a hanging judge in robes.*

Grossinger's poem expresses in a beautiful way how we human beings can and must descend into Mystery and live from there. The alternative for many is to live from moral outrage, judging others to be unworthy of being regarded as human. I like the poem because it challenges the assumption that only a moral framework should dominate human consciousness. By itself, however, the poem could encourage me to soar beyond having to acknowledge destructive tendencies within me and others as human beings.

Instead, I have introduced two sayings that express a moral framework, but in ways that curb our human tendency to dismiss others:

- (i) Mandaza: "Oh what terrible things WE HUMANS do to each other!" (He identifies with all human beings: not only with the victims but also with the victimizers.)
- (ii) St. Francis: "How can we express true humility and compassion in our words and in our eyes if we do not

know that we are capable of any human act?" (He sees himself within a humankind capable of atrocities and of saintly love.)

Understanding a TV Commercial from McDonald's

I'm not a fan of McDonald's Restaurants, but I was charmed by a TV commercial a couple of decades or so ago. An impatient child in a car with the family on an outing cries out, *Are we THERE yet?* The focus on arriving at a destination reminded me of various heroic-journey spiritual paths. In the Christian versions the pilgrim eventually arrives at the Celestial City or the Holy Grail.

So I was especially delighted with a cartoon that a friend sent me on Facebook. Half a dozen robed figures are seated together, obviously meditating. A voice comes from one of them, "Are we HERE yet?" The fun comes from the fact that the impatient inquirer who asks the question is obviously not "here", for he/she is viewing "here" as if it were a "there".

The cartoon also moved me into two reflections concerning my own experiences of "being here".

(i) Sometimes I'm not only "here", in the present moment, in my immediate surroundings, but also "everywhere", connected to everyone and everything. One awareness may predominate, and I may even alternate between them, but although intellectually they seem to be opposites, they are not. Yet each state by itself involves me in quite different ways. When I'm only "here" I'm aware of my own uniqueness as an individual. When I'm only "everywhere" that awareness tends to

recede. If a religious group concocts an intellectual framework extolling either state, they exclude much that is human.

(ii) Probably because of my Christian background, I'm reluctant to shed all concern about the future of humankind. Such shedding seems to be required if I am to act and be in the present without concern for success in outcome. Much mysticism is about the eternal NOW.

My mysticism is different. It combines two opposite-seeming states:

- (a) acting/being in intimacy with Mystery in the present**
- (b) acting/being with Mystery towards a better future for humankind.**

Going beyond these reflections, in general I see an overemphasis on either "here" or "there" as destructive for humankind. The "Eastern" ideological insistence on human history as having no significance is associated with acceptance of too much human suffering and injustice. The "Western" ideological insistence on human history's significance in relation to an "eschaton" is associated with human suffering and injustice, though in a different way - as "collateral damage" necessarily involved in the means God or humans employ in getting to the END. Secular Western versions (communist tyranny and free-market capitalism) are ruthless in similar ways. So is the most recent version, envisaging a technological utopia in which human beings achieve everything through our IT machines.

Hope, however, need not be based on ruthless Western ideologies or on Western "optimism". Gabriel

Marcel provides an alternative. In his book *Homo Viator* he describes optimism as merely a mental construct, a substitute for genuine hope. For Marcel, *Hope is a memory of the future*. That is, hoping involves remembering positive experiences as resources to draw on as we move into our next moment creatively. Hope is a “virtue” similar to gratitude in having a dynamic function for human beings. Gratitude overflows in blessing of others. Buddhist teachers advocate it because of this. But hope too is a virtue. Hope feeds positive, creative action.

Buddhist Joanna Macy differs concerning hope. The following quotation I read online::

Western culture is very concerned about hope, but Lord Buddha never mentions hope or hopelessness. These are merely emotions, affected by what we eat or by what happens to us

Unlike Joanna Macy and some other Eastern mystics, I do not view hope and hopelessness/despair as merely unsubstantial emotions. Rather, they are basic human attitudes closely linked with intentions and actions.

Of course my life-long wavering between hope and despair, between wanting to be here in this body and not wanting it, arose from my experiences in 1929. I could have gone on forgetting them, but I repressed them and gradually uncovered them.

THIRD CHAPTER: 2003 JOURNAL ABOUT MEETING ST. FRANCIS IN ASSISI

Arrival on Wednesday

In mid-May, 2003 I spent five momentous days in Assisi. I had planned to spend my time there as a tourist on a holiday, but from the moment I arrived there I was on a pilgrimage. St. Francis took over as my constant inner companion: guiding, instructing, challenging. What follows is the an edited version of the Journal I wrote while I was there. The editing was done in 2013. It involved deciding what to include from the Journal. I didn't leave out much. Sometimes I needed to clarify some of my Journal-notes to make them more accessible to readers. I've also added some reports and reflections concerning Assisi written in 2013 and 3015.

On a Wednesday afternoon, having driven from Rome airport, I unpacked in my room at Hotel San Francesco near the giant Basilica of St. Francis. I lay down to meditate, expecting to begin as usual to focus on my memory of a fresco of the resurrected Jesus by Piero Della Francesco. But I couldn't get the image. It was like having a TV converter that refused to work. Instead, I kept getting an image of St. Francis by Cimabue that I vaguely recalled having seen during a visit to Assisi in the 1950s.

Gradually I came to realize that St. Francis was powerfully present within me and that for a perod of time he was to be my central way of access to Jesus and God.

His unusually earthy embodiment of the Divine Mystery would help me to become more real, more embodied. He would reduce my romantic attachment to the realm of spirit, my Puer Aeternus (eternal boy) denial of down-to-earth human realities.

My room, immediately above the hotel office, turned out to be very noisy. Next morning I arranged a move. It took some time to repack, but eventually I settled in a room where I could easily journal and meditate.

Thursday morning

St. Francis brought me to Mass in the Upper Basilica. I expected that he would be introducing me to a deeper sharing in the sufferings of Jesus Christ for humankind, but this was not what happened. Instead he was bringing into my own body the joy and love within the Divine Mystery that he himself embodied, especially in his Transfiguration. I began to realize more clearly than ever before a truth about myself that may not apply to others: because of my traumas in infancy such joy and love are for me the indispensable condition for my being able to share in Jesus' Crucifixion. Gradually I would be enabled to accept all human pain, starting with my own, as part of the "stuff" of human existence.

Another insight that came to me was that I was beginning to love Assisi. Previously the romantically-spiritual in me had involved a disdain toward travelling anywhere. I could connect with Jesus anywhere without going to Israel. I could connect with, say, Ramana Maharshi (the great Hindu saint) without travelling to his sacred mountain in India. That morning in Assisi I

realized that I hadn't let myself love any place in particular lest I feel heart-broken in having to let go of it. I also realized that during much of my life I had imposed a similar limitation on love when I connected, not with places, but with people with whom I sought some form of intimacy.

During Mass we all joined in the Confession of Sin. I immediately felt deep anguish. Initially I was surprised, but soon I realized that I was still feeling the emotion I had been feeling as I was driving from Rome to Assisi. I had been overwhelmed by an agonizing remorse concerning my part in a break-up with a particular woman. I had misled her by not revealing my sexual impotency prior to our first attempts towards intimacy. Some years before I had done the same with another woman. Then my naïve, spiritual-romantic assumption that we could find ways other than penetration to be sexually intimate had not led to disaster. Luckily for me, the response had been warm and loving. In 2003, however, the circumstances were different, and she understandably felt she had been dishonestly manipulated. Eventually she struggled within herself to reveal this to herself and to me and she broke off our relationship.

I felt much anguish at having wounded her so deeply. I had triggered in her not only a distrust of me but also a distrust of Spirit, whom she had felt guiding her towards involvement with me. My anguish was a positive, authentic state. It was focused on the harm that I had done her. As I examined it I realized that my anguish was not mainly a judgmental self-condemnation because I had broken some moralistic rule. Not was I mainly

feeling shame that I had spoiled my own self-image as a “nice guy”. It was anguish for deeply wounding her.

During Mass I felt God’s ongoing acceptance of me, but I did not receive a simple counsel to “move on” as if nothing had happened. For the rest of my life it is appropriate that I go on feeling sorry for misleading her, even if eventually her wound is considerably healed.

(Note inserted in July 2015: In July, 2014 she initiated an email conversation that led to a reconciliation.)

Yet I am to “move on” in the sense of not making remorse central. Rather my central focus must continue to be on my relation with Divine Love and whatever personal changes this involves for me. Obviously this now includes a commitment never to mislead anyone in such a way. And more generally it includes a commitment to bring less and less personal distortion to any woman towards I’m attracted. I need to go on uncovering and challenging my hidden tendencies to deceive myself in such matters.

After Mass I sought out the fresco of St. Francis by Cimabue. When I gazed at the original it had a powerful impact on me from as it had decades before. But it was only a very physical version of the image already familiar to me in Assisi as the signal of Francis living within me.

I also visited the Mary Magdalene chapel, where I was aware of how differently I respond to her in 2003. In 2003 I was experiencing her sensually and sexually in relation to orgasmic energy rising within me.

Thursday Afternoon

That afternoon, still very aware of St. Francis within me, I went to San Damiano, one of the sacred sites associated with him. Instead of being alone with him I found that many hundreds of people were already there, deposited by buses and special vans. The people were from the “margins” of society: children and adults with Downes Syndrome, seniors with dementia, many cripples and others with serious, debilitating ailments. Each had an attendant helper. I thought to myself, “Roman Catholicism at its very best!”.

Previously been in Toronto I had been stirred by a similar respectful compassion expressed in action by members of Jean Vanier’s “L’Arche” who live communally with society’s “discards”. I was moved, but not deeply inspired. As I witnessed the deeply-Franciscan caring in Assisi I was inspired to live my own version of such humble caring more in my ordinary daily life. During the subsequent decade this inspiration surreptitiously affected me in important ways. It was not that I was consciously trying to live like St. Francis. Indeed, in each case it was only later, after reflection, that I realized St. Francis had been at work in me! As I write in 2013 I think of three examples:

- (i) In September, 2003 I was on an errand from my home north of Bathurst and College Streets in Toronto. I saw a homeless man sitting shivering on the corner. Immediately and spontaneously I walked back home for a

jacket and gave it to him. (Not that I've often given up possessions since then!)

(ii) In 2006 I began visiting patients in Bridgpoint Hospital in Toronto. I was assigned to those suffering from MS and brain damage. I found ways to connect with them in deeply-present silence or through musical sound.

(iii) These hospital experiences prepared me for some aspects of my daily life in a residence for seniors (2009-13). Some residents initially seem inaccessible because of their advanced dementia, but I have found that silence and/or sound sometimes bring deep connection.

Later, when the crowds had left, I began to meditate before a crucifix in San Damiano. When St. Francis did this 700 years before he received a vision of Christ, and a monumental message to which he responded for the rest of his life. Christ said to him, "Rebuild my Church!"

I, too, meditated before the crucifix. As I merged with the crucifix I also prayed Francis' great words, "*Father, make me an instrument of thy peace.....*". Then I surrendered to receive whatever message, if any, Spirit had for me. Not surprisingly the message I received was not to initiate a dramatic, big-scale change within the Christian Church. Rather, I was told "*Become more deeply receptive to further inner change within yourself*". This involved a new emphasis on two specific services to fellow human beings:

*Do more healing at a distance for individuals
and communities.*

*Engage more in face-to-face encounters with others
where your presence will enable them to
discern their own way of access to God.*

Friday: (1) Meditating In St. Francis' Solitary Cave

In December 2013 I realize that the most powerful body-memory of my time with St. Francis in Assisi is what happened as I sat in a very cramped rock-seat which I had approached through a descending cave. I never wrote this up in my Journal, (though I did refer to it). But I did report what happened in various buildings near it. Perhaps my meditation in the cave-seat, where St. Francis had meditated many centuries ago, seemed beyond words. Today as I "see" the place again and "sit" there again what I feel is St. Francis pervading every cell in my body. No words, no images, no reflections.

I meditated in a nearby worship room for monks and nuns. I was by myself except for a period when a nun cleaned with Zen-like focus. I was filled with divine joy.

Don: What in me is the main obstacle to love?

St. Francis:: FEAR! If you let in more joy you'll be moved into a way of living with total abandon-for-others, expansive because you're letting go of self-protection and self-concern.

Don: Will my bodily adaptations to such change have to be gradual?

St. Francis: Yes.

In a small outside chapel for Mary Magdalene there is a scene of her tearfully holding Jesus' head. I prayed for guidance concerning what I am to do and be. I was told to continue offering to theology students at Emmanuel College academic&experiential courses on Christian spirituality and spiritual healing – a new venture that I was just beginning. I was also told to continue offering meditative workshops to many outside the Church.

Friday: (2) Joyful Sounding in the Hills

Leaving the cave area I was moved to go for a short hike in the woods on the hills behind Assisi. I found a well-fenced, well-travelled trail. As I walked I knew that some time soon I wanted to SOUND my joy. About 50 feet ahead I saw a couple emerging from the forest on to the trail so I decided to explore where they were coming from. There was a round-stone gathering place with stones forming a circle and one in the middle. On the far side of the circle there were over a dozen small improvised crosses inserted between stones. The largest cross was about 15 inches tall and 12 inches across. Most were about 5 by 4. Why? No answer. But it resonated with my shamanic-Christian experience.

I ate a snack. (Note in 2015: Was this my meal with Jesus?) Then suddenly, filled with St. Francis, I sounded three or four times, filling the whole valley below me. This was a noisy break in the silence that had preceded it, but it felt entirely in keeping with Francis' song-filled spirit After all, he was a Troubadour. Each time I was

about to sound I was aware of self-conscious fear, but I moved through it. (Now, in 2013, I often and easily burst into song as a way of connecting with someone where I live. Or in my room I do this quite spontaneously for no conscious purpose at all, though it does connect me with my vibrant self.)

I walked back to the trail and followed it to my point of entry. There I met a white-haired woman on her own. (Later that day I realized that she was attracted to my expansive energy and that in her words of greeting she was chatting me up!) We had a brief conversation during which I remember talking about the mystical dimension in St. Francis. She was a former Roman Catholic and described herself as now being more “Eastern”. I liked her but found her somewhat “flaky”. She seemed to be entirely on her own.

In this somewhat magical setting I wondered whether we were meant to meet. Immediately, however, I set that thought aside. It was too soon after my break-up for me to meet anyone else pursuing intimacy. Not appropriate during this retreat.

I was lucky to get a taxi to a gate into Assisi. During the long walk back to my hotel near the great Basilica I felt some fleeting sexual-spiritual longings. I decided to visit the Tomb of St. Francis in the basement of the Basilica.

Friday (3) Conversation At His Tomb

Before descending to the level of the Tomb I again contemplated Cimabue's image of St. Francis for a while. The stairway down was filled with people, but fortunately I was able to find a seat on the right that was out of the traffic. There I could feel some privacy. He signalled his abiding presence within me by bringing his image into my awareness. I welcomed him. Immediately I could feel him pervading me from inside my body and spreading throughout the whole of me.

I felt immense gratitude to him. In Assisi he is my central mentor and way of access into the crucified and risen Christ and into the Mystery of overflowing joy and love within the Godhead. Feeling such gratitude, I asked him, *Is there anything I can do for you, Francis, in return? For the Church or for your Order or for you personally?*

Francis: *No. But what you can do is pursue further your path of trying to bring together an active, vigorous sexuality with spirituality. This is now very close to my heart. It needs to happen. It was lacking in my times. It is new territory. Whatever can go on happening in you concerning this is helpful in the long run.*

I thanked him deeply for this encouragement. (Now, as I write in 2013, it's clear to me that this message from St. Francis was important in helping me to decide to attend my first sexual-spiritual workshop a few months later, in January, 2004.)

With St. Francis I returned to a portion of my initial question. I said, *I want to give something more personal*

to you as a human being. Is there anyone in my life whom you specially care for that I can be more available for?

In the ensuing conversation what emerged was that the person was a boy whom I knew. I knew two boys very well, each the son of a close friend, but it was not either of them. It was a boy whom I'll call "Joe", who had been thrust into my life some months before. (That Friday evening, back in my hotel room, it became clear that on my return to Toronto I would contact Joe and let him know that I specially love him and want him to know this and to call on me at any time for protection or companionship. I would also offer the caring of St. Francis, which he is free to accept or reject.)

After the conversation with Francis concerning Joe, I asked him again about his message to me concerning sexual-spiritual deepening:

How can I check whether this message is really from you, and not merely from my own conscious and unconscious wishing?

His reply:

"Didn't the message come when you felt full of me? Is it not still coming right now as you feel full of me?"

Saturday: In the Upper Sanctuary of the Basilica

On Saturday I was guided to spend a lengthy period in the Upper Sanctuary of the great Basilica, where Giotto painted a series of frescoes depicting major events in the life of St. Francis'.

When I enter the Basilica I'm first inspired to imagine a "cloak of many colours" and offer it up to St. Francis as a symbol of the spiritual gifts I've received from God thus far in my life. Then I invite him to enter me, open to receive something of his distinctive way of embodying the glory of Christ, his distinctive version of Jesus' Transfiguration. Then I contemplate each fresco in turn.

(Note in 2013: I now realize more clearly than I did in 2003 that my pilgrimage to Assisi resembled what thousands of Christians from all over medieval Europe undertook in the 13th century. Not the approach people might expect of a modern, Oxford-trained academic!)

In my altered state I was receptive to many discernments that came to me. In 2013 as I draw on hand-written notes in my Journals in 2013 I will try to report in a way that is intelligible to readers who do not have the frescoes in front of them.

One Journal note is clearly a response to a depiction of St. Francis receiving the stigmata. an indication of his total identification with Jesus on the Cross:

My emphasis today is on being open to whatever embodiment of God's joy&pain is appropriate for me at this time in this present life, as guided by the angels who support and challenge me."

Concerning a frescoe depicting the death of St. Francis I wrote:

This is for me to ponder later. My own death is not imminent."

(In 2013 that is less obvious!)

A very famous fresco shows St. Francis “Preaching to the Birds”. In my own response I’m drawing on my own shamanic experience and acknowledging that St. Francis goes beyond this experience:

I know what it is to resonate with a fellow-creature in a ‘brotherly’ way, but St. Francis goes further. He is somehow conveying to the birds his own conscious embodiment of God

Another fresco depicts him expelling demons, an esoteric practice with which I was already familiar. My response was a series of questions:

Do I offer my services to individuals, couples or groups who need such services? Or should I only do this if and when requested? And even then, should I first check with Spirit that I should do so?”

I did not record any answers. Maybe this was because there weren’t any, but my hunch is that the response to each question was Yes.

One fresco that I can’t now identify seems to have something to do with a nature-miracle, perhaps a change in a water-source or spring.

Don: *Am I ever to ask for a nature-miracle?*

Spirit: *Yes, but only if you are clearly so directed by Spirit.*

Don: *Only for others?*

Spirit: *No, it can be for yourself.*

Don: *Are there any limits on this? Can I deal with the ego-issues of personal inflation and of adulation from others?*

Spirit: No answer!

(Comment in 2013: Several years after Assisi issues concerning miracles had receded from my consciousness. Instead, I was beginning to be more aware that my gift was to be a presence for people that helped them to discern further steps on their own path. Only in recent years did I discern clearly that my way of being present to a woman, though usually okay, was sometimes distorted by the “puer” in me, and also by my fantasy that some day I would meet the woman who would fulfil me. And during 2013, as my health deteriorated, my awareness has become remote from miracles and filled with basic bodily awareness – more like my experiences near the Tomb in the Lower Basilica.)

Sometime during my time in the Upper Basilica I remembered that in his early adult life St. Francis saw himself as a knight, indeed a “knight in shining armour”. Giotto records the dramatic gesture when he let go of that self-image, shedding all his clothes in the public square. My response: *I need to be more wary of the puer, the eternal-youth in me*

When I contemplate the fresco depicting St. Francis receiving and accepting his calling to rebuild the Church I have a new discernment. St. Francis had to move through his own fear and awe in so far as this was preventing him from receive his momentous personal calling from God. I too have to move through my own fear and awe, though my own calling is small-scale. I am not called to rebuild

the Church, but my calling does include helping to renew the Church in a very small way. My own calling, like St. Francis', includes service to humankind beyond the Church – though on a very small scale compared with his service as a founder of the Renaissance. In my remaining years beyond 2003 my calling is to continue help some people to discern for themselves the next steps in their spiritual path, people within the network created by the “Healing Rifts” movement and people whom I encounter in my everyday life.

(Note written in 2013: At Assisi I did not realize that by 2009 my everyday life would consist mainly of encounters with very elderly and much-disabled seniors where I live.)

What am I meant to leave behind when I die? St. Francis left behind a Community with a Rule. My calling, as I see it in Assisi, is to leave behind a network within which everyone is a peer, whether man or woman, old or young, conventional or eccentric, veteran meditator or beginner. My current website would be a vehicle for the network.”

(Note written in 2013: In March, 2013 I launched a new website for my new ebook, “Grateful Reflections on Experiences that Changed Me”, which I had begun on October 19, 2012. As I was completing the book in February and March I included some postscripts concerning my vision that the new website would be the vehicle for a new, online dialogue-network of peers, sharing experiences, whether similar or diverse. Indeed this was beginning to happen. From May 2013 on, however, only a few people had downloaded the book to

read it and my deteriorating health precluded my actively promoting it. I had to let go of my assumption that the new website would host much discussion for a significant period. What I had envisioned did not happen.)

Sunday: Again I Visit the Lower Basilica Tomb

St. Francis brought me to the Lower Basilica where his Tomb was erected within a cave-like room where the floor, all four sides and the ceiling are all made of stone. As I walked there and arrived there he seemed to be promising me some new gift. This would not pertain to my doing something new. Rather, it would be the gift of a new way of being, out of which my service-doing would arise. And what I did would somehow convey this way of being to others.

(Comment in 2013: My hunch is that in 2003 I was not ready to receive much of this gift. Perhaps I didn't even begin to receive the gift until my breakthrough meditation on October 19, 2012. Only a minimal shift from doing to being seems to have occurred in 2003. Nevertheless, what I went on to record in my Journal made sufficient sense to me in 2003 that it reverberated within me for many years – though I was not re-reading it during that time!)

What follows is from my 2003 Journal. It's in two parts.

(i) A Quotation: "Embodying God, Godhead; Jesus' humanity: mortality, vulnerability (also for me sin and shadow stuff still not challenged or shed or transformed). St. Francis is helping me to sink fully into my materiality

alongside – and physically touching – the stone wall of the crypt. If I am to embody the Divine Mystery I must first genuinely embody myself. “

(Comments in 2013 and 2015: This approach is amazingly similar to what I experienced in December, 2013, when what I consciously experienced was almost entirely bodily, with minimal awareness of Mystery and even of spiritual presences. Similarly in 2015.)

(ii) Second Section: “Is there anything for me to do to facilitate in this moment or as a daily practice to add to my current practice or replace it? NO. Simply remind myself of Francis at any time in the day. Let him do the work in me of bringing myself fully into my body, bringing God into my body, as Jesus did for Francis. And focus more on the Gospels concerning Jesus’ earthly life and on Francis’ earthly life as I have here in Assisi.

In the crypt I suddenly feel faint. Maybe a Rescue Remedy in my room would help me. (It’s homeopathic. I use it to reduce panic induced by a bodily crisis). I go to my room. I desperately need to lie down. Then for over an hour I feel heavy, dense, and very material.

Comment in 2013 on this part of my 2003 Journal: My hunch is that I couldn’t remain long in my awareness of myself as embodied; instead I distracted myself from this state by shifting towards theorizing about what I had been experiencing so intensely. Here is what I wrote in 2003:

This is Christian continuing-of-incarnation. Traditional Catholic spirituality, where this is not mainly

otherworldly, emphasizes suffering of Christ and with Christ and in Christ. What I experienced was partly this, but in the Tomb-Crypt I celebrated human creativity and beauty and pleasure – the Renaissance that St. Francis helped to found!

St. Francis said somewhere *Only our vices and sins are ours'*

This is true in one way. Our virtues and our human love are gifts from God in that our whole existence as human beings comes from God. In another way, however, this is not true, for our virtues and our love are also expressions of our human nature, with which we can co-operate with God.

There is a new 'project' for our times, endorsed (I believe) by St. Francis for me and others. It involves combining a truly earthy sexuality and union-with-God. This can include a bodily exchange of sexual-spiritual energies (which I've experienced) but it goes beyond it."

When I was in England prior to Assisi I had talked on the phone with Sister Frances Teresa, a Poor Clare nun whose recent book *Living the Incarnation: Praying with Francis and Clare of Assisi* inspired me. I had hoped to meet her, but this didn't happen. Nevertheless even on the phone her presence was a blessing. Connecting with her, plus experiences in Assisi and probings of John Wesley's "conversion" experience, provided much material for intellectual reflection in 2003 to 2005.

By 2006 I had written a substantial essay, a proposed revision of Christian theology: "Completing the Incarnation: Women, Gay Men and Non-Christians". The essay can be downloaded on my first website:

<http://individual.utoronto.ca/devans>. Scroll down to the general heading "Revising Christian Theology to Include All Human Dimensions".

Here is the essay abstract on the website:

"This essay in Christian theology was presented at a conference at St. Michael's College (Roman Catholic), University of Toronto in May, 2006 in honour of Henri Nowen. First I draw on elements in the theologies of John Wesley and St. Francis that call on Christians to continue the incarnation of Jesus, participating in the divine nature. Then I suggest that the Incarnation of God, though completely pervading his humanity, was incomplete in that his humanity lacked dimensions that need to be contributed by others up to the present and into the future. I focus especially on the neglected or suppressed contributions of women and gay men within Christianity and I also argue that people of other faiths or no faith can contribute to the overall process of incarnating divine love, moving towards an eschatological completing of the incarnation initiated in Jesus."

I underline "eschatological" because it shows that I was engaged in theological speculation to define the End of humankind, ignoring the Mystery of it all. If in 2015 I were re-writing the essay I would remove any eschatological reference. But I would still maintain that since Jesus incarnated God only as a MAN, additional embodiment needs to be supplied by women, gay men and people not devoted to Jesus. I was speaking at Roman Catholic event so I was appealing for reform within the Roman Catholic Church. But a similar message is relevant to many non-Catholic institutions.

What I'm asking you, the reader, is not to read my theologizing but to consider two suggestions:

(i) Ponder Marcel's saying *Hope is a memory of the future*. It is a way of being actively hopeful without depending on any optimistic ideology, whether theological or secular.

(ii) Include marginalized people among those who can contribute their own unique gifts to whatever embodiment of Mystery promotes human love. In my essay I included women, gay men and non-Christians, but an even more inclusive list would include LBGT persons, people of other religions, agnostics, atheists, refugees and many others.

FOURTH CHAPTER: Healing Rifts between Men and Women and between the Masculine & Feminine in Both Genders 1982 to 2000

Two Preliminary Comments:

(i) Parts of this chapter are quoted from an essay *Spiritual Counselling and Counselling Spirits* which I published on my old website in 2006. I also drew on my memory of events. And I've added some notes in 2015.

(ii) Sometime before 1982 I saw a movie called *Lost Horizon* that deeply impressed me. It's about a British diplomat who is brought to *Shangrila*, a shamanic

community in the Himalayas that has built up so much life-giving spiritual energies in a valley that people who remain there live for hundreds of years. The diplomat has been chosen by the resident leader to replace him when he finally dies – which he knows is soon. In 2015 I saw the movie again and realized that it had prepared me for the shamanic Healing Rifts project (and also for my experience with “Poco”, which I will report in the final chapter).

1. Men’s Group for Healing Rifts

(1) Ten months learning some shamanism

In the summer of 1982 Robin Noya, Mike Dean and I found that we all wanted to learn shamanism. We set aside one evening a week. All three of us were newcomers to aboriginal religion though Mike Dean and I had previously learned spiritualism.

The first evening we met we were immediately taught by indwelling discarnate native shamans, who continued with us weekly for ten months. They enabled us to experience some of the earthy, joyful wisdom of aboriginal spirituality, especially the sacred circle of elders who preserve the Sacred Fire from generation to generation. They also led us to experience some of the tragic events when white men nearly destroyed them and their spirit as a nation.

They did not guide us to seek out a living, embodied aboriginal teacher who would initiate us into any particular ongoing aboriginal tradition. And although they seemed to come from a variety of tribes, only rarely was their tradition identified. We could not claim the

authority of an aboriginal lineage, and we did not seek it. Indeed it became clear ten months later that our training was meant to prepare us to receive a commissioning to a special project, which I am about to sketch.

(2) Men's Group Begins 1983

During the summer 1983 Mike Dean received a message from spirit: an invitation to him and other men participate in a momentous special project: an angelic community was asking us to embody whatever spiritual presences and spiritual energies would enable us to overcome our male fears and angers towards women, so that eventually women could in our presence feel safe in retrieving their ancient powers (bodily, sexually, emotional, spiritually) which they had been forced to hide during centuries of male oppression. The challenge was not only to go through this process to deal with whatever obstacles arose from our personal histories, but also to do this on behalf of men generally, dealing with our collective and historical unconscious as men. So the process would be both personal and transpersonal.

(Notes in 2015:

(i) Dealing with “whatever obstacles arose from our personal histories” involved psychotherapy. At group meetings we didn’t do psychotherapy except for sharing current crises and mini-crises in our lives. Each of us explored our own emotional issues mainly on our own, during the week between meetings. Much later, in the mid-1990s, “shamanic psychotherapy” could be offered.

(ii) Our personal histories were different, so our individual emphasis on fears and angers differed. For example, Robin had much more fear than anger. He felt

fear because he lacked confidence as a man. His father provided little of this, whereas he loved his mother. He became his own man in relation to her by travelling alone in Europe and becoming a mystic!

My own history involved traumas inflicted by my father and Nellie the housekeeper, so I had much fear and anger towards both him and her for undermining me as a male boy. And I was angry at my mother for rejecting my male genitalia and for not protecting me.)

Eventually the group would become a mixed group devoted to healing the rifts between men and women and between the masculine and feminine aspects of all of us. First, however, we men had to grow up. We were bluntly told that, as we were then, we would simply become the children of any woman who entered the group! The process, it turned out, went on for thirteen years, when we realized that we were ready for the men's group to become a mixed group.

The men's group began in the fall of 1983 and it continued to involve much active intervention by discarnate shamanic teachers and much emphasis on resonating with the earth and with all earth's inhabitants, whether human or non-human.

But the range of spiritual presences and spiritual energies expanded greatly. As we met each Monday evening we began to realize that we were primarily in the hands of a particular angelic community, "residing" both in heaven and earth. This community, whom we called "The Messenger Community", exposed us to whatever new presence or energy was needed for our transformation at the time. After each Monday we had to

assimilate, bodily and emotionally, whatever we had been subjected to, whether from heaven or from earth, whether masculine or feminine, whether frightening or comforting, whether revealing depths of evil in our collective patriarchal past or providing glimpses of a possible future “heaven on earth”.

It was not at all obvious why we four men were selected to undergo this process. It was not because each of us was already advanced in a process of overcoming the typical male fears and angers that create rifts between men and women. Far from it! Nor could we each draw on similar personal strengths, for we were strikingly different in these. But it was true that all of us had experienced some psychotherapy and some spiritual practices. And as we endured many transformative tests and trials together we experienced and created a powerful loving energy as a group.

(3) A Digression

As I write this in 2015 I realize that we had some dynamic similarity with groups of men who endure tests and trials in the public external world – waging a war, climbing a mountain or fighting a forest fire. Who is more courageous, those facing external challenges or those facing internal challenges? I don’t think there is any general answer to such a question. Each individual is unique in his/her struggle to persevere though frightened.

In my own life World War II ended as I turned 18, so I’ve never been in a war. Nevertheless I’m in a position to compare myself to someone who was. At university I

shared a room George MacDonell. He was captured by the Japanese at Hong Kong. He was still having nightmares and he needed to share his experiences with me. He was only 19 and he endured beating and privation and indignity in slave labour. He became camp spokesman for fellow inmates and so his tortures increased.

When he returned to Canada he became chief spokesman for a movement to help Japanese-Canadians whose homes were confiscated and then replaced by concentration camps in the wilderness. He said that his oppression was only slightly worse than ordinary labourers in the hierarchical military regime that ruled Japan. He respected individual Japanese. He deplored both the Japanese regime and the Canadian treatment of Japanese-Canadians.

I know myself well enough to know that if I had been in his shoes at Hong Kong and afterwards I would have quickly collapsed. But I also know that individuals differ in the vulnerabilities and strengths we bring to whatever ordeals that arise.

(4) Men's Group Continued

One of the earliest and most persistent spiritual processes involved resonating with a "pillar of fire" extending from the heights of heaven down into the depths of earth. At first we closely associated this image and vibration with reliance on the very masculine Israelite God of the Exodus and with the stirring Christian hymn, "Guide me, O thou great Jehovah". Week after week, year after year, as our bodies resonated with the

pillar of fire, it came to be associated also with the native Sacred Fire and (for me) with the Hindu god Shiva. Eventually we experienced it as the quintessential “masculine divine”. Our resonating was not only in our heads and our ears but also in our legs and genitals and bellies, awakening and affirming our own “masculine human”. If eventually our men’s group were to become a mixed group we needed first to become secure in our own divine-human masculinity . Only then would we eventually be able to welcome without fear the fierce presence of women in their mature “crone-energy”, their divine-human femininity.

Such fearlessness also required gradually opening to various forms of feminine spiritual energy. By 1996 we could receive these in their most intense form, through women who embodied and transmitted them. But back in 1983 we needed to become somewhat familiar with them by receiving them directly into our own bodies. For example, this is how we first experienced Kali, a Hindu expression of the divine feminine. We experienced her as ruthlessly attacking all male oppressors and haters of the human feminine. At first Kali terrified us, for she challenged whatever in us received her deserved wrath. But as we changed, she gradually became a friend and ally. We learned to call on Kali whenever the feminine in women or in ourselves need protection. (Later on I also associated her with the protection of children.)

Other feminine presences included the “Hideous Crone”, an appallingly destructive, devouring monster-woman spirit, cackling over the prospect of tearing our testicles off and inflicting on us men a gruesome death. This “black witch” image and vibration, unlike Kali, is

entirely a human creation, a personalized pattern of energy built up over centuries by the Unconscious of humankind, both men and women. On the one hand it is men's radically distorted experience of genuine "white-witch" power – distorted by our terrified response to positive female power and by our projection of our own fearful rage on to whoever or whatever carries such power. On the other hand the "Hideous Crone" is a gathering together of women's collective, archetypal rage, accumulated and repressed during centuries of oppression and constriction by men.

In retrospect, it is clear that we men needed to enter into the "Hideous Crone" energies, experiencing them in our bodies, releasing our own fear and anger, and receiving the accumulated female rage towards us as men without being overwhelmed. We needed to undergo this process if eventually we were to become able to recognize and welcome the "Divine Crone".

Concerning the divine masculine aspect of our process, I remind you that the pillar of fire linked heaven to earth. At first, however, our experience of masculine energies in the earth was weak and obscure. Mother-earth experiences were much more easily accessible, especially during our periodic sweat-lodges. Gradually, however, our earth-connection as men with the masculine divine was experienced more and more clearly within our (material, earthy) bodies. Thus we could alternate between father-earth and mother-earth consciousness. (Note written in 2015: During the past 15 years or so my experience of earth as mother has been much stronger than my experience of earth as father.)

The expansion of consciousness within the men's group was not limited to masculine/feminine awareness. The mandate for the project involved an openness to being changed by whatever spiritual energies and spiritual presences the Messenger Community deemed necessary if our men's group were eventually to become a mixed group. During the process we came to realize that, in principle, we as human beings can learn to resonate with anything and everything:

(i) in our evolutionary history, which is still within us, back through early humans to pre-human mammals to reptiles to rudimentary life-forms to volcanic energies to the Big Bang.

(ii) in our spiritual world, from ordinary life-energies of earthly creatures through discarnate saints to angels and into our ultimate origin in the Divine Mystery.

2. Comparison Between Healing Rifts and Traditional Shamanism

The Healing Rifts process included a central element in traditional shamanism: resonating with everything and everyone in nature, whether material or spiritual. We learned how to connect with and contain the energies of the "Big Bang" and of alligators and of early ancestors and of angels, the energies of the four directions (east, south, west and north) and the energies of the four elements (earth, air, fire and water).

The central challenge to us men, however, was very practical, and it both culminated and began in 1995 when women joined us in the group as peers. Whatever weird and wondrous states we might have experienced on our shamanic

way, the challenge was to meet the women in the group in a way involving true encounter: with a simultaneous awareness of our own bodily-emotional state, our own spiritual state, and their bodily-emotional-spiritual state. Unlike a traditional shaman on a shamanic journey, one's own spiritual "journeying" did not temporarily remove one's awareness of one's bodily-emotional connections with oneself and with the other person. This insistence on whole-self encounters was immensely difficult. It was still difficult ten years later, though considerable progress has been made.

What distinguished our path from traditional shamanism was its narrow focus on healing rifts between men and women. This meant that, for example, the Messenger Community did not teach us how to journey spiritually into the "lower world" and the "upper world" to retrieve parts of a person's soul-essence that had been lost because of traumas earlier in life. This central practice in traditional shamanism, (typically interpreted by contemporary psychology in terms of healing a client's dissociative tendencies) was not seen as necessary for our project. (Later on, however, Heloisa privately came to learn how to do soul-retrieval journeys for people.) Nor did the Messenger Community provide the group with instruction concerning the use of the Sacred Pipe. (Later on, however, Catherine learned how.) Nor did they teach us other typical shamanic resources such as the use of plants in nature as medicines. (Later on, however, both Heloisa and Catherine learned much from shamans in the Amazone jungle.

But the Community did guide us in traditional shamanic drumming, sounding and dancing and sweat lodge as ways of working with spiritual energies and spiritual presences. Nevertheless the ongoing focus for all this shamanic activity

was to facilitate healing of rifts between the masculine and the feminine within each of us and between us as men and women. And healing these rifts involved another element in traditional shamanism: retrieving awareness of our natural origins in evolutionary history, especially (but not exclusively) the wisdom of our earliest human ancestors. So we had some important resources in common with traditional aboriginal shamans, though we also lacked others.

We never claimed legitimacy alongside aboriginal groups who have a lineage with handed-down teachings, and our contact with them has turned out to be minimal. In this context, one incident about 15 years ago at a “Life-Skills” conference north of Barrie seemed significant, but only at first. I was leading a small workshop introducing participants to some elementary varieties of meditation when suddenly I became aware that an aboriginal participant was being initiated as a shaman by a host of spirits. An aboriginal wise-woman, also in the group, was also aware of this, as was the participant himself. It was when I was guided by a spirit to put my hands on his shoulders that the whole process began. I was merely the voluntary, but very surprised, instrument of aboriginal spirits who came into him.

At first I wondered whether this was the beginning of some new service to aboriginal communities. I told the new shaman how to get in touch with me if I could be of service in any way, but I never heard back, and did not feel any call to pursue the matter further. Indeed, it turned out that this incident was the first of many where spirits want to make themselves known to someone and does so through me, assuming rightly that I am willing to serve in this way and that I’ll be an instrument rather than an obstacle in the process. Sometimes the spirit blesses me – on the way, as it

were – but usually the focus is entirely on the other person. The spirit who wants access to someone can vary greatly. Sometimes it's a spiritual notable such as Kwan Yin, Jesus, Mary, Krishna, Ramana Maharshi, or the Dalai Lama. (Okay, I admit that I'm name-dropping here!) Sometimes it's a mentor unknown to the person or to me: a medicine-woman or a saint. Sometimes it's an ordinary human being, desperate to find through me some way to find reconciliation with an estranged friend.

Am I called to some service within aboriginal communities? Another way in which the question arose was when an aboriginal shaman with whom I had co-led two workshops asked me whether I could accompany him on a trip to Western Canada to co-lead spiritual healing workshops with aboriginal people. I declined because of my limited stamina and energy at the time. But it was a great honour!

3. Mixed Group for Healing Rifts

(1) Mixed Group Begins

In the early 1990s Robin and I led some workshops on shamanism for both men and women. At one of these, Heloisa Porto was suddenly transfigured. I remember standing about 30 feet away and feeling the impact of feminine energies radiating from her: amazingly powerful and uncompromising. Immediately Robin and I both knew that the mixed group could now begin! A human-divine crone had revealed herself to us and we were able to appreciate her! We invited Heloisa to join us as a peer.

Soon after that we also invited Catherine Stone and the mixed group began (1995-6). Within a year or so at least two more women and two more men also joined us. Soon the eight of us were co-leading Healing Rifts workshops together, though sometimes the original four did the leading, sometime all eight of us. The women testified that our recognition and welcome enabled them to move into their divine-human feminine powers more deeply than had been possible in groups where only women were present. They retrieved ancient feminine energies and discernments. Among other things they reported the following:

- (i) a sensuous snake-energy that is earthy, powerful and healing
- (ii) awareness of having large energy-bellies, filled with creative power
- (iii) grief and anger concerning centuries of patriarchal pressure to conceal all this essential femininity, or lose it entirely.

(Note written in 2015: It's now clear to me that some women become deeply aware of (i), (ii) and (iii) without first connecting with men who help them! What happened to women as the mixed group began is not a formula for everyone to follow. But it is a major route for anyone dedicated to healing rifts.)

The process of healing rifts accelerated for women as they felt the men recognizing and welcoming the "Divine Crone" in them. And, similarly, a recognition and welcome of our divine-human masculine powers by the women helped us to move more deeply into them. This occurred because they could distinguish these powers

from “Macho” harshness and thus celebrate them rather than fear or resent them.

Healing Rifts was motivated by a commitment to reducing the conflicts between the masculine and the feminine within ourselves and between men and women. Since these conflicts have both spiritual and emotional components, many transformative processes involved both spiritual and psychotherapeutic elements. This combination continued in workshops offered by the Healing Rifts group.

In the middle of one workshop the four original leaders found ourselves creating a welcoming energy-ritual for each participant, a re-birthing into this world. As I recall it, Catherine’s role was to provide energetically a divine-feminine womb on one side of the room, where participants initially gathered.

Each individual in turn moved through a corridor created by the others. At the end of the corridor, at the other side of the room, Robin and Heloisa provided energetically a divine-masculine&feminine couple who could provide a new welcome into this world. I was the “energy-coach” on each person’s birth-journey.

Obviously this ritual involved both depth-psychotherapy and shamanic-spiritual ingredients. Individuals experienced these differently, but the combination was crucial. Within about a year these experiences and similar experiences at workshops made possible a new offering by the Healing-Rifts movement: the Institute for Shamanic Psychotherapy.

Later I'll describe the Institute but first I want to note some other typical features of the Healing-Rifts workshops. One had to do with how participants who gathered began to prepare for them. The men would first meet separately to connect with each other while the women would do the same in another room. Typical differences emerged. The men would usually connect with each other in an aggressive "scrum", wrestling and jousting (harmlessly) so as to get "out of our heads" and eventually bringing together heart and genitals in an assertive tenderness. (Note in 2015. This helps me understand a ritualized sequence in team sports: after they score a goal, men "take five" and hug!)

The women would usually connect with each other by forming a circle, holding hands, creating a container for blending and harmony and consensus, bringing heart and womb together in an inclusive receptivity. The separate bonding strengthened each individual to deal with the varied fears and angers that arose when men and women then encountered each other.

Another feature of some workshops had to do with my role. Sometimes a woman would feel moved to express her rage at men and I would provide a "welcome", receiving the rage without becoming frightened and defensive. The rage had accumulated not only from mistreatment during their personal life-times but also from many generations of "macho" oppression. Within the boundaries of a sacred ritual, and drawing on years of preparation, I could focus my consciousness mainly on the suffering which gives rise the rage and minimally on my own fears. (Of course, it was much more difficult to provide this outside such a context, in my daily life. There, I sometimes felt overwhelmed by

terror when a woman who was important in my daily life put me down!)

I remember offering a day-long workshop entitled “Women and Anger”. As the one man, indeed the one leader, I expected that most of the twenty women who came would come to express their anger at men. I would offer catharsis through raging at me as symbolic representative of repressive patriarchy. To my surprise, only a few did. The rest came to express their anger at women! Many of them said that they avoided workshops led by women because they distrusted women. Their most prominent issues had to do with their mothers, who had rejected or abandoned them, sometimes through alcoholism or psychosis, sometimes in other ways. They had come to this workshop because it was led by a man. So most of the day was focused on issues of anger and anguish between women. I had not expected such an emphasis, but I was grateful to be more of a neutral mediator than a target!

So even when a workshop was not officially sponsored by the Healing Rifts group, it could turn out to be relevant to Healing Rifts, in this case providing a venue for women to heal rifts within the feminine.

During this period I was learning how to facilitate transformative breakthroughs as I worked alone with individuals or with Heloisa with groups. It’s a complex, two-fold ART: (i) the art of psychotherapy, uncovering one’s own emotional unconscious, plus (ii) a central art of shamanism, gaining conscious access to spiritual presences.

As for me, I was learning the art of teaching this complex art to others as I brought it to them. In many instances, I worked myself out of a job, and people left to work on their own. In other instances, people dropped out. But some people wanted to continue learning the art with the four founders of Healing Rifts in the Institute for Shamanic Psychotherapy.

(2) Institute for Shamanic Psychotherapy

Some Healing Rifts participants enrolled in an Institute for Shamanic Psychotherapy, established mainly by Heloisa and me. The Institute provided a variety of workshops and ongoing groups. Quite a few enrolled, but by 2000 only one or two had “graduated” with a certificate from the Institute. If an individual decided to leave, we did not pressure them to stay. We had not required that participants in events offered by the Healing Rifts movement or the Institute identify themselves as members of a new religious cult.

Nevertheless we had already found ourselves on the brink of becoming a religion, in spite of our intention to be an open society or network. In retrospect we were learning how a new spiritual movement tends to change into an institution. This change is not necessarily deplorable, but it was not appropriate for us. (My own personal view of Christianity is that it needs to draw on its spiritual-movement origins to avoid rigidity.)

Two events exemplify our tendency towards becoming a religious institution.

(i) When a new birth happened within our Healing Rifts community, we had a welcoming ceremony. So do Christians (baptism) and many others.

(ii) On the first anniversary of a man's death within the community we gathered to honour him. As we remembered him he returned in spirit! He led us all in a playful dance of celebration and gratitude! In my case he led me by inhabiting me for about a minute so that I danced with his former vigor, far beyond my physical ability at the time. This did not harm me at all. It invigorated me.

And we did not become a religious institution. If we had, we might still exist in 2015!

(3) Transition in 2000

In the early 2000s Heloisa Porto, started her own school. When Healing Rifts was thriving the group had given me a painting of an aboriginal chief entitled "Visionary". I had indeed been a visionary in the group, for example it was I who envisioned the re-birthing ceremony. But by 2000 the group meeting on Monday evenings had become mainly a support-group and I had stopped attending and I was focusing more on my own private life. I was mainly occupied with a potential marriage to a very gifted female friend and with new challenges on my path towards inner reconciliation. It seemed right to pass the picture on to Heloisa and I did.

In conclusion, I recall one workshop I led for people who had some connection with Healing Rifts. I asked them to consider a common purpose for the day. It was

not healing rifts between masculine and feminine within us and between us as women and men. I now see that it expressed my own ongoing commitment:

to become more loving, less self-preoccupied and less conflicted, more heart-present to others, more connected with the earth, more surrendered into the Mystery out of which we all arise

This is still my commitment in 2015!

They were still free to formulate their own specific purpose, but it was clear that if they simply wanted to become rich and famous, this was not the place to come!

4. Men's Group 1985 Transcripts Pondered in 2012

In March, 2012 I found some transcripts of what happened in the Men's Group during 1985. Mike Dean brought a tape-recorder to many sessions and transcribed what he recorded. I had lost this during my move to a seniors' residence, but found it while looking for something else. I immediately wrote a piece in which I quoted passages from the transcripts and commented on these passages.

In July, 2015 I've been re-reading my Ebook, chapter 3, section for March, 2012. It seems important to quote extensively from this before I present what I wrote concerning the transcripts. Here it is:

Last night, just as I turned off the TV to prepare for going to bed, I felt a strong presence at my crown energy-

centre. The presence was clearly feminine, but it took a while to discern who it was: St. Teresa of Avila. This surprised me, for although I had been impressed and influenced when I read her *"Interior Castle"* decades ago I had never been aware of her spiritual presence.

This morning in meditation, she began by instructing me not to welcome any of the spiritual presences that regularly were screened or selected by Jesus for my physical healing. She wanted to work within me only with Jesus, and not for my healing but for my transformation.

Sometimes during meditation in the past I have felt heavy and physical and bound to earth. This morning I felt this more than ever before. My whole body felt like a "lumpy sack" collapsed on my bed, totally unable to "soar".

As I tried to get some sense of what was happening inside me, two memories concerning St. Teresa emerged:

- (i) I saw an image of a famous sculpture of her by Bernini. She is in a state of ecstatic erotic bliss, her heart pierced by an arrow of divine love from an angel.
- (ii) I remembered murmuring "Yes, Yes!" when I read her contrast between the sixth, penultimate "mansion" (spiritual state) and the seventh. The sixth is mystical pure consciousness, aware only of Divine Mystery. The seventh embodies the Mystery in very practical activity, initiating changes in the everyday world.

When I remembered her erotic intimacy with the Divine I wondered whether I was feeling an excess of divinely-originated orgasmic energy. But soon I realized

that what St. Teresa and Jesus were doing within me was focused on my embodiment of the Divine, intensifying it more than ever before. I also seemed to be feeling more clearly than ever before the achiness that pervades my aging body. I could not reduce this awareness in any way that had “worked” before: distraction or dissociation or spiritual flight.

When as usual my friend Robin Noya came today for lunch, ending with a meditation together, he was for the first time guided to sit alongside me where I lay on my bed, holding my hand to his heart and resting his hand on my heart. I immediately realized that my heavy bodily state had frightened me more than I had let myself feel. This human connecting with him would help me find some calm. It soon did. But something else was happening as well. His words went beyond my awareness of my aging body, calling on me to let go of mental assumptions concerning this. Instead I needed to allow myself to realize that a deeply-transformative process was going on, one that could enable me to become much more actively engaged in life. As St. Teresa grew older, her mystical connection with the Mystery enabled her to initiate ever so much: founding convents, challenging civil authorities and the pope, etc. etc.! My new beginning would be very small-scale in comparison, but momentous for me.

After about twenty minutes in meditation, I felt St. Teresa at my crown again and realized that she would soon be leaving my body, which had been feeling less heavy as Robin challenged me to co-operate in the transformation. When she left, there was some increased

physical pain across the whole top of my head, as if a hole were being sealed over. After a short while, this eased.

Before he left Robin told me that a mystic whom I had met some time ago had come into his mind. Even as a child she had been aware of her mystical union, but she had never been able to connect alongside her fellow human beings, never acknowledging that she, too, shared their faulty frailty. He saw her in stark contrast with me. I think I can accept this as true without soaring into pride! Winston Churchill once said of his political rival, Clement Atlee, "He's humble because he has every reason to be humble!" I think that's true of me!

I have a strong sense that, immediately or gradually, much more will unfold from St. Teresa's intervention, working together with Jesus. Perhaps I'll be guided to assume even more responsibility for both infant-Don and elder-Don as I surrender into the Mystery to embody the Mystery. That's a paradox, for taking-charge and surrendering seem to be opposites. But I'm getting used to opposites!

2. Stage 2, Mar.2-7: Paradoxical Intuition/Guidance

Since March 1 my morning meditations have, indeed, varied greatly. Sometimes I'll be entirely in charge, as if there were no Mystery! Sometimes I'll surrender into Mystery and remain in that state. Sometimes the meditation will include both the purely-human and the mystical approaches. But overall I'm becoming more and more "my own man".

3. Stage 3: A Stronger, More Confident Presence

Journal March 7, 2012

This evening during and after dinner I felt tired, but I had to attend to two matters before I eventually lay down. I immediately asked, “Is this to rest or to continue what Teresa and Jesus began?” It was the latter. I was to embody Mystery more.

Will St. Teresa of Avila visit me again? Probably not. Her work with me seems to have become part of me. Surrendering towards pure consciousness or into pure consciousness has been substantially replaced by letting go into my body. And the changes within me initiated by the meditation on October 19, 2011 also seem to have become part of me.

This is the end of quotations from my ebook the I wrote in March, 2012.

Now I begin my presentation of my piece on the men’s group transcripts. I have never previously published them.

Overall I received much wisdom from the Messenger Community, and here I’m going to quote from the transcripts some passages that shed ever so much light on what’s been happening within me during March, 2012. As I read these passages I realize how little I really understood when I received them back in 1985. Now, however, after 25 years of gradual transformation and two years of accelerated transformation, the words deeply resonate with my experience.

Before I quote these passages, however, I have two quotations that will enable you, the reader, to get a sense of how we men took turns in “channeling” the Messenger Community. I begin with my own first venturing into it.

Feb. 13/85: “I have a sense of being asked to be an Instrument of some sort. There is some sort of message. I am aware of some reluctance and puzzlement as to how this might take place. I will be shown the form. It will be through my voice, but not in trance. I am becoming aware of the energy of the Messenger community coming through me.”

July 3/86: “Each of us is channeling a mixture of a reflection by what is mainly our own individual Higher Self (the self that continues through various incarnations) and a sense of being spoken-through. Our personalities are entering in and because of that the personalities are distorting the message, or eliminating parts of the message. Or the message that comes through each of us is simply different.”

(1) My own energy attracts various “outside” energies.

October 30/85: I had been distinguishing various energies that I’d been experiencing recently:

(i) Pleiadic Circle energies (feminine and celestial)

(ii) Appeal for Peace energies (associated for me with the United Nations International Day of Peace; I co-led a campaign across Canada and a million people celebrated the Day by 1986)

(iii) Messenger Community energies

I asked the Messenger (the “spokes-angel” for the Community) to provide some clarity concerning these experiences. The reply helps me to understand now how my March process could begin with an unsolicited intervention by Saint Teresa and culminate in a state where I’m intentionally experiencing only my own bodily breathing:

“You have made a connection within yourself at a depth you never had before....You must realize that the energy merely opened up what was already in you. What you felt flowing in you was your own energy opened up from outside, but it was your energy...We (in the Messenger Community) are attracted to the opening of you in your depth. So, open up yourself in your depth. We are drawn to that. We find it attractive energy and move to it instantly.”

(2) What is happening in the group is in this ordinary world

Nov. 12/85: “It is only life itself of which we speak and which we channel. This is not something unusual, extraordinary, or beyond this world. It is of this world and, for those who belong here, it is just ordinary. It is energy. It is life. There should not be too much of an emphasis on its spectacular quality. Although this might seem true, you must merely realize who you are, and that this is quite ordinary: bringing love into the world. After all, that is what everyone should be doing, isn’t it, and what everyone wishes to do – so everyone says. There is a spectacular quality, as I mentioned, but merely accept who you are and this shouldn’t bother you in the least. We are only human, aren’t we, in the end.”

Nov.12/85: "We all feel love individually, but in its nature it is not really such a personal thing after all. And yet there is nothing more personal. There are old ties to be broken and old strengths to be reclaimed, and all this requires calm reflection on who you really are: so that the false can go and the strengths can merely be."

Nov.21/85: "Love is always flowing. When it flows it is like the blood in the body: it flows and re-circulates and cleanses. As you feel love and become love more and more you will see that truly you become merely flow - your life will flow, you will be a flow. So these obstructions are merely in the way of the flow, these difficulties that are being cleared because they don't move. So they are being re-moved."

You distinguish passion as a personality trait or quality that you can possess at times and at other times not possess but in fact passion is the very quality or nature of the flow of love, which is love itself, which is God. When you love strongly you are not being passionate, you are being impassioned."

(3) I "channel" a message about being light-hearted rather than heavy-hearted:

Feb.13/85 Don/Messenger: "We welcome the Valentine Party, the dance, the drumming, the open heart, something light, frivolous, fun, amazing, not a heavy!" I sing a chorus of Glenn Miller's "In the Mood". Much laughter in response.

"Laughter is from God, you know. That's where it comes from. And the very serious stuff, that comes from you!...In the heart there is much heaviness. Not in the heart. We put the heaviness around the heart. We do it to ourselves. 'Here, have my heavy heart. Make yours heavy

too. Then we're all in this together. How do you tie up your heart? What knot do you use? Sheep-bend? Oh, granny knot. Oh, oh yeah."

Compare Dec.11/85: "So much of what you see as individuality is in fact just your individual way of interfering with love, its flow. But much of this is also, what you would call, necessary in order to learn who you are in terms of what distinguishes you from a senseless mass of being joined as water with flour in some great ball. But this keeps you with a sense of individuality, and a sense of your choosing to give-up what you observe as your individuality (to give up your possessions) whereas, in fact, you are merely giving-up what keeps you from being yourself all along."

(4) Angels help us humans to understand how we differ from them because we humans allow the experience of what we love to transform us: we "hold" on to the experience as we embody it.

Nov.21/85: "We wish to experience you, as a group, as being removed as far as possible from our leadership. You truly will feel the changes by what you call your intuition. We have the over-view so we have been initiating, by-and-large, the quality or function of the group but, of course, this is because of our nature. This is part of what we do and why we wish to work with you, but by seeing how you respond to this, we learn a great deal ourselves. You are our access to humanity as we are yours to the stars."

"We find that your ability to experience, and allow the experience to transform that with which you experience....we find this a quality we envy in a way, not a jealous way...but we appreciate it. That's a better word."

Nov.21/85:“You can transform the instrument (embodied consciousness) with which you receive that which you love. And by allowing yourself to be transformed, this is form of memory, of holding on to the experience, because you, in your very Selves, are changing. This is the pain (that transformation involves). The instrument, in a sense, by its nature remembers, must change in order to contain what it loves, and therefore, there is the pain. So you experience this as time. We find this fascinating. Thank you....Love is held by you more strongly (than by us). For us love is an environment that is created by an influx of love.”

(5) Human Beings, Like Angels, Can Experience
Mystically: Everything in Every moment

Jan.30/86: “Unless there is everything in every moment, everything else is unimportant...If every moment contains every thing, then everything else, (being happy or being unhappy) is unimportant because you can be everything-that-is.

If all that you want is to be happy, then you are rejecting unhappiness. And if all you want is to be happy in this moment, then there is the next moment, and then the moment after that, you will always be choosing and leaving something behind in every moment. But every moment is everything. So, why do you want to be happy and leave unhappiness behind? It is part of everything, and that is what is in every moment: everything!

Allow yourselves to accept who you are in every moment. Then you will no longer be concerned about

being happy or unhappy. You will no longer be concerned with being important or unimportant. And you will not longer be concerned with what is important in the world. What you can bring is everything in every moment. When you give up believing that you can make yourself feel better, when you give that up, you die to this 'feeling better' all the time. Then you will feel better, that is you will feel/experience in a better way: everything in every moment."

During March, 2012 my way of experiencing each moment has included much more of this mystical acceptance of everything past and present, here and everywhere, happy and unhappy. But I'm not aspiring to experience everything in every moment. Angels may do this, and they can transform me inside myself in surprising ways, but what has been happening – as the Messenger also emphasized – has been mainly a matter of becoming more thoroughly and distinctively human.

(6) Embodying the Flow of Love/God distinguished from Changing it into Structures:

December 11/85: "You are not trying to trap and form the love that flows into you, that is God...and make it into blocks to build some structure in which you will have a place. Such a God is the one who is at the top of the structure that has been built out of frozen love, or 'formed-into-cubes' love.

The use of the flow of energy to create structures does not re-create God...The flow of energy has been re-routed and blocked into forms that can build structures to house people and give them manageable amounts of God-love."

Summarizing various quotations: Such structures include repeatable rituals such as the “Lord’s Prayer” (which the Messenger invited me to lead the group in), controllable religious institutions and hierarchical world-views (with “God” at the top).

“You are destroying the structure that is your body, in a certain way. And if this involves anger, that is excellent. The anger is part of the heat of passion when it meets obstruction.”

Summary of what follows in the transcript: Anger against the God-of structures arises from the impassioning, flowing God inside your heart. Embodying God involves deconstructing and re-creating the individual self so that love can flow unimpeded through that self. Within our bodies we human beings can resonate with angels who spontaneously live within the flowing God. After the angels “leave”, their participation in the divine flow continues in our bodies, so our everyday life can be like St. Teresa’s in her seventh state of life: filled with God, yet this-worldly and ordinary.

These passages help me to understand how, in March 2012, my morning meditation can simply involve being aware of me, breathing. Also, I realize that I feel tired because much of me is being deconstructed and re-created.

I also note that my process was initiated, not by an angel, but by St. Teresa, who retains in spirit the wisdom of a human being who previously embodied God in her earthly life. Overall, in my experience I’ve been mostly

nudged towards further embodiment of God by the spiritual presence of human beings such as St. Teresa or St. Francis or Jesus. Also by human beings whom I've met before they died, individuals who in this life embody God in various ways: e.g. Jean Vanier, Mandaza and Ilyat Khan.

In contrast with this, my impression is that many people who focus mainly on connecting with angels aspire to resemble angels, not content to be simply another human being alongside other human beings. They want to "vibrate at a higher frequency" than most ordinary human beings. This is a path to which some people are genuinely called. Indeed, on occasion I have benefited much from their help. But it is not a path towards embodying God or towards acknowledging the reality of the destructive tendencies in all of us as human beings.

Although there was much wisdom in the Messenger Community, in 2012 I realize that they were seriously mistaken in various inter-related ways:

(1) They were overly optimistic concerning complete transformation of the participants.

(2) They held a non-dualist "Eastern" world view where the ONLY reality is God=Love. That may be how unembodied angels experience the world, but it's not how human beings do if they remain human.

(3) No need for body-psychotherapy; no mention of it. Indeed, they implied a ban by negative describing it negatively as *picking-away a scab*.

(4) They do acknowledge that fear is inherent in being human, and they are accurate in distinguishing the fight-flight fear that helps us survive from fears

not needed to survive. But they are overly-optimistic concerning replacing all fear by love.

IN GENERAL: Although the Messenger Community tried to learn from us humans, they didn't learn enough!

A quote from Thursday, January 23/86, Don (in-dwelt):

In this body, God/love, dwells in the heart.

The heart, the Sacred Heart/love/God,

this is the place which is everywhere....

everywhen, in which everything lives.

I am the host to God, this me, this body, this place.

But this place, this heart, spreads.

It becomes what it hosts.

It spreads - no boundaries - it spreads through the cosmos.

Wherever love is, I am. Wherever I am, love is.

There is only love.

Comments in 2012: Back in 1986 I did have some experiential understanding of this mystical state, but the state was largely disembodied, though I didn't realize this at the time. Now I understand "There is only love" as a way of expressing a state available to some human beings, a state that is merely one of many significant states. The statement is not TRUE in some absolute, final way. Indeed, its insistent non-dualism is FALSE in so far as it excludes statements expressing experiences that are dualistic: (i) experiences of some reality as evil, and other reality as good (love/God) (ii) experiences of one's body as physical and of God as non-physical UNTIL one embodies God.

The following poem, for which I composed some Rachmaninov-style music, was written in 1997. It includes the central theme of my mystical proclamation in 1986: hosting God. But there is no indication that the “deeper union” includes any physical intimacy. And I’m clearly assuming that my “jointly” hosting with a soul-mate woman is required for my spiritual fulfilment. I still had much to learn!

TREASURE-GLORY

*I treasure you, so lovely, in my life.
I dive beyond your eyes into your soul.
And know again the truth for which I long:
That as in you, in me, resides our Goal –
The dazzling Treasure-Glory of our God.*

*What deeper union could there be for us
Than jointly hosting with divine delight
The awesome Guest who is our Host and Source
The radiant Dark our Origin in Light.
What more could we as human beings want?*

5. Reflections in July 2015 Concerning 1985 and 2012

Have I learned anything since 2012? In 2012 I was learning the centrality of being simply a living, breathing human being and in 2015 this is happening again. But I’ve learned a lot since 2012.

In 2015 I’ve been learning to let go of any attempt to “capture inspiration” like Robert Schmitz. Unlike me in

2012 I'm letting go of being "entirely in charge as if there were no Mystery". I've been learning a "method" to deepen my openness to Mystery. It's really a non-method! When I lie down I simply focus on my breathing. Then sometimes the music I happen to turn on moves into my body, bringing me into new life-renewing bodily-emotional-spiritual states. Or sometimes the focus on breathing moves me into a non-thinking-controlling state and I'm enabling me to glimpse Mystery in my body.

And I'm still learning how to "feel better" where "better" is an adverb describing a shift in my approach to each situation. This advice in the transcripts I first read in a book by Da Free John. So I may have brought his teaching into the message! But it still seems relevant. (Da Free John impressed me a lot in his early books, but he went on changing his name in increasingly grandiose ways. When he claimed to be not merely an avatar but the "last of the avatars", making himself superior to any past or future spiritual mentor, I could no longer listen to him.)

In July, 2015 is my "doing" confined to breathing? No, I'm physically active. Each day I'm walking (outside if weather permits) and doing various exercises to strengthen muscles that would otherwise weaken become atrophied, especially my quads and in my shoulders. This takes a lot of perseverance.

The other thing I'm "doing" is writing. In section VI of *New Grateful Reflections* I tried to explain why writing is still so important in my life. Not only does it boost my morale, but especially since October 19, 2011 I feel called to write up whatever new experiences and

reflections arise in my life – first in my ebook and now in continuity with the ebook.

When I try to talk to individuals I soon find I can't continue, not only because of my muffled hearing but also because I soon find myself unable to recall names. With very few exceptions fellow residents and staff are patient and gracious, so I do venture a few conversations, but only a few each day. But when I'm sitting at my computer I can take plenty of time, including time for breaks, and very slowly a few pages emerge – with correct names, crystal-clear and well organized. I need breaks because after a while I notice my focus is disappearing and I'm beginning to make mistakes. Sometimes the mistakes are merely typos, but sometimes I've deleted what I was writing! Some of you readers may find all this personal explaining quite irrelevant even if you're moving towards old age. But others may find it interesting and even illuminating.

FIFTH CHAPTER; MEETING MYSELF IN COLUMBIA IN 1987 AND LATER

About 2000 years ago I was “Poco”, leader of an aboriginal community ago in Peru or Columbia. Section 1 is the story of how I became aware of this.

1 “Poco”

In 1987, spontaneously following instructions from Spirit, I travelled by myself to the little island of San Andres – part of Columbia, though considerably north of

it. Near the end of my week there, I rented a scooter and went to a spectacular tourist attraction, a “water-spout” caused by waves entering a cave in a cliff and creating an ongoing geyser. When I moved back from the cliff I realized that a nearby area was a “power-centre” where indigenous people had gathered for rituals (like some power-centres in Ontario that I had visited). When I moved on another fifty feet a life-changing past-life experience occurred. For several years previously I had been experiencing a shamanic presence who I called “Poco” as my special spirit-guide. On that day I realized that he was really me, a part of me that had split off from me about 2000 years ago.

Since that time “I” (the remaining part) had continued in various incarnations – some of which I had remembered – but Poco had remained outside the incarnating. Now I as Poco was remembering what happened when I was the leader of a very spiritually-powerful shamanic community somewhere in what is now Columbia or Peru. The community had split apart as various sub-leaders challenged Poco and each other. The conflict had even involved much killing. Poco felt so shattered and guilty that when he died he remained outside, in total spiritual isolation.

On that momentous day I realized that in this life Poco was now returning to connect again. Very reluctantly I realized that I was to become a leader of a spiritual community. In this calling I was to avoid the errors that Poco now acknowledged:

(i) the community had been hierarchical, but the new one was to be egalitarian in its leadership

(ii) women had been subordinate, but now must be peers

(iii) some women had been abused by male leaders (though not by Poco); this was not to be tolerated

(iv) individual participants had been placed on spiritual paths imposed by Poco and subordinate leaders; instead, they should be encouraged to uncover their own distinctive access to Spirit.

When I returned to Toronto, I told a few people what had happened. Over the next dozen years or so it encouraged me at times to be a “visionary” in the peer-group of two men and two women out of which emerged a community committed to healing the rifts between men and women and between the masculine and feminine dimensions within all of us.

From time to time I would be reminded that Poco was inside me as part of me, for I attributed some of the increasing spiritual resources within me to him. Also, I realized that I needed to avoid his mistakes – though I was already trying to avoid them before 1987. Since about 2000, when the “healing rifts” community began changing into more of a network than an institution, I rarely thought about Poco.

2. Poco Chose the Family into which I was born **(written in 2011)**

Very recently this changed radically. On February 25, 2011, a very gifted spiritual healer came to Toronto from Quebec province. While in Toronto she visited me. One thing she said stirred much meditative reflection in

me. She noted two tendencies within me: (i) I want to be within my body and (ii) I don't want to be within my body. This conflict was not news to me, but I had understood the first tendency as an ongoing personal decision on my part, especially since about 1980, not to let infantile traumas prevent me from becoming more embodied emotionally and spiritually. This seemed obvious to me.

A few days later, during a meditation, I became very aware of Poco and it was suddenly clear Poco had not incarnated within me in 1987 in San Andres, but sixty years earlier, as I emerged from my mother's womb. It was Poco who had deliberately chosen my family as the one into which he would be born, even though he must have realized, as I had, what traumatic horrors lay ahead! For sixty years he waited patiently for me to mature sufficiently for him to reveal himself to me as (part of) me! I felt, and still feel, very grateful to him for his patience, and – above all – for his bringing the energies of his “karmic-contract” commitment to embodiment to reinforce my own decision. Now, in 2011, he is enabling me to come into this world, into this body, in a newly-motivated way – very different way from 1927.

I also realize that Poco is grateful to me, for he has learned through me, in my life, much that he did not realize 2000 years ago. Indeed, I have drawn on spiritual resources not available to him, and although I have failed in important ways, I have approximated much that he wishes he had been and done. Indeed, he has experienced through me much that enables him to return to this embodied life, no longer traumatized by the destruction that was caused by his mistakes as leader.

Currently in meditation Poco and I surrender into Divine Love via Jesus, letting go of whatever separates us and sinking down into the soul that includes both of us, uniting without having to try to sort out which of our previous personalities to discard, which to retain, etc. etc. And as Poco-Don we are similarly surrendering into whatever processes of embodiment are possible and needed for this aging body.

3. Trying to Shed Poco's Guilt: Let Go of Him, Forgive Myself

I'm writing this on the evening of Monday, February 17, 2014.

As I left my session with Paul Pei on Saturday February 15, he suddenly said, apparently offering me a personal mantra, something like, "I don't need this itch"!

During these three days the flaming, painful rash and itch in my skin has covered my whole body, and my body-misery has been the worst yet. It's as if I were punishing myself. What's happening is an extreme version of far less intense itching. That itching was connected with feelings of guilt associated with trauma in infancy, guilt requiring self-forgiveness. What is happening now is also associated those feelings, but I've been wondering whether something else is at work.

While talking with Robin on Thursday February 13 I began wondering about Poco: Maybe his feelings of guilt are at work? I had forgotten that in 2011 I came to know

that he, not me, had chosen the trauma-laden family into which I was born. What I had not realized then was that his choice was shaped by his own immense guilt because his mistakes led to the violent dissolution of the community.

It's clear from what I wrote in Section #2 that Poco brought many esoteric powers to me when he returned in 1987, but I already had some, and new esoteric powers emerged in me. And I had by 2014 I've been enabled to love myself and forgive myself in very deep ways, moving beyond many constricting limitations. This had been helping Poco to change considerably, but recently, and perhaps since March, 2013, he "lost it". Why? I don't have to know the answer to this, but my hunch is that for various reasons I was exhausted in March. Perhaps I had been able to ignore this as I focused on completing my ebook. In general, I had been "carrying" Poco in his attempt to live bodily in this world, where he had caused so much suffering. When I couldn't "carry" him, he reverted to living a trauma-dominated existence.

Did this mean that he will leave my body on his own initiative? No. For this evening it became clear to me that I needed to ask him to leave my body. He and his guilt and the flaming itch can gradually be breathed-out. This evening I'm feeling a new clarity and a new hope. I'm trying to find confidence about this. I'm feeling regret that the momentous breakthrough in 1987 has not turned out. It had seemed significant, part of the meaning of this life. Now it's postponed indefinitely.

The intuitions that have been coming to me this evening and even some back in 2011 imply that my

ongoing identity as me is in some ways NOT Poco and HIS previous incarnations. Rather, I existed prior to Poco, but not as one of HIS previous incarnations. How can this be so? It's important not to become lost in reincarnational speculation!

What does matter is my ongoing experience of me as decision-maker and agent and recipient of help from spirits and from people.

4. Meditating with Robin Noya Concerning Poco

On Thursday, February 20, 2014 during his visit, I asked Robin Noya for help and counsel in relation to shedding Poco. I'm writing this up on Friday evening, February 21.

I told him how I had scared myself on Wednesday evening. In the past I had sometimes become an instrument for the risen Jesus in his "Shamanic Warrior" persona, evicting an evil spirit from this earthly realm where he/she was invading someone – usually someone who had contacted me for such help, but also on a few occasions where the spirit was invading me. The fierce presence of Jesus would either terrify the evil spirit into leaving this realm or, if that didn't work, shatter (but not destroy) him/her. On Wednesday evening, as I felt Poco continuing to occupy my body with his guilt-filled, self-punishing presence, I began to summon Jesus to evict Poco. Immediately I realized that this would bring great harm to ME!

I also told Robin that his way of helping people invaded by an evil spirit didn't include such a violent approach. Rather, he helped clients to change in ways that reduce their vulnerability to the particular invader. My situation with Poco seemed to need such an approach.

Robin went to my feet and as he held them he told me that he was drawing deeply on energies in the earth. He invited me to draw these energies too, supported by the energies coming through him. I asked the risen Jesus and St. Francis to help me with this. Together we guided these energies up through my body, carrying Poco up and out through my shoulders&neck and my crown. Since he is not grounded, but has been relying on me to carry him, he is having to leave my body and also this realm. There are spirits devoted to taking care of him who are receiving him and helping him to begin making the changes necessary before he can - eventually - incarnate again.

Robin also vigorously massaged my upper back, shoulders&neck and upper chest (to stimulate my breathing).

Before Robin left it did seem to me that Poco had left, though some of his energies remained in me. Since Thursday afternoon I've repeated the meditation I learned from Robin. It seems to help in reducing my awareness of the energies, but the intensity of my flaming itch all over my body has continued, especially in my shoulders&neck and my crown.

5. Journalling, February 28, 2014

Since February 21 I've had a session with Paul Pei and also a treatment by Robin, both of which involved vigorous massage to loosen my joints (shoulders, elbows, knees, spinal cord, which has been becoming even more rigid and which is closely associated with the flaming itch/rash.

Some of Poco's energies remain in my body, but yesterday I was guided (probably by the risen Jesus) into a meditation that seems to clear some of these energies and my own self-disturbing energies stirred up in this crisis. I did it three times yesterday. I draw earth energies into my feet, shedding harmful energies there. Then into my feet&ankles, shedding there. Then into my feet&ankles and shins/calves. shedding there. Then up to knees, and so on, eventually to my crown.

It's become clear that the current crisis, much simplified, involves a big shift in response to my life-long reluctance to be here at all. These days I'm very embodied and this involves more bodily-emotional suffering than I've ever had (a flaming, itchy rash al over my body and powerfully incapacitating exhaustion in body and mind) but also at times a very sweet surrender and light-hearted joy.

In August, 2015 it's clear to me that the itch and exhaustion did not come mainly from my shedding Poco. And they still go on, along with more surrender and joy!

MORE JOY IN 2015: POSTSCRIPT #1

The main thing I've been learning in 2015 is that I've been relying on my spiritual gifts so as to feel I'm in control. I need to stop doing this. One way is to stop listening to favorite cds that I know fosters such-and-such a bodily-emotional-spiritual state. Instead I've been randomly turning on the radio; sometimes I'm surprised into joy by what I hear. I've also been learning to let myself be helped by spiritually-gifted friends and by "ordinary" people who bring the simple gift of kindness.

In my 2013 ebook I described my initiation into experiencing orgasmic energy at various spiritual-sexual workshops. I described a workshop in Janury, 2012 where I experienced the healing powers of orgasmic energy within my own body and also as the staff led participants in sending the energy out into the world. This was especially significant for me since orgasms don't have to include a hardened penis or ejaculation. (For many years I was impotent and I still am!)

In particular my 2013 ebook included a description of an encounter with a new friend at the January workshop. As our chakras merged we became light-hearted, laughing playfully in the joy of each surprising moment. We both knew that we were not becoming lovers. We were simply enjoying the other's pleasure as we enjoyed our own. Both of us had matured so we brought minimal manipulation or hidden agenda.

In July, 2015 I received an email from her. She would be visiting me on August 6. When she arrived I was

delighted to see her again, for we had become good friends as we corresponded on email. I was open to whatever might happen but I had not experienced an orgasm since the late spring of 2013, when my severe health problems began, so I was not expecting what happened. But in her presence I soon felt orgasm arising again! We did not need to undress. We simply lay down beside each other and my body began to shudder and sound with pleasure and joy. And I could feel the orgasmic energies surging through my body, reducing the pain in my body!

I'm deeply grateful to her for her very special gift. And I'm aware of mystery in her and in myself. I'm making a new kind of "progress". I'm learning that as I let go of my need to be in control I can live in a wonderful world where I can be surprised by joy!

I'm learning openness to receive help from spiritually-gifted friends and from "ordinary" people who provide kindness.

And I'm also learning to confine my "deeds" each day mostly to simple physical actions such as

- (i) relaxing my mid-back as I breathe out or
- (ii) walking or
- (iii) doing strengthening exercises,

while trusting Spirit or positive spiritual presences to do for me whatever they decide I need.

My "deeds" also include connecting briefly with anyone (whether residents or staff or taxi-drivers) whom

I happen to meet. I bring to them whatever playful, light-hearted, joyful humor seems spontaneously appropriate in the moment. Sometimes I sense that none is appropriate so I silently wish them well. Sometimes, however I'm feeling too anxious and agitated and prickly to be positively present; my task then is to avoid privately shaming and rejecting myself by finding forgiveness!

MORE JOY IN 2015: POSTSCRIPT #2

Introduction

On September 26, 2015, more joy came to me. It was not from a physical and energetic encounter with a sexual-spiritual friend . It was from watching TV: Pope Francis in USA on CNN. What I saw glued me to my TV for most of the day – unprecedented!

Why and how did he matter to me? I grew up in the United Church of Canada, was ordained in 1955 and I'm still listed as a retired minister in that denomination. I reject the infallibiity of papal pronouncements *ex cathedra* and the authoritarian dogmas and structures that pervade the Roman Catholic Church. I loathe its attempts to cover up continued sexual violations of children by Catholic priests.

Yet in my ebooks I've reported many experiences that indicate my affinity with him. Although I do not want to BECOME a Roman Catholic, I can understand why people REMAIN Roman Catholic despite the Church's moral failures.

Pope Francis and St. Francis of Assisi

Why does Pope Francis matter to me? First of all there's his choice of Francis as his papal name, identifying St. Francis as his mentor. In my 2015 ebook I described my life-changing visit to Assisi in 2003. As soon as I arrived there St. Francis took over my life while I was there. I was aware of his distinctive presence guiding and inspiring my response to paintings of events in his life and to sites made sacred by him centuries ago.

When I visited one sacred site what happened around me was something very dear to Pope Francis' heart. At first when I arrived I was disappointed , for the site seemed to be merely a tourist centre. Dozens of buses had brought hundreds of people. Soon, however, I realized that what was going on was "sacred" in a different way: it was wondrously filled with merciful love. The buses had brought hundreds of people from the margins of conventional society, people whose value was minimal if measured by their

contribution to the Gross National Product in 2003.. They were crippled or deformed or chronically ill; some adults had Downes Syndrome and some seniors had dementia.

Each was at the site to receive healing of body and soul and each was accompanied by a volunteer looking after them. The volunteers did not merely help individuals to move around and provide protection from mishaps. I could see that each volunteer brought compassionate empathy and respectful appreciation. The whole site was filled with deep caring. I was deeply moved. I said to myself *"The Roman Catholic Church at it very best"*.

I assume that the event was organized by a group within the Roman Catholic Church and that the volunteers were all Roman Catholic. I also assume that they understood their service in relation to Matthew 25.31-46. In Mt.25. 40 Jesus famously says, *"Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren you did it to me"*. Probably the people who were brought to Assisi were all Roman Catholic, but the scriptural passage has been interpreted within the Church in such a way that *"my brethren"* I can include non-Christians. This kind of inclusive serving is emphasized by Pope Francis in his talks and in his personal service to each human being.

"We are Family"

On CNN viewers saw a celebration of Inclusiveness in a song "*We are Family*" at a Roman Catholic event organized to welcome Pope Francis to the Archdiocese of Boston. The song invited Roman Catholics to expand their sense of "WE" beyond the particular family to which they belong (parents, children etc.) and beyond the family of Roman Catholics, to identify as part of the HUMAN family. This was not new for Pope Francis. Early in his papacy he had broken from tradition. Instead of washing the feet of eminent Catholic clerics during Holy Week he visited prisoners, including a Muslim. So it was not a complete surprise that during his time in the USA his speeches in prestigious settings were often immediately followed by personal service to the sick or the marginalized. And in any meeting with an "ordinary" human being he connected with them primarily as simply a fellow human being.

Clearly he encourages not only Roman Catholics but every human being to realize that we all belong to one human family. Also, he seems to be urging each of us to prioritize this awareness over any approach that distinguishes humankind into US and THEM. Most approaches do: US is mostly "Good Guys" and THEM is "BAD GUYS –

sometimes not bad but merely strange, sometimes not only bad but IRRETRIEVABLY BAD.

Pope Francis' emphasis is on one human family. For him it is not just an intellectual theory. Some people who love humanity in the abstract don't connect with any particular individual, but Pope Francis brings his heart.

One theme throughout my life has been gradually learning how to heart-connect with individual people. During my final years I've been enabled to make some progress, a progress that includes becoming able to recognize and appreciate Pope Francis' simplicity. TV documentaries convey an impression that decades ago he was a harshly rigid church functionary. If this is true, his transformation required much courage and humility, and I admire him for it.

Because he is a pope, indeed an unusually charismatic pope, the events during his days in the USA drew millions of people to see him, plus millions more on TV. So he could use the events to encourage people to set aside their differences enough to find some human solidarity.

I felt confirmed by him because I've tried to provide opportunities for inclusiveness in various ways. In both ebooks I reported how I promoted

events that enable people to let go of their assumption that differences among human beings are beyond reconciliation. One example was in the mid-1980s when I co-lead a movement of a million Canadians to celebrate the United Nations International Day of Peace. For a moment individuals could unite for peace, for during the silence they can “do” whatever feels appropriate. Some can pray for peace, but others may hope for peace and renew their commitment to work for peace.

When I’ve presided at weddings and a funerals in recent decades I’ve always included a time of silence during which participants in the ritual can “do” something for the wedding couple, even if it doesn’t fit the ritual. This is especially appropriate multi-cultural Toronto. I believe that the bride and groom or the main mourners should decide on the ritual, but everyone present should have an opportunity to support the couple or the mourners in a way that feels authentic. It’s unlikely that Pope Francis would advocate such a policy for the Roman Catholic Church, but , but my impression is that he would view it as something positive in my very different situation.

Section 1 of chapter 1 of my 2013 ebook is entitled “*Including All Humankind*”. There I noted that as a child of 10 and in my early twenties I

gradually became aware of "*WE HUMANS*", developing a sense of "We're all in this together". And in section 4, entitled "*Changing Images of the Risen Jesus*" I report my encounter with a South African shaman, Mandaza and his grieving outburst "*Oh what terrible things WE HUMANS do to each other*". In his grieving he identifies with both victim and victimizer, both Holocaust-Jew and Nazi exterminator.

Within Christianity "Truth&Reconciliation" circles have been organized by Archbishop Tutu in South Africa (and recently in Canada). Also Jean Vanier's "L'Arche" communities have helped mentally-challenged adults become receive empathetic care from volunteers who in turn learn how to receive love from those they care for. I draw on both Tutu and Vanier in section 4 of chapter 1. I'm sure that Pope Francis is in tune with them.

Sexuality and Spirituality

When I discussed the song "*We are Family*" I didn't mention that the three-women group who sang was called "Sister Sledge" and that they also danced the song. They were quite sexy and in their joyful song-and-dance they presented themselves as if to say "*This is who we are; respond however you want*". Although they were clearly not trying to

seduce us, they were inviting us to be less uptight. I assume that the Pope or his staff okayed both the song and Sister Sledge.

In both ebooks I explained how and why integrating spirituality and sexuality became very important for me. It is a way to access bodily healing and bodily pleasure-joy. My sexual traumas during infancy and childhood needed the transformation that tantric awareness can bring. And I'm convinced that some men and women who suffer from such trauma (or from other traumas that cause Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) would benefit from such an approach.

I'm also convinced that many individuals (and societies) would benefit from learning how to connect with others intimately while respecting their freedom and dignity. There is a life-force of orgasmic energy in human beings with which people can be enlivened and softened if they learn how to access it on their own or with others.

Divine and Human Judging

Pope Francis startled the Roman Church and the world when someone challenged him to judge a homosexual priest. His response to the priest was. *"Who am I to judge you"*. His version of Christianity is non-judgmental, appealing to the best in people

of all faiths and of none. In both of my ebooks I explore issues that arise in me when I find myself judging myself and others. His emphasis on forgiving people is heartening for me.

But in the words of scripture and of the Holy Communion God is depicted as extremely judgmental. Indeed, when Pope Francis calls us to do works of mercy he ignores extremely judgmental verses in Matthew 25. 31-46! Jesus is portrayed as summoning people to do works of mercy; but if they don't they will be punished: *"Depart from me, ye cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mt. 25 verse 41)*. Pope Francis is not alone in not mentioning the threat of hell. Many contemporary Christians do so.

Endless torture in hell has moved many Christians to leave traditional Christianity. This outrageously disproportionate punishment depicts God as worse than even than the most arbitrary, vindictive and sadistic human being.

Such a punishment is central in traditional Christian doctrine. It underlies how Jesus' death on the Cross is understood in the words of Holy Communion/Mass and of Scripture : Jesus had to "take the rap" for the sins of all human beings. The only way that human beings can avoid hell is by

believing that divine forgiveness of our sins comes through Jesus' sacrifice. Such a belief, associated with the belief that Jesus was both human and divine, allegedly enables Christians to receive eternal life and to avoid hell.

In general, being punished for not-doing works of mercy seems less inappropriate than being punished for not-believing a doctrine. But if the punishment is endless torture I must reject the "God" who imposes it.

In my 2015 ebook (Chapter 2 of Part 2), I reflect on my own experiences, distinguishing between deeds or omissions for which I feel remorse and for which I feel only regret. More generally I reflect concerning judging myself and others and forgiving myself and others. Some readers may resonate with my experiences and others, whose experience has been different, may not.

Pope Francis Humanizes People

But I must continue my journal concerning Pope Francis on CNN. On September 26 the power of his simply-human way of connecting with people was evident. This was strikingly so in his effect on a CNN host. As the day went on she dropped her public image. Previously when I had seen her on

CNN she always maintained her public image as an impartial, professional reporter. But this day she confided something very personal and private. She blurted out that she had left the Roman Catholic Church but now she was so heartened by Pope Francis' warmth that she would return!

This response from a TV journalist was typical of what we saw on the faces of people in the crowds. Pope Francis' humility concerning his own elevated status and his sense of others as fellow-humans was an invitation to humanize what was going on. Whatever our religion or irreligion, our low or high status, we all matter simply because we are human beings.

Climate Change

His challenge to all of us to do whatever we can to reduce human contributions to destructive climate change was central in his speeches in the USA. Previously he had published a book on this topic, but he personally presented his message on September 26. I was not surprised by his deference towards scientists and scientific evidence, for the Vatican has had its own centre for many years. What is new is Pope Francis' insistence that not only Roman Catholics but all human beings have an urgent moral responsibility to work together to prevent catastrophe.

His call for action was directed not only to individuals, but also to governments. He spoke at the United Nations, Congress and the White House, so he plunged into politics, especially American politics. Most Republican spokesmen deny human involvement in climate change! But although Pope Francis is *gentle as a dove* in his encounters with most individuals he is also *wise as a serpent* in dealing effectively with powerful politicians and governments. His stance boosts my hopes for success in time to prevent big-scale human suffering and damage to our eco-system. He has unusual influence. And his gentle, embodied wisdom concerning the inherent value of each individual human being energizes his message to leaders of big human institutions.

During most of my life ecological concerns arose occasionally, but they were not central. I discuss this in my 2015 ebook in the section on self-deception concerning society and nature. More recently, however, protecting the earth and all its creatures has new priority for me. I'm doing all I can at this stage of my life, including signing online petitions.

Is the Good News in the Christian message mainly about life after death or about this life on earth? Pope Francis' emphasis is more on the

latter. This enables him to enlist human beings generally in the cause to combat climate change. Concerning life after death religions differ and agnostics doubt whether there is any. But people everywhere can agree that human welfare includes some necessities (food, water, shelter, basic health care etc.).

Unfortunately many institutions subordinate even such minimal concerns to concerns about their own advantage . Big Pharmacy has manifested this in its devotion to extremes of profit over any humanitarian concerns. So too has the Roman Catholic Church in its refusal to curb sexual abuse of children by its priests. Its policy under the previous two popes was to cover up widespread sexual abuse of children while not preventing priests from going on doing it. At all costs the Church's divine authority must not be tarnished!

Pope Francis is challenging such long-standing attitudes within the Church. Personally, I believe he is doing his best to reduce clergy abuse of children, and to foster a more humble and and less fanatical image of the Church. But although his best is wondrous, we can't be sure that he will prevail. There is much opposition within the Curia, the Vatican bureaucracy. Leaks to the press reveal much infighting there.

Pope Francis enjoys and reveres children

During his visit to the USA perhaps his most endearing moments were his times with children. Indeed, his spontaneous, joyful, and playful energies when he was with children continued elsewhere, turning his travels through the crowds into celebrations.

His affectionate, empathetic delight as he connects with children seems very natural. (He's clearly different from many politicians who kiss parents' babies to gain another vote!). But in addition to being "natural" in the sense of congenial to him as a human being it is more. It is also an expression of his spiritual transformation by Jesus, who viewed children as first in God's Kingdom on earth.

Readers of my ebooks will be familiar with my own aspiration towards becoming more childlike , more innocent and more joyful in the moment. Also I've hoped I could become more able to connect in that way with children, whether my own or not my own.

On both counts my lack can be excused to some extent. Because of my traumas as an infant I never had a childhood in which I enjoyed play. So I've little experience to help me to empathize with

playful children. And in the 1950s and 1960s I lived within the expectations of the current culture back then concerning professional men, so I was not involved with my sons as I now wish I had been. In spite of this, however, their parenting has all been more engaged than mine was. They've learned from my mistakes. I'm much relieved by this.

During this century one spiritual practice has helped me towards experiencing the world like an open child. On my wall I have a copy of an iconic fresco by Fra Angelica. It depicts Jesus as Holy-Child Earth-Ruler. As I contemplate the fresco I'm not hoping to have an encounter with him as I did 60 years ago with the Transfigured Jesus (another Angelica fresco). Rather, I'm hoping to view the world through the eyes of Jesus as Divine Child. This enables me to view the world less through the traumatized eyes of my actual infancy, which still influences my eyes today.

Saint Teresa of Avila and Embodying God

As I've been editing this Postscript in early November I've been thinking about Pope Francis' this-wordly emphasis I found myself thinking about something that is for me even more basic: my own commitment to embodying God. This commitment has shaped my spiritual path.

As I considered this commitment I was moved to re-read what I wrote about St. Teresa of Avila in my 2013 ebook (Chapter 3, Section 4). She has been an important influence in deepening my commitment. Decades ago I read her spiritual autobiography "*Interior Castle*". In 2012 she suddenly inhabited my body, taking me through a process towards embodying God.

(1) St. Teresa's Book

In her book she describes seven levels of "Mansions" which she experienced in relation to God. The fifth stage is mystical union with God. Today it is often labelled "*pure consciousness*", for in contrast with all other states it is empty. Yet afterwards one realizes that one has united with God as featureless Mystery, beyond this world and any world. In classical Hinduism this state is the final one, but for Teresa it is only the fifth.

In my 2013 ebook I described some meditations and even some music that can open us up to the possibility of experiencing a momentary glimpse of this state. One way to such a glimpse is by becoming deeply grateful that I and the world exist rather than not-exist.

When Jesus told his disciples *In my Father's house there are many mansions*" he was referring to life after death, but Teresa is talking about mansions as stages that can take place here on earth before we die. And in her seventh, ultimate stage she is very active in THIS life on earth. The fifth stage is important to her but it is merely a preparatory stage.

The sixth stage draws on the access to divine power opened up by the fifth, so a person has new visions and charisma. Divine knowing replaces divine unknowing. But the person also suffers much affliction, both from outside and from within. Much testing and training and travail has to happen before a person can become God's active instrument in this world in the seventh, ultimate stage.

(2) St. Teresa Drops In

I never thought that Teresa would some day influence me by dropping in on me. But that's what she did! I now quote from my 2013 ebook:

Last night, just as I turned off the TV to prepare for going to bed, I felt a strong presence at my crown energy-centre. The presence was clearly feminine, but it took a while to discern who it was: St. Teresa of Avila..

Next morning in meditation she was still in me. She began by instructing me not to welcome any of the spiritual presences that Jesus was then regularly screening or selecting for my physical healing. She wanted to work only with Jesus within me, and not for my healing but for my transformation.

Sometimes during meditation in the past I have felt heavy and physical and bound to earth. This morning I felt this more than ever before. My whole body felt like a “lumpy sack” collapsed on my bed, totally unable to “soar”. I realized that what St. Teresa and Jesus were doing within me was focused on my embodiment of the Divine, intensifying it more than ever before. I also seemed to be feeling more clearly than ever before the achiness that pervades my aging body. I could not reduce this awareness in any way that had previously “worked”: distraction or dissociation or spiritual flight.

When as usual my friend Robin Noya came today for lunch, ending with a meditation together, he was for the first time guided to sit alongside me where I lay on my bed, holding my hand to his heart and resting his hand on my heart. I immediately realized that my heavy bodily state had frightened me more than I had let myself feel.

This human connecting with him would help me find some calm. It soon did. But something else was happening as well. His words went beyond my awareness of my aging body, calling on me to let go of mental assumptions concerning this. Instead I needed to allow myself to realize that a deeply-transformative process was going on, one that could enable me to become much more actively engaged in life.

As St. Teresa grew older, her mystical connection with the Mystery enabled her to initiate ever so much: founding convents, challenging civil authorities and the pope, etc. etc.! My new beginning would be very small-scale in comparison, but momentous for me.

After about twenty minutes in meditation, I felt St. Teresa at my crown again and realized that she would soon be leaving my body, which had been feeling less heavy as Robin challenged me to co-operate in the transformation. When she left, there was some increased physical pain across the whole top of my head, as if a hole were being sealed over. After a short while, this eased. (End of my Entry in 2013 ebook chapter 3 section 4).

At the time I supposed that Robin's assurance that I would be "*more actively engaged in life*" would include some improvement in my physical

health, which of course did not happen. Today, November 2, 2015, I realize that I had never attended to what St. Teresa said about the sixth stage. It includes not only wonderful new spiritual gifts but also afflictions, including physical illness,. And I realize that the sixth stage is what I've been mainly in for six years! I probably won't be into the seventh stage before I die, but this doesn't matter. I'm not St. Teresa! What matters in embodying God is being open to mystery and Mystery, allowing my life each day to be as sacred and as creative and as loving as possible. St. Teresa provides one framework within to understand my life, but I need to be open to whatever experiences arise each day.

This openness can facilitate gifts from Spirit and spirits. On several days at the end of October and the beginning of November I was given much. I experienced being surrounded and pervaded by the energies of flowing water as I lay still and as I moved about. A similar experience had occurred on May 11, 2015 when I happened to hear the first five minutes of Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloe* on radio. Both in May and recently the experience continued as I washed dishes and prepared food in my kitchen while feeling much pain. And this evening (November 2) it's even continuing as I write! I'm becoming actively engaged in my life as it actually IS!

**My path and my understanding of my path
continue to unfold and unravel in new-and-old
ways, accompanied by experiences new-and-old
And I continue to be grateful that both I and this
world exist at all!**

