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Mexico's Prison Saint

The Story of Mother Antonia

Where Are the Women?
Beyond the Divine Feminine

Ken Wilber & Andrew Cohen

We Don't Have Time to "Be Here Now"

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Andrew Cohen

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Robert Heinzman

Managing Editor

Wren Bernstein

Senior Editors

Carter Phipps Jessica Roemischer Elizabeth Debold

Associate Editors Ross Robertson

Maura R. O'Connor Tom Huston

Copy Editor Ellen Daly

Creative Director Will Rogers

Art Director

Mary Herrmann

Associate Designers Paul Bloch Nathan Del Signore David Grev

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Laura Hartzell Fred Macri

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Advertising Sales

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Media Relations

Hope Cohen

Volunteers

Angela Boto Maya Bobrowska David Marshall Leslie Revnolds Brian Rittenhouse

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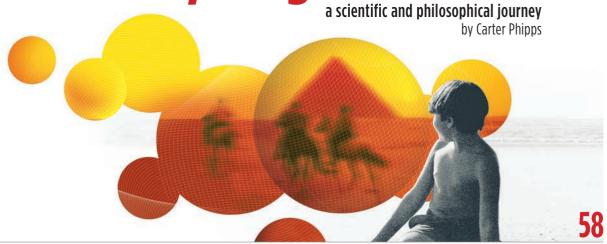
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SPECIAL death, rebirth and everything in between



With everyone and her mother claiming to have been Cleopatra in a past life, the New Age has given reincarnation a bad name. But what if there were scientific evidence for this ancient idea? In a unique exploration, WIE travels far beyond the boundaries of the physical world, uncovering groundbreaking research that will forever change the way you look at life, death, and the mystery of what comes next.







WHO REINCARNATED AS WHOM?

Good spiritual teachers are notoriously hard to find. Fortunately, some of the best seem intent on coming back to help, again and again and again . . . by Tom Huston



DO ANIMALS HAVE SOULS?

Foxes holding funerals? Wolves practicing aikido? Cows reaching enlightenment? Spinning tales of animal lore and legend and reporting back from the controversial edges of scientific research, WIE investigates the deeper dimensions of consciousness in the world of animalkind.

by Ross Robertson





TO BE SOULFUL, YOU HAVE TO FLOW

An interview with Michael Beckwith and Rickie Byars-Beckwith We all know that great musicians like Ray Charles and John Coltrane had soul. But what does that really mean? In this freewheeling conversation, the charismatic leaders of the Agape International Spiritual Center attempt to pin down this elusive human virtue. by Andrew Cohen

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Andrew Cohen and Ken Wilber

Recently, spiritual teacher Andrew Cohen and spiritual philosopher Ken Wilber took to the stage to explore the future of enlightenment—and field a variety of questions from the audience—in their first-ever public dialogue.



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The Incredible Story of a Modern-Day Saint

Thirty years ago, Mother Antonia left behind her life as a mother of seven in Beverly Hills to care for thousands of inmates within the hellish confines of a Mexican prison—the place, she says, that "freed her." by Maura R. O'Connor

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Where are the Women? Part III Beyond the Divine Feminine

Are women morally—and spiritually—superior to men? In the third article of her series, Debold challenges readers to question whether the so-called Sacred Feminine can truly help women take the next step forward in their collective evolution.

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The Only Solid Ground in the Universe

by Andrew Cohen



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EVOLVING OUR ETHICS

I have been reading What Is Enlightenment? for over five years now, and this last issue contains statements on morality and ethics that I feel are particularly important and seldom heard. In the context of spiritual evolution, the focus of WIE's work, it is easy to get carried away by the metaphysical elegance of combining the notions of evolution (primarily a Western, scienceoriented concept) and spirituality (more central in traditional Eastern thought). In amalgamating these two disparate fields of human endeavor, I feel that a vacuum has developed in certain areas—particularly ethics, which has been approached rather differently in the two domains we are now bringing together.

Traditional Western religion is largely dualistic, relying on the authority of codes of law propounded by the prophets and worked into the secular legal system. These laws were assumed to be universal, objective, and systematically applicable. On the other hand, the Indian religious tradition has a robust core of nondualism, which supports the idea that as one evolves spiritually, one will intuitively know how to behave appropriately and ethically, even if not conforming to the rules and regulations that guide the lives of the "less evolved." Indeed, it was to such evolved souls, rather than to legal

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professionals, that the culture turned for the propounding and interpreting of social laws. To make sure that the "wise" were really wise, the system relied on a huge network of social and other distinctions intended to filter out charlatans

As we begin to examine and even challenge the presuppositions and objective safeguards of the Western system, we are opening ourselves up to the difficulties inherent in the Eastern system's reliance on the subjective evaluations of "the wise." This is of particular concern in the West, where we lack the traditional Eastern social safeguards. To begin with, can we really know who the "wise" are without being wise ourselves? By what criteria would we judge, in any case? On the other hand, many Westerners are all too ready to abandon the Western notion of morality entirely (answerability to an accepted, universal code of behavior). In this context, the call for a more explicit morality, particularly as voiced by Jason Hill and Andrew Cohen, is very welcome. Professor Hill calls for a recognition of moral hierarchy, acknowledging that some are more morally developed than others, and the ability (so sorely lacking in the West) to submit to their authority—the quintessence of the Eastern view, as far as I can see. Andrew, for his part, calls for a reembrace of the old-fashioned Western virtues of honor, dignity, respect, propriety, and loyalty to the best part of ourselves, which he rightly holds essential to true spiritual growth and evolution—and which I feel, in our context, are valid measures of the very "moral authority" proposed by Professor Hill.

It seems that we must make efforts on two fronts—to retain the best of our own "objective" Western tradition while recognizing that our "individuality" is not cast in concrete and may benefit from openness to the more subjective qualities that distinguish a truly evolved human being. This project is like rubbing your tummy and patting your head at the same time! We need more dialogue about it,

and also objective studies on just what constitutes moral behavior and how it impacts the individual and society. It is highly dangerous to abandon our Western objectivity entirely (which I think may be at the root of much of the silliness of the New Age), but it is just as problematical not to take the plunge into the much more fluid, subtle, and ultimately tricky waters of "spiritual" subjectivity. Working this out is going to be quite a project!

Sister Gayatriprana

Hollywood, CA

BAD HABIT

As a member of a religious congregation very committed to both religion and spirituality, I am offended by the cover of your magazine that has a woman with half religious habit and half recreation garb. I think you could have gotten your point across without reference to the garb of a woman religious. That kind of dress is very outdated and does not speak of 21st-century religion or 21st-century spirituality. There are overlaps and distinct differences between the two, and your cover does not address the issue for a 21st-century milieu.

Marilyn

via email

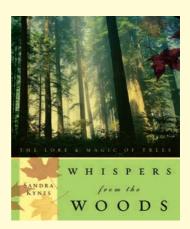
AUTHOR APPRECIATION

I cannot thank you enough for the opportunity to appear in WIE, and for your review of my book, Brain & Belief, by Carter Phipps. While Carter thinks the book highly dogmatic (in the strain of materialism), he gave a careful review of it that was true to the text (which is a bit dogmatic) and true to the majority of readers of WIE. I thoroughly understand his critiques and consider them to be fair and accurate for someone using a different set of assumptions and "organizing principles," and I'm honored to have the book reviewed in a magazine for which I have such a great deal of respect.

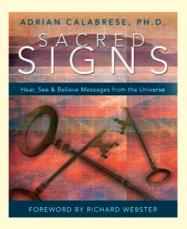
John McGraw

via email

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letters continued

WIE'S WAR AGAINST NONDUALISM

"Not Just a Book Review"—you've got that right. How about "the shameful trashing of an ally in the quest for clarity on the leading edge of the evolution of consciousness"? I refer to The Translucent Revolution by Arjuna Ardagh, review by Tom Huston. Nine pages is a lot of magazine to devote to a view you find fault with. The worst part of WIE's tediously unending editorial war against the nondualist view is your arguing against a position you only pretend to understand. As this issue sits on my coffee table, I'm waiting for my disappointment to subside so that I can look forward to the next one. But I'm not so sure that WIE is as committed to "evolution" as I once thought.

P.J. Reece

Vancouver

KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK

I greatly appreciated Tom Huston's "Not Just a Book Review" of Arjuna Ardagh's *The Translucent Revolution*. In particular, I enjoyed the final paragraph. The article was light, informative, and wonderfully unbiased. I now have a deep respect for Tom's skill in writing. He had me convinced he was a believer, right up to the final paragraph (which, incidentally, shocked me into fits of laughter). Keep up the good work, Tom, and please don't ever become stingy with your opinions!

James Ramsey

Denver, CO

SIMPLY A SHAME

I was surprised by the first sentence of Ross Robertson's "Ultimate Black Belt Test": "All too often in our postmodern world, traditional character virtues like humility, integrity, and self-discipline have given way to self-acceptance, selfimportance, and self-indulgence." To include self-acceptance in the company of self-importance and self-indulgence shows a lack of understanding and supports harmful cultural mores as old as the country and older. Self-acceptance can free someone to achieve and take risks that critical self-judgments were preventing. I think it is simply a shame to mislead people who are looking for help.

Linda Levv

via email

THE NEW AXIS OF HISTORY

The philosopher Karl Jaspers expounded the concept of the Axial Age in his 1977 book The Origin and Goal of History. The term denotes an extraordinary era, peaking between the sixth and third centuries BCE, in which a significant number of enlightened sages and illumined teachers emerged worldwide, radically advancing human self-understanding and its cultural expression. In India, the Upanishads were written. Zarathustra brought forth Zoroastrianism in Persia. Taoism arose in China, thanks to Lao Tsu. Siddhartha Gautama began Buddhism. Several major Jewish prophets, notably Isaiah and Hosea, appeared. Athens and other Greek city-states produced Socrates, Plato, Pythagoras, and other philosopher-sages. The age can be regarded more broadly as a major development in human consciousness stretching from Akhnaton (c. 1400 BCE) to Christ, and including, in addition to those just named, Moses, Confucius, Vyasa, and Plotinus.

Like Karen Armstrong, I see contemporary history as another such turning point, a Second Axial Age. There have emerged in the last few centuries a remarkable number of spiritual teachers and elevated thought-leaders from all the sacred traditions and great world religions, and their collective effect is pointing humanity toward a profound and positive growth in consciousness. The teachers and thought-leaders of the Second Axial Age have elevated mass consciousness toward the possibility of enlightenment—something which has never before occurred in history. As the idea of enlightenment comes into the mainstream of popular culture, the evolution of human consciousness is accelerating; the average consciousness of humanity is being drawn upward by the advanced consciousness of the "growing tip." That growing tip consists of enlightened teachers, seers, saints, and sages such as Andrew Cohen, Adi Da, Ramakrishna, Ramana Maharshi, Paramahansa Yogananda, G.I. Gurdjieff, Baha'ullah, Akbar the Great, Meher Baba, J. Krishnamurti,

Neem Karoli Baba, Lama Govinda, D.T. Suzuki, Katagiri Roshi, Ahmet Kayhan, Hazrat Inayat Khan, Byron Katie, Chögyam Trungpa, and others too numerous to mention. Their influence is being marvelously extended by communications technology, a near-instant diffusion of knowledge compared to the rate of diffusion during the First Axial Age. It is a breathtaking vista to contemplate.

Although many people are writing and speaking about this vast process, Ken Wilber has been especially adept at articulating it in a clear, elegant, and comprehensive manner. His writings have brought together the wisdom of the sages and the enlightenment traditions and integrated it with the full spectrum of modern science, philosophy, psychology, and other aspects of global society, from business, economics, and politics to art and literature, while adding his own important insights. His unified theory of nature, culture, cosmos, and consciousness offers a powerful new paradigm for science and society alike—a worldview he calls Integralism. It is, I believe, the best guide to self- and societal unfoldment thus far in history. Therefore, I regard Ken Wilber as the primary voice of the Second Axial Age.

John White

Cheshire, CT

FAN MAIL

What a gorgeous essay by Jason Hill. He describes beautifully the dignity and deep humanity of the student-teacher relationship. WIE continues to provide ballast and sustenance in a world of increasing ephemera. You all do amazing work.

Carol Raphael

via email

Thank you for your magazine. I happened on it at a Whole Foods store. I have waited patiently for more than 20 years for some of the discussions recorded in *WIE*. You have opened my heart to learning again.

Mitch Curley

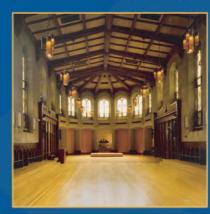
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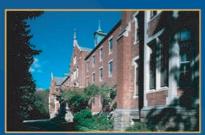
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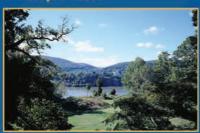




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ONE OF THE MOST REWARDING ASPECTS of work-

ing on this magazine over the years has been the enormous thrill of being immersed in an unending inquiry. The creation of each issue is a collective endeavor that always boils down to my partners in crime and I sitting in a circle and simply losing ourselves in passionate discussion and debate that can end up going in any direction imaginable. What makes all the hard work and stress worth it are the moments of creative synergy or "flow" that we have by now almost come to expect. For a long time, I've been calling this our "mind-meld." The fundamental ground rule for our work together is that this collective dynamic of ongoing edge-pushing and intersubjective inquiry must be constantly kept alive. Whenever it seems that we've all gotten too lost in our own particular parts of this process, I always bring us back together to make sure we are together!

An ongoing subject of our discussions has been the traditional notion of the human soul and its relevance in postmodern life. What part of the self is the soul, how does it develop, and where does it come from? This thread has inevitably led us again and again to the fascinating subject of reincarnation and what's technically known as "survival of bodily death." Senior editor Carter Phipps, who has been, ever since I met him about fourteen years ago, more fascinated by the esoteric dimensions of spirituality than the rest of us, was the natural candidate to take on this enormous and mysterious field. He became so intrigued by the realms beyond bodily existence he was learning about in his research that he boldly declared he needed to write not one but two feature pieces in order to do the subject justice! After a fierce wrestling match, he finally conceded to write only one but has not ceased to remind us that "there is much more to survival research than reincarnation. There's out-of-body experiences, near-death experiences, communication with mediums, the appearance of apparitions . . ." Okay, okay, okay one step at a time!

If you think survival research is a little too far out there, wait till you get to Ross Robertson's feature, "Do Animals Have Souls?" He'll tell you stories that will surely take your breath away and cause you to question the very meaning of the word *soul*. To bring this all back to earth, I had a lively, engaging, and uplifting conversation with my friends Reverend Michael Beckwith and his wife, *soul* singer Rickie Byars-Beckwith, about the intriguing question, "What does it mean to *have* soul?" And just to make sure none of us forgets the ultimate purpose of this kind of inquiry in *this* life, our "Beyond Limits" section features a moving piece by Maura O'Connor on the life and work of a rare soul indeed: living saint Mother Antonia.

Nothing we've ever published has generated more mail or caused more of a stir than Elizabeth Debold's ongoing series, "Where Are the Women?" I can't tell you how gratifying this is for Elizabeth and all of us, as the questions she raises have been a recurring and significant topic within our mind-meld for many years. Indeed, I first met Elizabeth when we interviewed her, as a prominent feminist and author, for our issue on "Women, Enlightenment, and the Divine Mother" almost ten years ago. Since then, she and I have had countless conversations about gender and spirituality, including our first published dialogue, "Liberation Without a Face," back in 1999. Her current series, of which Part Three is featured in this issue, has led to a recent lecture series, which by all indications may even ignite a revolution through inspiring women to think in radical new ways about women's spirituality and women's liberation.

Finally, speaking of our collective mind-meld, longtime editor Craig Hamilton recently decided to "leave the nest," as he put it, to pursue his own work in the fields of consciousness studies and media. We wish him well and look forward to seeing how all the individual and collective soul development he shared with us will bloom in his future career.

Andrew Cohen

Founder and Editor in Chief

pulse

catching the buzz from global leaders, thinkers, teachers, and mystics



I CANNOT TELL A LIE: GEORGE WASHINGTON SLEPT HERE

Speaking of reincarnation—who would have thought that America's founders would come back to lead the New Age? Well, Dr. Walter Semkiw, for one. In 2003, Semkiw, working with Kevin Ryerson, who channels the spirit guide **Ahtun Re**, wrote *Return* of the Revolutionaries. In it, he argues that many famous founding fathers and mothers have reincarnated as New Age icons in order to carry forward their work of social and spiritual transformation. Semkiw believes that Shirley MacLaine was Robert Morris, who financed the Revolutionary War effort; Neale Donald Walsch was William Walter, a Freemason and Boston minister in the late 1700s: and the list goes on and on. Semkiw himself claims to have been John Adams, whose then-wife Abigail is currently making another go-round as bestselling author Marianne Williamson.

Another New Age icon—Caroline Myss (Ben Franklin's wife Deborah, according to Semkiw)—has added fuel to the fire with a new book entitled An Autobiography of George Washington. That's right, autobiography. Myss is planning to publish George Washington's channeled life story—a story that he is said to have given to a well-respected vaudeville star, playwright, and spiritualist medium named Edith Ellis in 1944. Eerily, the book contains facts that historians had not yet uncovered when Washington bared his heart to Ellis. For example: He confessed that he would have caved in at Valley Forge when his men were reduced to cannibalism—information yet to be discovered in 1944—but a radiant angel appeared and assured him that the nation he was fighting to set free was destined to change the world. Myss, who discovered the manuscript twenty-three years ago, told Pulse, "Normally, I never tamper with this kind of stuff. But I just couldn't ignore this one. We are living in an atmosphere as volatile as when our forefathers and mothers were trying to bring forth a new beginning, a new nation, and a new spiritual paradigm, which is what America represented in 1776. This time it's global, and the stakes are higher, but the power of America's vision could have a real effect if we as a nation reconnect with that vision."

If the original G.W. has his way, maybe we'll also find it in our hearts to change his portrait on the dollar bill. Apparently, he always hated that picture (based on the famous painting by Gilbert Stuart)—he said it makes him look stiff.

HERE ARE THE WOMEN!

Last year, Microsoft manager Laurel Ross popped the big question to Ken Wilber at an Integral Institute leadership training. She asked him, "Where are all the integral women?" and the dialogue that ensued ended up on Integral Naked.com. This year she's joined with four high-powered Houston women to declare that "integral women are everywhere." Ross, Unity Church executive director **Rima Bonario**, leadership mayen Susan Lieberman, executive coach Judith O'Connor. and spirit-at-work consultant Cindy Wigglesworth argue that "integral women in the world are abundant but seem not to be visible" as leaders because they lead less out loud than men. Integral women leaders, they claim, don't toot their own horns. Ross's one-eighty on the "Where are the women?" question came about after WIE senior editor Elizabeth Debold wrote several articles exploring the question herself and calling for a new, evolutionary women's liberation. The five women take Debold to task, saying that they are seeking "HUMAN development," not a new feminism or women's liberation. (You'll find their full response at wie. org/women—and Debold's next installment discussing the responses to her articles appears in this issue.) "Traditional male/female labels lose usefulness at

higher stages of development," they believe, and rather than focusing on gender, they call us all to "get back to the bigger agenda—we have a planet to heal."

Could it be that "female labels" are helpful in getting to those higher stages of development? At the first-ever Women's Integral Practice Seminar held at Omega Institute last fall, the feminine was in abundance. In fact, psychotherapist and vocal artist Willow **Pearson** describes the event by saying, "She was born, and she's a girl." As she told Pulse, the integral girl was all about "honoring the feminine principle in practice. It came alive through the honoring of the sacred through dance and devotional singing." Pearson, the co-anchor and seminar curriculum manager of this gathering of seventy-five women, shared the lead with senior Zen student and conflict resolution pro Diane Hamilton, yogini and sacred movement specialist Sofia Diaz, and several others, including pioneering developmental psychologist Dr. Susanne Cook-Greuter. What's the next step? Well, according to Pearson, it's not about healing the planet, but about reclaiming the feminine face of our spiritual history. As she observes, "When it's missing, we fail to know who we are."

PLAY THAT JEWISH REGGAE, MON

Have you heard the one about the hip-hopping, beat-boxing, reggae-rapping Jew? His name is **Matisyahu**, and he may be the world's first Hasidic reggae superstar. Born Matthew Miller, this 26-year-old former Deadhead from White Plains, New York, came from a secular Jewish background but took his first steps onto the spiritual path while in high school, after realizing during a camping trip in Colorado's Rocky Mountains that "there is a G-d." Though he experienced moments of inspiration through his love of music, Miller didn't find his way until he met an old Hasidic Jew one day in a park in New York City. Eventually taking up the mystical mantle of a Hasid, Matthew Miller became Matisyahu Miller, and after going on a yearlong spiritual retreat to contemplate life in the light of his new religion, he decided to begin transmitting his religious passion to unsuspecting audiences with a distinctly original style. Today, he has two CDs available and is playing to sold-out venues in the U.S. and Canada—but not on Friday nights. Despite being outrageously avant-garde, Matisyahu is, like any good observant Jew, strictly shomer shabbos.



pulse

EVERYBODY EVOLVE TONIGHT

Boom-ta-boom-boom, boom-ta-boom-boom . . . the tribal drums beat as you flail your arms above your head, dancing in ecstasy, absorbed by the primordial rhythms of the so-called purple meme of sociocultural development. Around you on all sides, images of cave paintings, voodoo dolls, unicorns, elemental spirits, and modern street gangs merge in an inchoate transmission of a strangely intimate primal state of consciousness. Within a few minutes, the music and scenery shift. Now you hear the pulse-pounding beat of White Zombie's raging nineties rock hit "More Human Than Human" as images of ancient Greek warriors, Saddam Hussein, Attila the Hun, and others flash by in rapid red-hued succession. What the heck is going on? Who's DJ-ing this party, anyway? All you know for sure is that you are attending something called an "integral rave."

The visionary creation of Integral Institute's **Brett Thomas**, Integral raves aim to be fun, enlivening dance parties that also manage to convey—through a multisensory barrage of multimedia—the past, present, and future trajectory of the evolutionary process at the level of human consciousness. And according to the rave reviews some recent participants gave Pulse, the experience certainly seems to deliver. In fact, one person reportedly had a powerful satori, or taste of enlightened awareness, after just a couple of hours of Integral partying. Thomas intends to bring his unique brand of evolutionary entertainment—currently limited to members of **Ken Wilber**'s integral training seminar series—to the general public in the near future. What's more, Thomas has expressed an interest in partnering with WIE's parent organization, **EnlightenNext**, to bring even deeper spiritual themes into his consciousness-raising audio-video onslaughts. So if you like a little excitement with your evolutionary theory, maybe we'll meet you on the dance floor someday.





DARSHAN WITH DA

Will the World Teacher please stand up? After decades of seclusion from the public eye, leaving his multitudes of books, videos, and devotees as the only avenues through which to transmit his "Divine Blessing Work" to the masses, the guru formerly known as Da Free John (among other names) has cast his doors open to the world at large. Adi Da Samraj, the Western guru renowned for his sophisticated teachings and for claiming to be the most enlightened being in history. recently moved from his private Fijian island to his spiritual ashram in Northern California. There, for the first time since the seventies, he's been offering "darshan"—the transmission of an awakened master—to "respectful and grateful members of the public who are not formal practitioners of the Way of Adidam," as one representative put it. In addition, the grapevine has it that Adi Da's most senior students have been working diligently to "call back" ex-members of their flock, saying there's never been a better time to be a devotee. But for those of us new to it all, what does it take to qualify for an audience with the "Ruchira Avatar" of our age? Mainly just sincere interest and sanity, with one caveat: You must be "open to the possibility of . . . coming under vow in the Way of Adidam"—a vow that is said to be eternal.

NOW, ZEN, AND THE FUTURE.....

Last fall. Zen roshi Bernie Glassman and his closest students once again went to Poland for an unusual sesshin. There, in the death camps of Auschwitz and Birkenau, his Bearing Witness retreat was offered for the tenth year in a row to people of all cultures and religious persuasions. While this is hardly a traditional Zen practice, Bernie Glassman is not your traditional Zen roshi. The eighty-first head of a lineage that can be traced all the way to the Buddha, this NASAscientist-turned-roshi is known for kicking his well-fed, soft American disciples off their meditation cushions and into the streets to respond to suffering people everywhere: to the homeless, to the sick, to those whose lives have unraveled because of years of war in their homelands. We're not in ancient Japan, he seems to be saying, so get with it.

And while his wide-ranging activities have taken him to many countries (Colombia. Poland, and Japan, to name but a few), Glassman has recently completed his permanent center, "House of One People" (or HOOP for short), located at the renovated Montague Farm in Montague, Massachusetts. Run at present by merely ten people, most of whom are the roshi's students, the house is a hub of activities, courses. conferences, and retreats—from cooking (taught by the roshi) to Hindu kirtans, from Jewish Shabbat services to peacemaking, from clown training for social workers to enlightenment retreats in the Zen tradition.

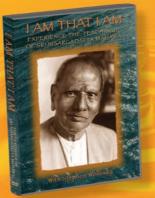




Glassman has high ambitions to turn the place into a full-fledged university, a vibrant center of learning for Zen studies, peacemaking, social enterprise, multifaith practices, and sacred and contemplative arts. You can count on his being able to pull this off—he started the now-famous Greyston Bakery as a project to employ the homeless and made it into a multimillion-dollar business. What's the secret of his success? Not the Seven Habits of. . . . Glassman derives all his force, inspiration, and endless energy from what he calls "not knowing." And in this, he is deeply traditional.

I AM THAT I AM

Experience the teachings of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj



DVD 157 minutes, Group 0 (all countries)

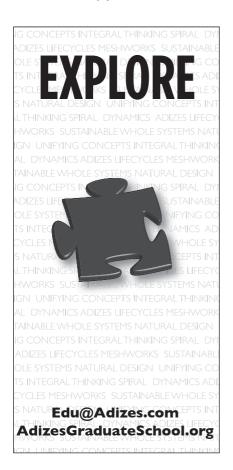
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Narrated by Dr. Stephen Wolinsky, this twoand-a-half-hour DVD contains The Complete Teachings of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, as well as "experiential meditations" that lead the viewer into the I AM and beyond, into That One Substance from which all phenomena appear to arise.

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj remained little known until 1974 when the book *I Am That*, which is arguably the most profound spiritual text of a generation, appeared.

Since Nisargadatta Maharaj's death in 1981, he has become renowned throughout the world. He is considered by many, along with **Ramana Maharshi**, to be the strongest voice of Advaita Vedanta to appear in the 20th century.

Visit www.NetiNetiFilms.com to purchase Wholesale and worldwide sales are welcome.



pulse

AWAKENING FROM AWAKENING



Lifelong mystic **Robert Rabbin**, tenyear student of **Swami Muktananda** and self-described "poster boy for transcendence," has had a new realization—one that is very much in this world rather than beyond it. Around the time of 9/11, Rabbin had what he calls an "awakening from the awakening" and radically changed direction, devoting himself to helping "evolve the archetype of the sage from some kind of aloof witness to the drama of the world into a passionate advocate for peace, freedom, and social justice." He published forty-some articles in the space of a year, founded TruthForPresident.org to mobilize the yoga and meditation communities in the 2004 electoral process, and followed up with radicalsages.com (an "online hub of global spiritual activism") shortly after Bush won a second term in November.

But the road to enlightened politics is not all bliss. Encountering strong resistance to political involvement among the spiritual crowd, Rabbin was also taken aback by a lack of spiritual depth in the activist community. "Authentic spirituality," he declares, "if it's not blocked by fear or self-limiting beliefs, has to flow outward. But

In the 2004 presidential election, a

LEARNING TO LOVE MORALITY

we can't get so caught in the ideological war that we forget that everything we do has to be part of the solution at the level of consciousness—our own consciousness." With a revamped radicalsages.com that leaves most of the politics and the organizing to **Amy** Goodman and MoveOn.org, Rabbin is focusing on his core vision for the website: "to call forth the highest expression of our common humanity, unity-in-love with all creation, as the medicine for healing our troubled world." How does he see "unity-in-love with all creation" dealing with, say, the terrorist problem? According to Rabbin, if we were all in touch with our highest Self, there wouldn't be a terrorist problem. Well, that's certainly true. And in the meantime . . . ?

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significant number of voters cast their ballots, pollsters tell us, on the basis of "moral values." Since that fateful day, religion and morality have become the equivalent of catnip for left-leaning politicians. Even **Howard Dean** has vowed that his party will reach out to evangelicals. But amid all the concern about making room for faith in Democratic circles, it's good to remember that there are many on the left for whom the words "religious" and "spiritual" are not new. Take, for example, Reverend Jim Wallis, founder and editor of Sojourners magazine and Rabbi Michael Lerner, founder and editor of Tikkun magazine. Both have been mainstays in progressive politics for years, but the last election put a new wind in their sails. Wallis has been hitting the conference circuit with a vengeance and Lerner has formed the Network of Spiritual Progressives (spiritualprogressives.org) or NSP, attempting to create, "a left that is friendly not only to secularists and mili-

tant atheists but also to people of faith."

Calling for "an end to U.S. militarism, an immediate withdrawal from Iraq . . . and the implementation of a global Marshall Plan," the NSP has its work cut out, but Lerner is undaunted. And he is making good use of his formidable talent for bringing people together in common cause. Last July, hundreds gathered in Berkeley to hear Wallis, Lerner, and others make the case for a new spiritual politics. This May, they will gather again for the Spiritual Activism Conference and raise a moral ruckus in our nation's capital. While it's hard to imagine President Bush losing much sleep over the political threat posed by the Reverend and the Rabbi, there may be more to these gatherings than meets the eye. The time is ripe for change, and you never know what spark will start the fire. It's three years to the election—a lifetime in the world of politics, and plenty of time for a new kind of leader to offer the country the political, moral, and spiritual conviction that could kickstart the left and maybe even earn some respect in the red states as well.

sky to street

news from an emerging culture

by Maura R. O'Connor



Designing Utopia

All over the world, designers are becoming optimists, working together on new solutions to the planet's worst crises

Most of us are simply overwhelmed

by the innumerable problems confronting our world. Pollution, overpopulation, species extinction, poverty, disease, and severe wealth disparitywe are acutely aware of these issues but, on the whole, at a loss as to what the solutions might be. That's why it's so encouraging to take note of the growing number of designers—product, industrial, and architectural—who are increasingly convinced that they have some of the answers we critically need. Collectively, they're proving that design is about much more than modern furniture or robo-pets; it's not just the cause of many of our problems but also the means to create a radically new world. And luckily for us, it appears that various governments and

corporations, those that have the real power to implement sustainable policies and build new infrastructures, are beginning to pay attention to them.

Take Portugal, for example. This year, the country is launching the world's first "wave farm." located in the Atlantic Ocean off its northern coast. Four-hundred-foot-long orange cylinders will capture the energy of oncoming waves and direct it to an underwater cable that will run to the mainland and provide electricity to thousands of homes. Or consider Mercedes-Benz, the German-based luxury car company whose designers recently unveiled the first-ever bionic vehicle. Bionics is a burgeoning field of study that applies design principles found in plants and animals to new

technologies; Mercedes found their muse in an unlikely sea creature—the boxfish. By carefully studying the boxfish's aerodynamic shape and unusual skin, they managed to create a four-passenger diesel car that gets seventy-five miles to the gallon, emits eighty percent less nitrogen oxide, and has up to forty percent more strength than other cars in its class. Meanwhile, other designers are looking at everything from butterfly wings (for ways to color fabric without using chemical dyes) to mussels (for clues as to how to make glue so strong it would be capable of repairing broken bones) in the search for ever more innovative bionic inventions.

Bruce Mau, the well-known Toronto-based product designer, is a

prominent example of those designers who are "daring," as he puts it, "to believe in the best for mankind." Mau has so much faith in the potential for design to improve the human condition that he has launched an entire global

like Herman Miller and the Ford Motor Company. His theory of "cradle-tocradle" design, in which waste is converted into energy and new materials, and pollution becomes nonexistent, is a central concept of Massive Change.





Mercedes found their inspiration in organic forms like this seedpod.

movement toward that end. Called "Massive Change," it's an attempt to bring together the most ingenious and compassionate minds of the international design community through a traveling art exhibit, a website, an online community, and a future documentary film. Perhaps the best way to grasp the spirit and scope of Massive Change is to peruse the new book by the same name published by Phaidon Press. It includes page after page of stunning photography, hundreds of examples of technological inventions, and thirty-two interviews with scientists, environmentalists, philanthropists, engineers, programmers, and researchers, all pioneers in their fields. The defining characteristic of the movement is optimism, and by page 349, it starts to rub off. Indeed, Massive Change might just be the perfect gift for depressives, pessimists, and eschatologists alike. "We will eradicate world poverty," the authors declare. "We will build a global mind. . . . We will bring energy to the entire world."

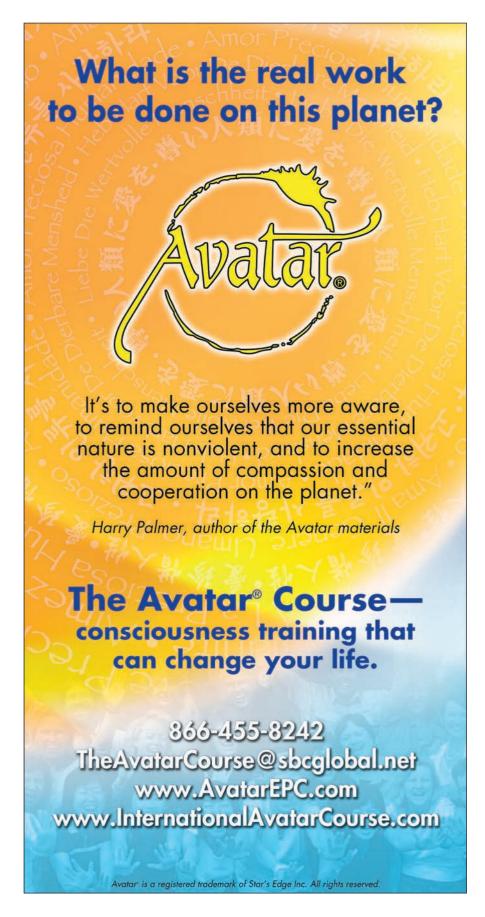
One member of the movement is William McDonough, the eco-architect best known for his work building sustainable factories for corporations But surprisingly, the first truly "massive" implementation of cradle-tocradle design, which McDonough says could constitute the "next industrial revolution," may not take place here in the West but in the hugely overpopulated, notoriously environmentally destructive country of China. It's been reported that the powers that be in Beijing have adopted McDonough's book Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things (written with Michael Braungart) as government policy and that President Hu Jintao frequently enjoys quoting from the Chinese translation.

The rest of the world should feel lucky: in its quest for global economic power, China is currently engineering an industrial revolution on a scale never before seen in history. To this end, the government is poised to relocate no less than four hundred million rural people into cities by the year 2030. The problem is that if the Chinese begin consuming resources at the same rate as Western urbanites, we would need three planet earths to provide enough. In an effort to prevent this apocalyptic possibility, McDonough, as co-chair of the China-U.S. Center for

Sustainable Development, is traveling to China and rebuilding six districts in six different Chinese provinces based on cradle-to-cradle principles. If these cities convince the Chinese government to provide more funding, McDonough believes that he can change the lives of the entire Chinese populace, something he says would be "nothing less than the magnificent re-evolution of human enterprise," a manner of living that not only radically improves quality of life but protects the earth as well.

Each of the six areas McDonough is redesigning will be filled with parks and waterways, enabling the migratory patterns of native species to go undisturbed and citizens to walk or bike to and from work. The city streets will be built at angles that will disrupt cold winter winds while ensuring that city air is constantly circulated and





kept clean and allowing the maximum amount of sunlight to reach apartments all year round. Businesses are to be located on the ground floor of buildings, residences will be above, and rooftops are slated to become farmland, the individual plots connected to one another by pedestrian bridges. These buildings will be constructed with special insulating materials that McDonough is developing so that the buildings can be heated and cooled for "next to nothing." Each apartment will be equipped with toilets so slick they require only a light mist to be flushed and with soundproof walls that will give China's extended multigenerational families the luxury of privacy. Bamboo wetlands outside

The Chinese government is poised to relocate no less than four hundred million rural people into cities by the year 2030.

the cities will be used to purify human waste, and the surrounding acreage that is of "marginal" value to both humans and animals will become giant fields of solar panels providing energy to the districts. China, McDonough predicts, will soon be the largest solar energy provider in the world. All in all, it's enough to convince you that there really is, as Bruce Mau claims, "a revolution going on" in design. "If you ask people about what's happening in the world," Mau told Wired magazine, "most respond with a negative answer. But if you check the Human Development Index since 1820, all lines point radically upward. Yes, there are still horrible disparities, and mistakes are made, but overall, true progress . . . is the real story."

From New Age to Abu Ghraib

Lock and load your incense burners a recent book unveils how the U.S. military has been taking cues from the human potential movement since the 1970s

Since its dawning nearly forty

years ago, the New Age movement has manifested itself in all sorts of unusual ways, but none perhaps as bizarre and counterintuitive as the First Earth Battalion. Conceived in 1977 by a young Lt. Colonel in the U.S. Army, the First Earth Battalion was to become America's second army—this one a peace-loving group of spiritually enlightened soldiers equipped with the best in technology and psychic powers. A few years earlier, Lt. Colonel Jim Channon had returned from his tour of duty in Vietnam depressed and acutely aware of the failures of the American military. "We suffered in Vietnam from not being cunning," he told an interviewer. "We just presented ourselves in our righteousness, and we got our butts shot off." Channon

to the West Coast, he spent two years visiting over one hundred fifty New Age groups, futurists, psychotherapists, theologians, martial arts masters, and a "wide array of practitioners both Western and Eastern. ancient and modern, and orthodox and mystic." Upon his return in 1979, Channon presented the results of his research to the Pentagon in the form of a 125-page manual replete with instructions, blueprints, diagrams, and illustrations for a new military, one that would absorb and implement every conceivable New Age technique and belief on a planetary scale. "It is America's role," he wrote, "to lead the world to paradise."

The First Earth Battalion would be composed not of soldiers but of "aquarian warriors" and "evolutionaries." "I see them," Channon wrote, "as those

who have soldier spirit within them. I see them come together in the name of people and planet to create a new environment of support for the earth mother. Their mission is to

protect the possible and nurture the potential." The First Earth Battalion would also include "guerilla gurus" to conduct "high consciousness commando raids" and would be capable of

The First Earth Battalion was to be a peace-loving group of spiritually enlightened soldiers.

wrote to the vice chief of staff at the Pentagon asking permission to go on a "fact-finding mission," and after clearance was granted, he began his research for the battalion. Traveling



using "omni-directional thought" to implement "non-destructive methods of control" over the enemy. Intuition would be consulted first and foremost by battalion soldiers. A chapter on ethical combat describes uniforms that are colorful and functional so that the "individual will shine through the uniformity" and includes drawings of techno-savvy battle gear with pockets for "natural foods," "ginseng regulators," and "divining tools." Alternating between military-speak and spiritual metaphysics, Channon's manual predicts that the military will move out of its "cultural trance" in order to allow soldiers to "release ... the force inside ... for no other descriptions matter in the end. The Earth Battalion honors all paths to enlightenment."

If you're having a hard time taking Channon's vision seriously, it may shock you to find out that the Pentagon did. In his recent book The Men Who Stare at Goats. British author Jon Ronson details how the principles and ideas of the First Earth Battalion—specifically psychic powers and nonlethal weaponry—were tested and implemented in oftentimes incredible ways within weeks of Channon's initial presentation to top officials at the Pentagon. (Note the name of the book. According to Ronson, the military has had its own goat lab at Fort Bragg for the past twenty-five years where select soldiers have attempted to kill goats by staring at them. Reportedly, it has worked only once.) In his witty voice, Ronson also manages to ingeniously map how these ideas are at work today, albeit in very different guises from those that Jim Channon envisioned. The First Earth Battalion "struck a cord with the top brass, who had never before seen themselves as new age, but in their post-Vietnam funk it all made sense to them," Ronson writes. "But then,

over the decades that followed, the army, being what it is, recovered its strength and saw that some of the ideas contained within Jim's manual could be used to shatter people rather than heal them. Those are the ideas that live on in the War on Terror."

Among the techniques cited by Ronson that are currently being funded and researched by the military are acoustic weapons designed to create "nausea, loss of bowel, disorientation, vomiting"; Special Ops "psychic assassins"; and the Prophet Hologram. The Prophet Hologram is a "projection of the image of an ancient god over an enemy capital whose public communications have been seized and used against it in a massive psychological operation." Perhaps Ronson's most interesting insights concern the nonlethal

methods of thought control and manipulation that he speculates have been tested in Guantanamo Bay as "Experimental Lab Mark I" and "were exported to Abu Ghraib." It's a strange but fascinating tale—from the human potential movement to some of the darkest moments in American military history taking place in the interrogation rooms of Iraq. And if you still can't fathom the connection between the New Age and the U.S. military, just consider a recent BBC report citing U.S. Army research and development of a "Gay Bomb" in the early 1990s. "The plan for a so-called 'love bomb,'" the BBC reported, "envisaged an aphrodisiac chemical that would provoke widespread homosexual behaviour among troops causing what the military called a 'distasteful but completely non-lethal' blow to morale."





Would Jesus Embrace Postmodernism?

A burgeoning movement of evangelical Christians is breaking away from the fold

Evangelical Christians are starting

to get nervous, and it's not because the secular left has miraculously regrouped and formulated a radical and foolproof plan to take back the White House. No, they're nervous because some within their own ranks are beginning to embrace—believe it or not—postmodernity. These postmodern Christians, or "pomos" as they are often being called, are the

newest spice in America's diverse religious soup. According to bestselling author Brian McLaren, the informal spokesperson of this postmodern demographic, what distinguishes pomos from evangelical Christians is that they are able to transcend dogma to "talk about spirituality" and "mystery" as well as "explore synthesis and systems thinking." They're not as concerned with control, power,

and certainty—signifiers of modernity—because, as McLaren suggests, "there's something better than control, power, and certainty out there. Maybe that something is love, stewardship, faith."

A number of recent statistics indicate that more and more young people are captivated by McLaren's message and the burgeoning movement he represents—sometimes called the "emerging church" by the news media. For example, the unfailingly hip guide to Christian living for twenty- and

"Pomos" are the newest spice in America's diverse religious soup.

thirty-somethings, Relevant magazine, saw their annual revenue increase from six hundred thousand to 2.1 million dollars in 2004, and their book sales grow by four hundred percent. In what's becoming true pomo style, many of the Relevant Media Group's books have resolutely unorthodox titles, such as The Naked Christian: Taking Off Religion to Find True Relationship and the ambiguously satirical Pocket Guide to the Apocalypse: The Official Field Manual for the End of the World. Proving that pomos are gaining tremendous buying power and increasing cultural influence, a study on religious books by Publisher's Weekly found that the average age of buyers was a youthful thirtyeight and that the largest group of buyers fell between the ages of twentyfive and thirty-four. Of course, this new breed of Jesus' followers is not without its critics, and some of these traditional evangelicals are beginning to call themselves the "mods," for "modern." Convinced that pomos are merely truth-deprived, the mods' solution is age-old: pomos, they say, are in need of "more doctrine, not less."

pulpit

featuring the passions and perspectives of contemporary spiritual leaders

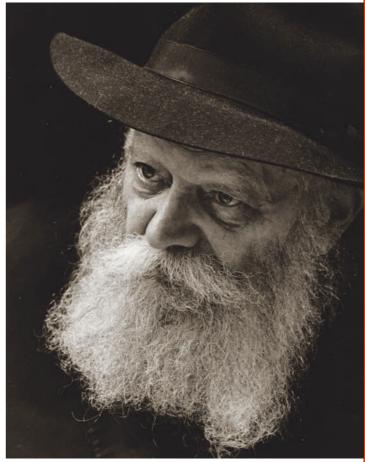
The Soul of the Rebbe

Meditations from the wisdom of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson

The branch of Jewish mysticism known as Hasidism began with the Baal Shem Tov, born in the Ukraine in c. 1700. Orphaned at a young age, the Baal Shem Tov grew up to be an extraordinarily charismatic leader, someone whose love and understanding of God was so ardent that his influence spread like wildfire through eighteenth-century Europe and ignited a mystical revolution among hundreds of Jewish communities.

Two hundred years later, Menachem Mendel Schneerson was born in the Ukraine to a family of Lubavitcher Hasids. As a young boy, Menachem was already what Professor Lawrence Shiffman has called "a Torah genius of an unparalleled nature." In his twenties he also studied science, mathematics, and the humanities at the University of Berlin and at the Sorbonne in Paris. When the Nazis invaded France during WWII, Schneerson was forced to flee with his wife, arriving in Brooklyn, New York, in the summer of 1941, where he would live until his death in 1994. He neither wanted nor sought a position of authority in the Jewish community. But in 1950, following the death of his father-in-law, who was the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe,* the Hasidic community begged him to take the title of Seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe and accept the mantle of leadership. For a full year he refused before finally bowing to the pressure of his people and of international Jewish leaders.

According to Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, one of the most respected Jewish scholars and religious figures alive today, "the essence of being a rebbe is not his being a scholar or his being a leader—it is his being a human being in full. If he is there, everything is all right." For Rabbi Steinsaltz, and for thousands of others who cherished Schneerson as they would



Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994)

a living saint, no one embodied this quality of a rebbe more completely than he did. Indeed, Rabbi Schneerson was almost universally revered for the depth of his humanity and wisdom. Even Newt Gingrich and Bill Clinton found themselves united in shared awe when, in 1995, Clinton posthumously awarded the Rebbe the Congressional Gold Medal for his lasting contributions to the American people and the world at large. During the ceremony, the writer Elie Wiesel—himself a recipient of the same medal as well as the Nobel Peace Prize—said, "The Seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe did not receive medals or honors—he bestowed them. It was an honor to be in his presence. It was an honor to listen to him. It was an honor to be seen by him. Every time I met him, he touched the depth in me. That is true of every person who saw the Rebbe . . . Oh, this medal. Believe me, he didn't need it."

Many of the Rebbe's students believed that Schneerson was in fact the Messiah himself, as spoken of in the Torah, come to herald an age of goodness and perfection in the world. Although he made no claims to being the Promised One, it was Schneerson's belief that ours is indeed the generation entrusted to carry out the purpose of creation itself—to bring heaven down to earth and make a dwelling place for God in the material world. It was this single purpose that gave the Rebbe's life its form and essence.

Maura R. O'Connor

^{*}For Orthodox Jews, a rebbe is more than just the leader of their congregation—he is also a spiritual advisor and mentor who people look to for guidance not just on matters of religion but on social and political issues as well. The Lubavitchers are a group of Hasids who first lived in the small town of Lubavitch, Russia; today there are more than 250,000 worldwide, with 20,000 living in Brooklyn alone.

Excerpts from *Bringing Heaven Down to Earth:* 365 Meditations from the Wisdom of the Rebbe Menachem M. Schneerson, compiled and condensed by Rabbi Tzvi Freeman (Class One Press, 1997).

Mighty Waters

When the Mighty Waters cover your head, suffocating the soul and the flame that burnt inside . . .

When raging torrents of confusion drag you away in their current, ripping you from your hold on Life . . .

Look deeper. Beyond the soul.

For the soul itself, as well as the flame it holds, are rooted in a serene G-dly World of Emanation, a world of quietness and sublime harmony.

But the turbulence of this world is rooted even higher, in a World of Confusion, of light unbounded and untamed, before the orderly emanation of defined being.

"—and the world was confused and void, with darkness over the face of the deep."

So you must dig deeper than those roots, to find the coals from which the flame arose and the flint rock from which the spark was struck. Deeper, until you reach the primordial essence of the soul, beyond Emanation, beyond Light—even beyond the unbounded light of pre-creation. Where there is nothing but the seminal thought that inspired all that is and was and will come to be.

And what was that thought?

It was the thought of you here and now, in your struggle with this world, and the delicious taste of your victory.



There are times when the entire world denies the truth you know within.

There are times you must be a lion, a deer, an eagle, a tree—but now you must be a rock.

Now you must not flinch, not in any way even acknowledge the existence of the mighty waves that come crashing down upon you, conspiring to grind you to sand, to sweep you away to join them in the vast ocean.

You must be the hard, unmoving rock that lies at the essence of your soul, the voice from beyond all this ephemeral reality, from beyond all time and space. The voice that says, "They are nothing. There is none else but He"

It begins with you. And then it happens in your world. The outer crust of façade begins to crack, the essential reality is revealed, the storm dissipates as though it never were, and all things begin to say, "I am not a thing.

In truth, there is none else but He."

Thigh Souls 172 Z

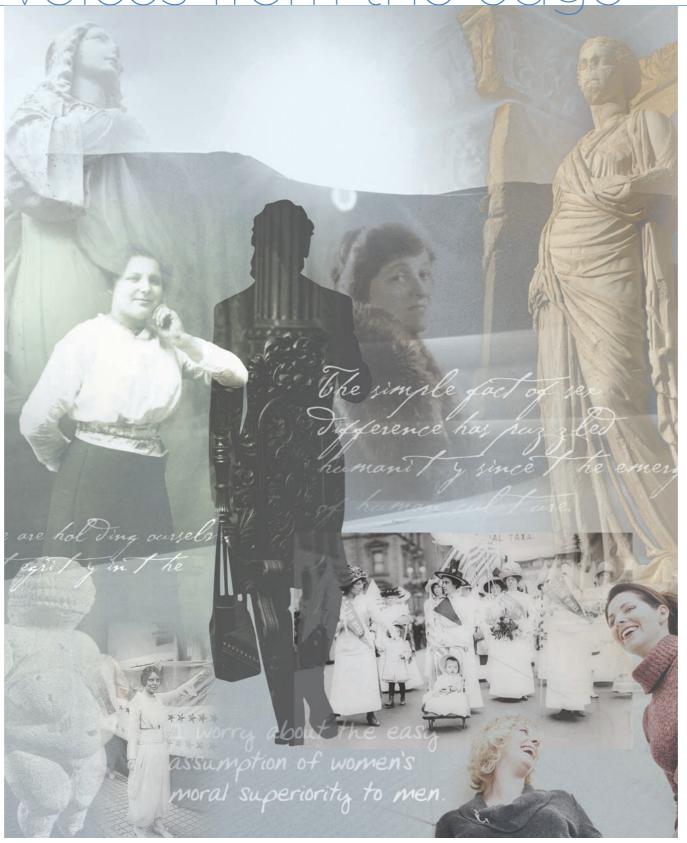
To one whose self is his body, death of the body is death of the self. But for one whose self is his love, awe and faith, there is no death, only a passing. From a state of confinement to the body he makes the passage to liberation. He continues to work within this world and even more so than before.

The Talmud says that Jacob, our father, never died. Moses, also, never died. Neither did Rabbi Judah, the Prince. They were very high souls who were one with the Truth in an ultimate bond—and since the Truth can never die, neither could they.

Yes, in our eyes we see death. A body is buried in the ground and we must mourn the loss. But this is only part of the falseness of our world. In the World of Truth they are still here as before.

And the proof: We are still here. For if these high souls would not be with us in our world, all that we know would cease to exist.

voices from the edge





Beyond the Divine Feminine

by Elizabeth Debold

Several years ago, a quote by Dorothy Sayers, the Christian essayist and mystery novelist, stopped me in my feminist tracks. "The first thing that strikes the careless observer is that women are unlike men," she writes. "They are 'the opposite sex' (though why 'opposite' I do not know; what is the 'neighboring sex'?). But the fundamental thing is that women are more like men than anything else in the world." Having spent years exploring gender differences, I found her statement of the obvious to be a complete and refreshing surprise.

So much has been made of the differences between men and women—Mars and Venus, dogs and cats—that sometimes it does seem like we are two different species. The simple fact of sex difference has puzzled humanity since the emergence of human culture. Most ancient cultures—as well as aboriginal peoples everywhere—dotted the heavens with male and female deities that represented different core aspects of the process of creation and the experience of life. Somehow we have always believed that the fact of two, not one, bears a mysterious significance.

Frankly, even today with all of our scientific sophistication, why we exist as two sexes is still a mystery. Why didn't intelligent life continue the way it began-by some form of cloning? Biologists argue that there were significant evolutionary advantages in mingling DNA from two parents. Through combining DNA, change was built into the process of procreation. But could the existence of the two sexes in fact reflect a deeper pattern in the universe—expressing two fundamental forces, the masculine and the feminine, that are not just human but cosmic? It is very hard to know. Pioneering psychologist Erik Erikson noticed that when young children played with blocks, boys built erect towers and girls created circular enclosed spaces. He didn't think it was an accident that children constructed structures that reflected their anatomical differences—in fact, he suggested that projecting our experience of embodiment outward is a primary way that we make sense of life. For much of human civilization, for example, we have projected our inner experience onto the world around us, inventing deities that reflect the mysterious forces at work within us. Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Mars, the god of anger. Are feminine and masculine, yin and yang, another projection of our experience onto the canvas of the cosmos? Or is it the other way around—that there are two sacred cosmic principles that are manifested in physical form as male and female and expressed in human psychology as masculine and feminine?

Why does it matter? In the last few issues of this magazine, I have been asking: Where are the women who want to evolve consciousness to the next level of human awakening? Responses, primarily from women, poured into my email inbox from around the globe. We've never seen anything like it. By and large, the women who have responded argue that our global culture has been shaped by a hypermasculine ideology that is destructive of the web of life so meticulously woven by nature. They also observe that women are working in every corner of the world to bring forth a feminine form of consciousness, leadership, and social change in order to transform this planet. It's obvious that women care passionately about the leadership that will bring humanity forward. And I can think of nothing more thrilling-since the sixties, Woman Spirit has ignited, spreading like brushfire around the globe. I wholeheartedly agree that this has to continue. But I would also argue that there is more than bringing forth the feminine that is needed to transform the world. If we believe that masculine and feminine are primary sacred forces embodied by males and females (even though each contains aspects of the other), then the evolutionary progress that we can make will always be bounded by our ideas of who we are as men and women. I'm asking: Could there be something beyond our ideas of the masculine and feminine that marks a new potential for humanity, women and men alike?

Gender holds the heart of culture, I have written elsewhere. Gender is such a primary organizing principle of human life, governing its most intimate aspects, that it is almost unthinkable to seek for new ways of being that take us beyond what is so deeply familiar to us. Our cultures, particularly those that

have the most global impact, are *patriarchal*—meaning that they have developed out of social arrangements in which men hold power. However, it's not simply that men rule but that most

The simple fact of sex difference has puzzled humanity since the emergence of human culture.

often women are considered to be the lesser, weaker, and *justifiably* subordinate version of humanity—leading to dismaying episodes in history such as the debate within Christianity as to whether or not women have souls. In many of our societies, perhaps most, patriarchy operates out of what historian Riane Eisler calls a "dominator" model in which everyone, male and female, is distorted in his or her development by dynamics of domination and oppression.

How do we move beyond this dynamic when it is so deeply entwined with our sense of ourselves as men and women? If we take to heart Einstein's oft-repeated and apt statement that problems can never be solved at the same level at which they were created, it seems doubtful that we will ultimately be able to "solve" the twin problems of patriarchy—the dynamics between women and men and the way our male-dominated cultures function—from within a framework that still sees the solution in terms of our existing ideas of gender. However, at this moment, the need for new leadership that embraces values that have been traditionally ascribed to women—care, communication, inclusiveness—is critical.

So, holding the tension between the need for a solution beyond gender *and* the immediate need for more "feminine" values in leadership, I want to explore three key themes that emerged across the various responses to my query: Where are the women? These themes contain some popular assumptions about women's leadership. Given women's sincere desire to change the world for the better, I believe it's important that we be very clear about the assumptions we are making so that we can see where they are taking us. And then we can better determine if this is where we need and want to go.

THEME 1

We need to bring forth the Divine Feminine, because we need to imbue our overly masculinized culture with feminine values.

The Divine Feminine—what does that mean? "At the very dawn of religion, God was a woman," art historian Merlin Stone wrote in 1976. "Do you remember?" For most of us, Stone's words

are evocative, even if only because we were weaned by an allpowerful and all-knowing female presence, the first great goddess: Mother. Just as mother sustained our lives, the Mother Goddess gave birth to human culture. More than twenty thousand years ago, toward the end of the Old Stone Age, homo sapiens sapiens witnessed with awe the swelling of women's bellies and the squalling miracle of life that so violently came forth from them. As our ancestors struggled to survive, they created carvings of the pregnant mother—all breasts, belly, and buttocks—as a sacred symbol that, one can imagine, they felt was imbued with the power of life. This life-giving, nurturant mother is the first face of the Divine Feminine. She "inspires and focuses a perception of the universe as an organic, alive, and sacred whole, in which humanity, the Earth, and all life on Earth participate as 'her children,'" write Anne Baring and Jules Cashford in their impressive compendium, The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image. "Earth was her epiphany: the divine was immanent as creation." However, with the rise of the Judeo-Christian tradition in the West some four thousand years ago, Baring and Cashford tell us, "our mythic image of Earth lost this dimension."

As the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) looked beyond creation to a transcendent male God, the loss of the sense of immanent divinity and wholeness in creation took its toll. All that had been associated with the feminine gradually lost its value. This is less true in the East: in the Tao, *yang*, masculine energy (light, focused, agentic, and action-oriented), and *yin*, the feminine (dark, diffuse, intuitive, and receptive), each contains the seed of the other. But in the West, masculine and feminine are more often polarized:

FEMININE/FEMALE MASCULINE/MALE

Passive Active Soft Hard Submissive Dominant **Emotional** Rational Independent Dependent Objective Subjective Transcendent **Immanent** Chaos Order

Nature Culture (or science)

The list could go on indefinitely. The significant point, however, is that all of the terms ascribed to the masculine are those that have been widely valued in Western culture since the dawn of the Scientific Revolution in the eighteenth century. Today, some three hundred years later, as we look across a planet wracked with war and exploitation, feminists are crying for a reassessment of what we value as a culture. "The half

of humanity in charge of the world's agenda is led by men addicted to power and maintaining their dominance," writes Jungian analyst and feminist activist Jean Shinoda Bolen in her latest book, *Urgent Message from Mother*. "Now, there are weapons of mass destruction that can cause more suffering in a shorter time than ever was even imaginable. . . . It is time to gather the women to save the world," In this reversal of patriarchal values, the feminine—our Divine Mother—represents life and the masculine increasingly represents death.

Could the renewal and reclamation of the Divine Feminine be what we need to save ourselves and our world? "The [Western] Enlightenment ended with the Holocaust and Hiroshima," historian Jim Garrison wrote in 2000, before 9/11 and Iraq. In his fascinating and often cryptic book, Civilization and the Transformation of Power, Garrison notices a remarkable pattern in history. Whenever civilization's leading edge courted annihilation, there was an inexplicable emergence of the Feminine—for example, the rise of the cult of the Virgin Mary after Europe was threatened by plague. I could name more: the spread of Christianity through the commitment of women and slaves within the violent Roman Empire; or, after the fall of the Empire, the remarkable role that women (particularly nuns) played in laying the groundwork for Christian civilization. Garrison suggests that it's no accident that the women's liberation movement arose just at the point that we created weapons that could destroy ourselves completely.

Something seems to be moving in the collective psyche. The secular women's movement of the sixties freed women from confinement to hearth and home. And it also may have opened a channel to the Divine Feminine. In The Dance of the Dissident Daughter, Sue Monk Kidd tells of her extraordinary journey from being a Southern Baptist "Gracious Lady" to creating her own feminist spiritual path of worship and celebration of the Sacred Feminine. Kidd's story is striking because she tracks in her dreams the emergence of images that were utterly foreign to her in her devoutly Christian life—images such as the bare-breasted Minoan goddess holding two red snakes. Kidd becomes this wild goddess in a dream and only later is stunned to see the image in a book. Jungian analyst Marion Woodman, in a 1999 interview in this magazine, reported that her clients were telling of a gorgeous, lusty black goddess appearing in their dreams. Perhaps, suggests Woodman, this new goddess figure "represent[s] a cumulative insight that will eventually have an impact on the planet," a fierce and creative aspect of the Feminine. Like the tantric stream in Buddhism that emerged in the late medieval era, this call from the Sacred Feminine demands a recognition of the holiness of the manifest universe—the unified, nondual realization that every aspect of life, and all of its mysteries from birth to maturity, is divine.

From a philosophical and spiritual standpoint, who can argue with this? The techno-scientific worldview that brought us to modernity has done so by viewing the universe as dead matter and other life forms as lacking any sensibility whatsoever. This acute separation from the sanctity of life needs to be transformed at the core. "The Sacred Feminine is coming back," explains Shinoda Bolen, "mostly through women, but also men who have dreams of numinous goddess figures or who follow intuition and instinct to find and resacralize land or go on pilgrimages."

What an enormously appealing vision, particularly for us women! But I wonder about the value of making these arguments in terms of "masculine" or "feminine." Yes, Western culture needs to radically reconnect with the sacredness of life if we are to create a life-enhancing future. But as soon as we link this with the Feminine, we evoke our personal and cultural past. Images of male God and female Goddess came to life in the human psyche at a time before literacy, which limited the human capacity to conceptualize. Thus, these pre-literate visions, expressed by the female or male form, tie us to a primitive duality. Moreover, since masculinity and femininity have become so oppositional—bound together in a hierarchy of domination and subordination—breaking this pattern cannot come about by now making the feminine superior. That will only continue the pattern of one being up and the other down—this time with women on top. And I don't think that is a cure for the abuses of power that are destroying our world. Which brings us to the second theme.

THEME 2

Women are better suited to leadership because we don't have the egoic need that so many men do to be in the limelight.

I was struck by how often women described their inclusive, supportive, and nonhierarchical way of leading and, at the same time, expressed the opposite of that by asserting their superiority to men. Isn't this part of the division, hierarchy, and separation that we are trying to move beyond? I am not saying this in my best mother voice, with the underlying message, All of my children need to get along. I don't think that we are at a point where women and men are going to be able to trust each other overnight. These structures in our selves and in society have grown roots for thousands of years. Transcending that history would mean men giving up their assumption of power and women giving up our belief in our victimization. Both of these are entwined with our core sense of identity. And no one gives up power—or one's source of identity—easily. Despite our desire to bring forward women's talents and qualities, unless we find a way to change the core tensions and dynamics that divide women and men, we aren't going to be able to

pool human creativity to truly change the world. For starters, that means taking a deeper look at ourselves, which is why I'm asking for deeper analysis—and greater self-awareness.

The dynamic of men feeling superior to women ("How could she be so stupid?") while women feel superior to men ("He's so out of touch with himself") may go as far back as the Mother Goddess. The cultural idea that women are morally superior to men, however, can be traced back to the early modern era—which marked the dawn of capitalism, the birth of the middle class, and the division of the world into the masculine public sphere and the feminine private sphere. According to Nancy Armstrong, in her groundbreaking book Desire and Domestic Fiction, the early seventeenth century saw the creation of an ideal of femininity that gained wide acceptance because it was spread through the new art form of the novel—the first triumph of popular culture. The ideal of the good, pure, and virtuous woman solved a social problem. During this dangerous transition, women became extremely vulnerable because men were exploring, exploiting, and inventing a whole new capitalist economic order that destroyed the existing social structures protecting women.

In the so-called Dark Ages, women and men shared a fairly similar lot in life—and that lot was determined by social class. The majority of women who were not born into nobility-good wives and mothers, and also bakers, chickenhawkers, hostel-keepers, weavers, and so forth-worked alongside their mates. Both men and women lived lives circumscribed by their role in the feudal world, working on the land or in small cottage crafts, secured by kinship, class, custom, and church. But as more and more men went to cities to seek their capitalist fortunes, women were left behind. What would women's role be in the emerging society? Men of lower birth now had money, and they no longer wanted to be with the women of their class. They wanted to marry noblewomen. But there weren't enough noblewomen to go around. Quickly, a shift occurred in the meaning and value of being "noble." No longer did "noble" mean one was born into a particular social class. It now referred to characteristics of the woman herself. Women's identity as pure and good was an invention—literally a way of creating value so that men of means would seek to marry lower-class women, something that would have made less than no sense in feudal society. A bargain was struck in the new capitalist society, enabling women to trade the moral qualities of goodness and virtue for social and economic security. The price, however, was an even greater dependence on men. How ironic it is that these qualities are now being proclaimed as women's pedigree for leadership.

But does women's "goodness" make us better leaders? "Three decades of research in state legislatures, universities,

and international public policy centers have proven beyond doubt that women, children, and men all benefit when women are in leadership," states my friend Marie C. Wilson, founder and president of the White House Project. "Broader social legislation, benefiting everyone, is more likely to pass if women are in office." Wilson also cites how women have been effective negotiators and peacemakers across the globe. This is how women's identification with being mothers, caregivers, and nurturers has had a positive impact. From the U.S. to Rwanda, across the dimensions of race and class, women's practical and immediate connection to caregiving orients us as leaders to provide better health care, education, nutritional programs, and other sources of social support.

Is this the leadership that will create a new world? While advocating for these basic life supports is essential—and so often neglected—I'm not sure it's enough. Education and

What will happen when the lid is off of women's power and potential?

health care are long-term solutions for the inequities in our global society, but caring and listening won't change the minds of those who are gripped by ethnic rivalry or religious righteousness. Will women dare to engage in conflict when it's needed? Risk our sense of security and comfort? Be disliked? Men seem to find it easier to go their own way and damn the rest. However, women's preference for consensusbuilding and collaboration does not mean that we are pure as the driven snow. At a 2001 Women's Leadership Summit at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, Debra Meyerson and Robin Ely argued that the jury is still out on whether women's "difference" makes a difference: "The difference sex difference makes in how leaders, corporations, or politics function and in what they produce is likely negligible." Why? They observe that women's "difference"—"listening, collaborating, nurturing, and behind-the-scenes peacemaking"—arose in the context of women's second-class status. In fact, they note that "the wish to celebrate women's goodness would seem to require the perpetuation of her subordination." In other words, we are good and selfless because that's the bargain we made, and kept making, for our survival. Our self-image as good and caring women is our emotional consolation prize for years spent fearfully silent and obsequiously obedient within a world of male domination. While we women may feel superior to men who are out there with their accomplishments, our task may be to risk putting ourselves forward, even if it might mean being all alone.

Hence, I worry about the easy assumption of women's moral superiority to men as grounds for our leadership. Our goodness and care are double-edged. Women's ego, I submit, holds up our smiles of goodness and bows our heads in false humility. Of course, we too can get caught in egoic posturing, but most often our egos bloom in cultivating a self-image of selfless goodness. Could this be why so many women wrote to say that they are leading quietly, out of earshot? Certainly,

For the first time in recorded history, men and women at the leading edge of culture are social equals.

the very structures of our society value men and what they do. But we have to be careful not to conflate our self-protective (and self-gratifying) self-effacement with greater virtue. And when we reinterpret the Divine Feminine in light of this self-image and thereby make feminine goodness something sacred, I think we are on dangerous turf. The world does need us—desperately. As Sue Monk Kidd says, we can no longer just be content to cultivate our inner life or, I would add, to lead quietly in the margins; we need to be "prophets...calling society to truth, justice, and equality."

This calls us to consider what it would mean for women to wield power in a world in which we are no longer constrained by patriarchal bargains to uphold this image of goodness. What will happen when the lid is off of our power and potential? To prepare, we have to dare to investigate our relationship to power. Frankly, I don't think it's going to be pretty. Taking a look at powerful women in history or literature before the cult of the good woman began-Boadicea, Joan of Arc, and Cleopatra, or Medea, Lady MacBeth, and Moll Flanders—they are not creatures of sweetness and light. Or think about Kali, the Indian goddess of creative destruction. Or angry Demeter, jealous Hera, powerful Athena. There may be far less difference than our cultural roles would have us believe. So, will we care enough for the world that we are living in to wield power, assert our values, engage in conflict, or do whatever is necessary without getting intoxicated by that power, as we have seen so often in men, and at the same time not separate ourselves from them? That means a radical transformation of consciousness, which brings me to the third theme.

THEME 3

We are the women who are doing it it's already happening!

Women are doing so much extraordinary and groundbreaking work. The seismic shift of women's consciousness that started in the second half of the last century has created massive and continuing change. Newsweek's issue last fall on women's leadership featured San Francisco's police chief, fire chief, and district attorney—three women of color who have ended the turf war between their agencies to create a more effective response to emergency. Locally and internationally, women are part of the leadership of every movement for social and environmental justice. Around the globe, women are creating the space and opportunity for other women to rise up, to be able to educate their families, and to restore communities ravaged by war, disease, and disaster. The United Nations Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 created a global platform for highlighting issues critical to women and girls. Appalling forms of oppression—like female genital mutilation—are slowly being relegated to humankind's barbaric past. I've been amazed by stories of African girls spontaneously refusing to be cut—with no role models, no support, just a sudden shift in consciousness that now says, "No, this is not for me."

Something is happening. Women are working to evolve consciousness and transform lives everywhere, as many readers pointed out. But that's not what I was asking. When I raised the question "Where are the women who want to evolve consciousness?" I wasn't asking about how we are working with others. I want to know where are the women who want to evolve our own consciousness, the consciousness of those of us who have the unbelievable privileges that this era offers. We are at a unique moment in human evolution. For the first time in recorded history, men and women at the leading edge of culture are social equals. Although the goal of equity has certainly not been reached (women are still underrepresented in leadership in every sector of society), our hard-won and nascent social equality brings a potential alive on earth that has never before existed. I'm calling those of us who have been the beneficiaries of this new equality to take part in transforming what it means to be men and women, to break the binary opposition of gender. Who wants to explore this frontier that lies beyond what we know? And how do we even begin to find our way?

Harking back to Einstein's statement about resolving problems at a higher level than that at which they were created, two things come to mind. First, my mentor Carol Gilligan has said that patriarchy is founded on separation from women men separate from women, and women from each other and dissociated from themselves. Certainly, we must unite where we have been divided—first, women with other women, then women with men. But how do we do so in a way that does not reassert this fundamental division and separation? How can we end the division of the world by gender if we cannot do it from within gender itself, from within our ideas, beliefs, fears, and desires of being good women (or men, for that matter)? The Divine Feminine cannot help us here. We cannot use our identification with our gender as a way to transcend its grip on our consciousness. So, where do we go, within and without, to create a new consciousness free of these divisions?

That brings me to my second thought: Helen LaKelly Hunt, author of *Faith and Feminism*, has discovered that the nineteenth-century women suffragists and abolitionists dared to defy the conventions of "feminine" behavior, dared to speak in public, agitate, petition, and march, because they were on fire. A spiritual vision that the Kingdom of God—the manifestation of true equality and justice—was each human being's birthright lit up their hearts and led them out of their comfortable bourgeois homes. "Let us not hesitate to be the messiahs of our age," Lucretia Mott declared as she called others into the battle against slavery. She herself did not hesitate to speak, despite the fact that at the time women weren't supposed to open

their mouths in public. In fact, she once narrowly escaped an angry mob that burned to the ground in protest the building in which she spoke. Because she took incredible risks to uphold what was then almost unimaginable—freedom for all human beings and the equal rights of women—Mott was "spoken of as a most dangerous woman . . . an infidel, a heretic, a disturber," as her younger contemporary Elizabeth Cady Stanton recalls. But to Stanton, this diminutive woman, who insisted on living in obedience to a spiritual truth higher than the laws of men, was like "a being from some larger planet" who offered "an entirely new revelation of womanhood." No wonder Mott's public speaking, as one observer has said, was "so born of conviction, so radiant with . . . inward light" that it ignited social transformation by evoking a new consciousness.

There is a powerful connection between profound social change and the kind of consciousness that Mott, as an example, was a vehicle for. Mott was guided by a vision for humanity that did not exist in her day. Her vision of Truth was not tied to ideas of gender—it freed her from them. Epoch-shifting cultural change seems to be linked to a spiritual vision that illuminates a potential for human dignity and unity that was previously unknown. And this pertains not just to the suffrag-



ists such as Mott, Stanton, or even Sojourner Truth and Susan B. Anthony. Think about it: Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream came from beyond this world to wake us to a new conscience and consciousness. Likewise with Gandhi. And think about Buddha and Christ. Their spiritual awakening laid the foundation for shifts in consciousness that transformed the world. As the anarchist Voltairine de Cleyre mused in 1907, "I have been approaching the conclusion that consciousness . . . is the dawning power which threatens to over-hurl old processes and old laws, and supplant them by other powers and other ideals. I know no more fascinating speculation than this, of the role of consciousness in present and future evolution."

At this point where the most privileged of us live on the edge of gender equality, perhaps the next step is to reach beyond the notions of masculine and feminine that have deeply shaped our selves and society. The evolution of consciousness so desperately needed to transform this planet could well depend on our discovering a new ground for human relationship that destroys all of the division bound up in our ideas of being women or men. The glimmer of that ground may have been glimpsed by one of the greatest spiritual visionaries in history, as my colleague Jessica Roemischer and I discovered recently

at the Omega Institute's Women & Power weekend. Jane Fonda spoke there about her conversion to Christianity and her recent discovery of the surprising message in the Gnostic gospels. Quoting Christ's words from the Gospel of Thomas, she said: "When the male will not be male nor the female be female, then we will enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

Where are the women who want to discover this?

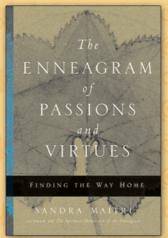
Elizabeth Debold is a senior editor of *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine. Author of the bestselling book Mother Daughter Revolution, she holds a doctorate in Human Development and Psychology from Harvard University. She was a founding member of the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls' Development that was directed by Carol Gilligan. She is working on a new book with the tentative title "The Evolution of Love: Men, Women, and the Possibility of Transformation," to be published by Pantheon.





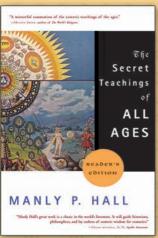
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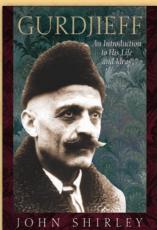
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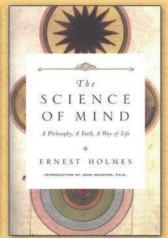
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the guru & the pandit: dialogue XII ANDREW COHEN & KEN WILBER - LIVE IN DENVER Creating the future

On Evolution, Ego, and Why We Don't Have Time to "Be Here Now"

It probably goes without saying that many of

humanity's most significant leaps forward have been achieved by creative individuals—men and women, fueled by necessity, genius, or divine inspiration, who stepped beyond the confines of the status quo to contribute something novel to the world. Less renowned, perhaps, are the cultural advances that have been achieved by a creative duo of individuals working together—allies or colleagues who, driven by a shared passion to change the world for the better, freely tested the limits of the familiar, the safe, and the known.

These days, as friends and partners mapping the evolving edge of consciousness, spiritual teacher

(and What Is Enlightenment? founder) Andrew Cohen and spiritual philosopher Ken Wilber—the guru and the pandit*—may be on their way to becoming such a team. Like a spiritualized fusion of Watson & Crick and Lewis & Clark, these contemporary pioneers are attempting to discern the deep structures of human nature while continually venturing into uncharted territory. Chronicled for the past few years in the pages of this magazine, their dialogues have united Cohen's depth of experience as a teacher of enlightenment with Wilber's formidable theoretical knowledge, and

^{*} In Sanskrit, a pandit is a scholar who is deeply proficient and immersed in spiritual wisdom.



together, the guru and the pandit have endeavored to explore a number of new pathways through the vast field of human potential.

So last fall, when Cohen and Wilber held their first-ever *public* discussion during a sunny afternoon in downtown Denver, Colorado, it was an exciting event. Admittedly, I was struck by its significance more than some, having been a student of Wilber's writings and a founding member of his Integral Institute before becoming a student of Cohen's teachings and an editor of *WIE*. But it was clear from the many people I spoke with afterward—including Integral Institute members, supporters, and their friends—that everyone was affected by what happened that afternoon. Sitting in a

packed conference room, we were treated to an exploration of awakened consciousness and the future of spirituality that was anything but abstract. After all, this wasn't simply a dialogue between Cohen and Wilber but rather an intensive—and *implicating*—Q&A session in which members of the audience had the opportunity to question them about anything and everything: from the problem of ego to the purpose of meditation, the nature of the enlightened state, and the risk involved in surrendering one's life to the evolutionary impulse.

In the following pages, we're happy to present to you a few of the most thought-provoking highlights of this nearly three-hour event.

Tom Huston

OPFNING REMARKS

KEN WILBER: We live in rather extraordinary times, if you think about it. We have access to all the world's great living traditions. This has never happened before in history. We are blessed to be able to experiment with and mine the various ways that Spirit has chosen to make itself known in the past. This is a challenge, and it's a threat. It's something that we want more than anything else, yet it's something that we're frightened of more than anything else (and if you're not frightened, you don't understand it). So it's a very delicate balance. Fortunately, we have God on our side. Unfortunately, however, we have egos; we have self-contractions.

So what we want to do today is talk about both sides of that street and ways that you can tip the scales in your favor. And also look at some of the ways that all of us are inherently dedicated to *not* waking up—which we know is the case, because the empirical evidence is right there. Of course, there's also the fact that we are all here together today, pooling our understanding and resources in order to engage in arguably the greatest adventure there is: the adventure of consciousness, the adventure of waking up, the adventure of going so deep into yourself that you stumble and fall into infinity. Under those circumstances, a new destiny arises from consciousness. And this destiny is one of pain and suffering plus bliss and ecstasy, *minus your fundamental* objection to life. And that's quite an extraordinary thing to realize you can do without.

There's a politically incorrect definition of a pioneer: the guy with all the arrows in his back. That's fundamentally what any of us who are trying to push the envelope are up against. We're running into the stresses and

strains of cosmic reluctance, because what are being laid down or created right now are actually structures of consciousness. The structures of the future are not Platonic givens that drop down from heaven. They are structures that we build every time we have a thought that's just a little bit higher than the thought we had a moment before, or engage in an activity that's just a little bit more noble than the activity we engaged in a moment before, or transmit our own state and the transmission is a little bit deeper than it was a moment before. In these ways, cosmic habits are built up, and that's basically what we're engaged in. It's an extraordinary adventure. I can't think of anything like it.

One of my favorite exercises from Quaker prayer gatherings is: "Let the next sentence out of your mouth be from your very highest self." Everybody gets quiet at that point! But that's the kind of attitude we want to bring to these dialogues. New structures in consciousness are being laid down right now—they are just faint footprints on the face of the cosmos. So your behavior, to the extent that you live up to your highest, is actually creating structures that future humanity will inhabit. Therefore, choose your acts very, very carefully. Make sure that the next action you take comes from your highest self. Make sure that the next thing that you say comes from your highest self. Then there's hope for the future. Those structures are already being laid down. God is laying them down; Spirit is laying them down through us. So we have to become appropriate vehicles for Spirit to lay down the very structures that humanity is going to inhabit. And if we don't, that is a guilt we will carry with us for eternity.

"Your behavior is actually creating structures that future humanity will inhabit. Therefore, choose your acts very, very carefully."

ken wilber

"The degree to which we are willing to let in the absolute, uncompromising fact that the future literally depends on us will mean everything about the kind of person we're going to be."

andrew cohen

ANDREW COHEN: Ken was just speaking about what it would mean to give up our fundamental objection to life—or what I would call our refusal to transcend our almost pathological engagement with our narcissistic inclinations.

WILBER: Yep. (Laughter from audience)

COHEN: So what *would* it be like to truly give that up—to be so serious about it that it wasn't a joke anymore? The reason to strive to do that would be so that we were able to take up the ultimate challenge, the adventure that Ken was speaking about, which, to put it very simply, is to actually create the future ourselves. As he was describing, the structures that lie in front of us don't yet exist, and it's up to us as individuals, together, to actually create those new structures. I feel that the degree to which, on an individual level, we are willing to let in the absolute uncompromising fact that the future literally depends on us will mean everything about the kind of person we're going to be, the kind of relationship to life we will have, and ultimately the difference we're going to be able to make in this world. So it's a deadly serious matter.

What I'm very interested in, and what Ken and I have often discussed, is how enlightenment itself is evolving. As human understanding develops and we begin to understand the spiritual path in an evolutionary context, we can see that it is no longer about merely transcending the world but about embracing this active dimension of what it means to consciously create the cosmos. Until very recently, God, or the creative principle, was something that we were asking for help from. But I believe we've reached a time in history when God, which I would describe as the energy and intelligence that created the universe, is now completely dependent upon us—upon those sentient beings who have reached

a level of development where we're capable of beginning to appreciate who we are and why we are here. God is not "up there" waiting to save us. That creative principle is who we are—not just in the formless, unmanifest dimension but in the creative, manifest world, as the evolutionary impulse, the spark that initiated the big bang, which is our own Authentic Self. The mysterious compulsion to evolve that we experience at the level of consciousness is nothing less than God becoming aware of himself, herself, or itself, as us. In this awakening, we directly know that the future depends upon us. It's no longer just an idea; it's an emotionally felt absolute reality.

So I think that creating the future at the leading edge is dependent upon each one of us waking up to this Authentic Self and making whatever effort is necessary to begin to identify with that thrilling creative passion and to transcend our attachment to the fears and desires of the ego or separate self-sense, which go on forever. Traditionally, the seeker would aspire to transcend ego in order to abide in the timeless ground of being. But I don't think that what the world needs now is more people hanging out in the timeless ground of being! I think we have to resist the temptation to get lost in timelessness and begin to embrace the overwhelming urgency of the evolutionary crisis we're in, which, as Ken has stated much more eloquently than I can, is a crisis of consciousness, a crisis of understanding, a crisis of development. Many of us can intellectually appreciate our predicament, but that's not enough. We have to bridge the gap between our capacity to cognitively appreciate the problem and our willingness to actually become the solution ourselves, as truly enlightened human beings.

ON RISK AND TRUST

QUESTION: Once we surrender to what you've called the "creative principle," how can we know that we're on the right track, that we're really acting on behalf of a better future?

COHEN: How can we know? Well, it's a very delicate question, but part and parcel of the kind of awakening we're speaking about is that you begin to directly intuit or cognize a higher order. It's experienced as a kind of harmony or fullness or integration, a higher structure that makes profound sense out of everything, and the best way I can describe it is that it's self-authenticating or self-legitimizing. This may be a silly metaphor, but it's almost like you can hear the angels singing. These intuitions are of the impersonal structures of consciousness itself, higher and higher manifestations of the ultimate truth of oneness. So the higher you go, the greater is the sense of being at the very center of the universe, of creation—of seeing with the eyes of God. Now, as to whether the individual is actually enlightened or is some insane pathological maniac, I guess others will have to make up their own minds. I mean, Hitler obviously had his own visions too . . .

WILBER: There's one way you can tell a little bit, and this is approaching it more from the pandit's side of the street. When that higher manifestation comes down, to the extent that it's healthy, you should feel it resonating in all four quadrants—and it feels deeply, deeply right. So it's impersonal in the sense that it's a higher person; it's not just radically without person. It's God in the first person; and it's also dealing with the world and dealing with you and we and it, and you can feel it resonating. When it hits all four quadrants, there is something very right about it. If it hits just one or the other, there's something inherently a little bit off. It's very seductive, because you can get one or two and you think, this must be right. But it may be just resonating with the I—not resonating with the you or the we, and so on.

COHEN: So unless it's all quadrants, it won't vibrate in that way that is self-authenticating.

WILBER: Right. And even if you mentally have to back off and check, write it down—all of us have to do that. Andrew's right on the money in saying that when it

comes down and it's healthy, you *feel* its authenticity; it creates an extraordinary sort of coming into manifestation of the next higher *you*. But then you can stand back and reflect on it. That's what critical reflection is—after the fact, you do a little review process.

QUESTION: So Andrew's speaking more about the felt experience that it's right, and you're saying it also fits the four quadrants.

WILBER: Yes.

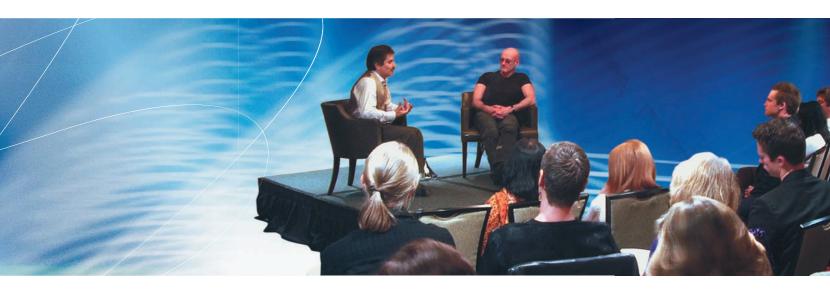
COHEN: But it's also seen—it's felt and seen as a whole. I don't want to reduce what we're talking about to a felt experience. I'm describing a higher level of cognition in which the emotional experience and what's being seen, what's being cognized, cannot be separated. The felt dimension is actually the least important part of it. What matters is what's happening in consciousness. New structures will have to come along to be able to contain what's being seen at moments like that.

WILBER: Yes, and it's not itself an experience.

COHEN: Right. But you know, the directly felt and seen dimension of this is always going to be moving faster than our understanding of it.

QUESTION: So are you saying that at a certain point we have to trust that what feels right is beneficial for the cosmos? We can never ultimately know?

COHEN: Well, I'm just saying that if you are pushing an edge in the way Ken was describing it, you are inherently going to be exploring territory that is, relatively speaking, unknown. So it takes a certain kind of courage to let yourself go that far. And of course, there is a risk there. Now, the risk is only felt by the separate self sense or ego. The part of you that is pushing this edge, the creative impulse, doesn't experience it as a risk because pushing that edge is a function of consciousness at that level. But when your human self, your ego, begins to be overwhelmed by that energy that's endeavoring to create the future, two things can happen. To the



degree to which you identify only with that consciousness that's trying to create the future, there's no fear. But when you step back and start thinking about it, there can be a recoil, an absolute terror.

When it comes to the question of whether one is on the right track or not, whether one is actually in touch with a higher level or just a little crazy, we have to be careful. How do we define sanity anyway, especially when we're talking about pushing an edge? I mean, in a world where most people are struggling to even keep up the pretense of integration, what does sanity actually mean? None of us should take for granted that we know what it is. Perhaps relatively speaking we can know, but when we are speaking about pushing the edge, about reaching for higher levels of development, the difference between madness and a higher expression of profound sanity may be very difficult for one who is not wise or enlightened to distinguish. It opens up questions that should force all of us to sit back and maybe question a lot of our assumptions.

So I think what I'm trying to say is that there are no guarantees. Of course, what Ken said is true—if you could see that all four quadrants were being taken into consideration, you could probably have a sense that

you're on the right track. But *still*, when you're talking about pushing the edge, there's always going to be an element of enormous risk.

WILBER: Let me play the other side of that too. What Andrew's saying is very important, and you also have to balance it with a fundamental trust. There's a very fundamental moment in consciousness where you establish trust. You can't distrust what's arising moment to moment. That very point of touching what's arising moment to moment—you can't doubt that. If you did doubt that, you'd be aware of the doubter. So you are in basic trust of the universe as it is arising. And that moment of contact with the universe when it's arising, that moment of touch, is Spirit. You can't fundamentally doubt the existence of Spirit, any more than you can doubt the arising that's happening right now. So it's important to do all the things that Andrew's talking about. And it's important to then stand back and reflect: Does it seem like it's resonating with all the different components in me, such as the quadrants? But don't ever lose track of that fundamental trust, because that's the very nature of God in you that's touching this world. And it's very palpable.

ON EXPERIENCE VS. ACTION

QUESTION: You were saying earlier that the ultimate state is not an experience. But I often feel that state as a powerful experience or sense of overflowing into the world.

WILBER: Let me try to explain. Right now, you notice things arising. You have an experience of this; you have an experience of that. Objects are arising in your awareness moment to moment—they come, they stay awhile, they go. Now, the space in which these experiences come and go is not an experience—that vast openness, or spaciousness, is not an experience. It doesn't come and go; it's unborn. It's also called emptiness because it's transparent; nothing sticks in it. And it has no moving parts, so it can't break down. That's the part that's not an experience. Out of that (although it's not really out of that) there can be movement, obviously, in the gross manifest realm. And that can be looked at as an overflowing, which tends to have more of an experiential component, because you're moving in the world of manifestation. So there's time and motion, and there's superabundance and it's overflowing. And that's fine, as long as you don't confuse the ultimate state with an experience.

COHEN: At the beginning of the path, we tend to measure our progress in relationship to moments or periods of time when we're experiencing what you described as that overflow. In other words, when that which exists beyond time is felt in the context of time, when it rubs up against time, so to speak—in those moments it becomes more obvious to us. And so we think when we're having that particular feeling experience, we are there or it's happening. And when that feeling is absent, we are not there and it isn't happening. But when you begin to wake up to who you really are and what the absolute nature of this whole process is, you give less importance to those moments of overflow as an indicator of who you are and what's ultimately true. As you mature, you become more centered in what's always true no matter how things feel or how they appear.

WILBER: When I was studying with Chagdud Tulku, who was one of the great Dzogchen masters, people would come to him and say, "Oh God, I finally got it. There's this clarity and it's just so unbelievable! I get it. I get it." And he was very funny, because he would ask, "Did

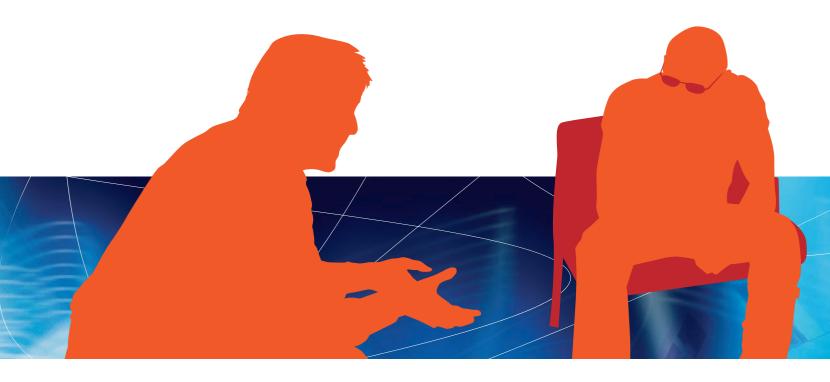
it have a beginning in time?" They'd say, "Yes, about half an hour ago." And he'd always say, "It's not it.

Come back later." So anything that has a beginning in time is not real.

QUESTION: In what you're both saying, I hear a call for action rather than experience, an emphasis on doing rather than being.

COHEN: Yes, because the fact is, we're all self-centered experience junkies who have a very materialistic relationship to *our feeling experience*, and we have to cut that out! The future needs to be created now, and we don't have any more time to sit around and enjoy the ride. We have to make something happen. Of course, there is a dimension to all this that never moves, that infinite ground of being that is the foundation of everything. But since the sixties, everybody's been talking about "be here now," and now we have "the power of now"—it's the same old thing. Personally, I think the last thing we need is more being here now. It's not enough.

A real integrated understanding of enlightenment has to embrace both dimensions. The absolute nature of everything is inherently free and inherently full and inherently perfect. And any liberated perspective, including an evolutionary one, has to be based upon a deep realization of that truth. But that's just the foundation. Upon that foundation there's an urgency to embrace this creative or evolutionary principle. Most of the time, we're all so lost in neurotic self-concern that if someone tells us, "Transcend the mind. Be in the moment," we go, "Ahhhh," and we feel some relief, and we say, "That's it." But I say, "That's not it." All we're feeling then is some relief from our narcissistic selfobsession and from "the burden of existence"—which is, ridiculously enough, how a lot of us actually feel about being alive. When you realize that the universe can only know itself through the unique capacity for consciousness that you and I possess, suddenly it's not a burden to be alive. It's the greatest gift and the greatest privilege to be a human being, right here, right now.



WILBER (to Questioner): Does that help you understand your experience?

QUESTION: Well, it is nice to hear more emphasis on doing. I resonate with that—not less being, just more doing.

WILBER: But don't get stuck in doing, or Andrew will go after that too.

COHEN: Yes, if it is doing that is not informed by the mind of enlightenment.

WILBER: Make sure you get that part—seriously!

COHEN: Of course, there are a lot of people doing great work who are not being compelled by the mind of enlightenment, and I'm not criticizing that in any way. But I'm talking about something different here. I'm talking about being compelled from the deepest and highest part of the self. And remember, the degree to which you're willing to respond to that compulsion is the degree to which you will experience self-liberation in that moment.

QUESTION: But the spot right before that is a little scary.

COHEN: Right, yes. Because the spot right before that is the ego's hesitation, inertia, and self-concern. It's the part of ourselves that we all have to get over, sooner rather than later. We don't have time to carry on like that—even though most of us aren't willing to give up the luxury of time. We don't have time to endlessly—

WILBER: —be here now. It takes too long! (Laughter)

cohen: Right! And also, we don't have time to endlessly struggle with the ambivalence of the ego. The ego will always be ambivalent. The Authentic Self, which is not separate from the energy and intelligence behind the universe, experiences only the ecstatic compulsion to create the future, with no sense of hesitation whatsoever. But the ego is identified with the past and attached to the way things have been, full of doubt and terrified of change. And on it will go, ad infinitum. So finally a decision has to be made, if you can permit me to say this, for eternity. It's not just a choice you make for your life, right now. When an individual awakens and makes this choice absolutely and irrevocably, I'm convinced it reaches beyond this lifetime.

ON EGO

QUESTION: What practices do you teach to guard against ego—to catch oneself when one is acting out of ego?

WILBER: There are two things I think are really important in terms of catching ego in your own path. One refers to the Absolute Self, if I can put it that way, and the other refers to the finite self. Meditative or contemplative traditions are very good at helping you reawaken to the Absolute Self, to the ever-present witness or Maha-atman, which is the Godhead in you. What you're likely to face there are ways you can mess that up, remnants of ego that get stuck there, and the traditions are pretty good at rooting those out. What they're not good at dealing with, because they can't see it, is the shadow of the finite self. So people can be relatively enlightened in certain traditions but have shadow elements that are quite shocking, because there's no way meditation can get at them.

I use several ways to get at that shadow, but one is a process that we developed at Integral Institute called 3-2-1 (as in third person, second person, first person). There are two versions of this practice. In the morning when you wake up, you think of a dream and think of the element in the dream that's the most disturbing—it could be the most attractive, most positive, or most negative. So that's a third-person object or "other." Now, most psychodynamic theories agree that these elements that disturb us most are parts of our own finite selves that we haven't come to terms with; we've repressed them or projected them and they appear as other. Your finite self has split something off from itself and that shadow element will screw you up all the way to enlightenment and back, because there's no way to get at it. So in the morning you simply take one of these elements and hold it in front of you and talk to it. Now it becomes second person. And once you've converted it to second person, then the next step is to make it first person, to identify with it, to actually speak from that place: "I am the monster," and so on. That's a very good way to help you get out of the victim mode, because one of the primary ways you get into the victim mode is by projecting some aspect of yourself that you hate outside of yourself, and then it attacks you all the time and you

can't figure out why. So that's the 3-2-1 process. You can also do it at the end of the day—take an event, thing, or person that upset you and follow the same process.

Here's where meditation can make it worse: If you've split off some aspect of your finite self and turned it into a third person, and you say, "I'm not angry, but boy that person seems to be angry at me. I don't know why; I never get angry," and then you sit in meditation and say, "There is anger, there is anger, there is anger," all it does is increase the disassociation. So meditation increases the disassociative capacity vis-àvis your own shadow. That's one reason why, if people get deeply involved in meditative practices, after five, ten, twenty years all they have left are enormous shadows, and everything else is gone. And if they're teachers, they get together over lunch and talk about their shadows! They can bring a great deal of mindfulness to the shadow; they just can't cure it.

So meditation is very important, but you have to remember that there are things to keep the Absolute Self straight and things to keep the finite self straight, and you want to try to have at least a practice or two to cover both. If you don't do both, you're in a great deal of trouble. The 3-2-1 process basically keeps your finite self healthy, even while you try to transcend it.

COHEN: In the way that I teach, I try to get people, number one, to recognize that they *have* an ego, and number two, to actually become deadly serious about transcending it in a way that is *significant*.

I don't personally believe it's possible for anybody, through the power of their will, to transcend ego *completely*. There apparently have been rare individuals who accomplished such a thing, but it seems to me that this was really a force of grace or karma, something that just seemed to happen. But I am convinced that it is possible to transcend ego to a profound degree, simply through the power of one's own awakened intention to do so. However, getting an individual to take *seriously* for more than a nanosecond the possibility of actually transcending their own ego is very difficult. The very

notion is just not part of our culture. But if it's not going to happen as an act of grace, the individual has to want to achieve that more than anything else.

One thing I put a tremendous amount of emphasis on is getting people to begin to pay attention to their own experience, and not just when they are practicing meditation. Once you really get what meditation is, it becomes something that you're always doing. And if you are paying attention in this way, then you are going to become aware of what ego is and what it feels like. You will become aware of the fact that we all have all kinds of unwholesome motives arising within us.

QUESTION: So it's just about being conscious moment to moment.

COHEN: Well, yes, and a lot of teachers talk about "moment-to-moment" awareness. But the important thing is, what's the *context* in which you're being aware from moment to moment? I've known people who could do vipassana retreats for months at a time, paying attention to literally every thought, every emotion, every sensation, and every sinew in the body, but then I would see them afterwards and they were still acting in the same egoic ways. They were not necessarily enlightened people who were really aware of their deeper impulses. They were just good meditators.

So bare mindfulness, or attention from moment to moment, is a good technique as far as it goes, but I don't feel it's enough, unless you, whoever you are, care about your own effect in this world and the role that you're going to play. When we really begin to care about the impact we're having on others and the world, we're naturally going to begin to give a presence of attention to our own motives. And when all these dark and impure impulses arise (which they will), because we care, we're going to take responsibility for them and not act out of them. Now, it takes a very big heart and a courageous interest in higher development to be able to bear all of that without wincing, without pulling back, without being frightened by your own darkness. You begin to see that

your potential to be a saint and your potential to be a sinner are absolutely equal. And you have to find a kind of equanimity as you observe everything that arises within you and get to the point where you're not just trying to become a "good person." As long as you want to see yourself as a good person, you're going to be afraid, for the wrong reasons, of the darker parts of yourself.

I think a really heroic attitude is to embrace the darkest parts of ourselves without wincing—to know that both potentials exist in all of us, but we're not striving to become saints, and we're not afraid of being sinners. We want to be free. And because we want to be free, we no longer want to act out of unconscious, impure motives in a way that will have karmic consequences in the world. If you live knowing that the darkest potentials exist inside you without being afraid of them, you're going to catch them before you act on them. If you don't, it means there was some unwholesome impulse that you were invested in, something you wanted or were afraid of, so you didn't care. That's when, at least in the way I teach, karma is created. And if you are awake to some degree, you have to deal with the consequences.

WILBER: There's a koan you can take home with you that speaks directly to this issue: "What is it in me that is conscious of everything?" And as for karma: "Karma is action that requires further action." So be aware of that in you which is conscious of everything, and don't merely be caught in the stream of karma, but simply know karma, and be aware of it.

COHEN: And if karma is that which requires further action, if you create karma, then you have to do whatever is necessary to correct it.

WILBER: Absolutely.

COHEN: Of course, in an evolutionary context, the reason we don't want to create karma is not so that we don't have to be reborn again but so that we can fearlessly embrace the reason that we're here.



QUESTION: I've spent many years meditating, but I've always felt there's more to enlightenment than that. I'm really grateful to hear teachers express that view, and I'm curious what role you see meditation as having. It's definitely supported me a lot in my own life, but I don't see how my sitting and being at peace does much for the situation the world is in.

WILBER: I'll give you a bit of sophistry first—sophistry meaning specious logic that has no meaning. Developmental psychologists have looked at scales of development for decades. And once you start understanding these, the first thing you want to know is: How can we help adults move through these stages? It's sort of a natural inclination. Lawrence Kohlberg spent twenty years of his lifetime doing that, as did Carol Gilligan, Kurt Fisher, Robert Kegan, and Howard Gardner. And interestingly, there is only one thing that's been consistently demonstrated to move people, on average, about two stages—and that's meditation. So that's point number one.

Point number two: Amrit Sen, the Nobel Prize-winning economist, demonstrated that there's never been a famine in a democratic country. And the reason is because information flow can allocate resources where they're necessary. Point number three: A democracy stems from at least stage-five moral development. Since seventy percent of the world's population is not there, the single best thing you can do to end world famine is to meditate. Meditation has a profound impact on the average level of consciousness in the world. It's very, very important. So go ahead and spend time meditating. That's exactly something you should

be doing. Why does it work? This is a little bit technical, but there's a fundamental rule about development: "The subject of one stage becomes the object of the subject of the next stage." So what happens when you meditate, and this is probably why meditation has been demonstrated to move people through stages, is that basically you're looking at your own mind. You're taking time, relaxing, settling into yourself—you don't necessarily have to be introspecting; you can just be resting with everything that's arising and letting it all arise and self-liberate in its own space—but when you do that, you're still making it an object. The only thing that can't be made an object is I-I, or the pure Witness, or God.

So meditation is a way to help you disidentify with finite objects and rest in that ground of being which is your very nature, your very Self. That's a little bit of an abstract summary, but I think meditation is extremely important, and don't ever let anybody tell you that it's just not having any impact on the world. You're changing the fundamental fabric of the cosmos when you meditate.

COHEN: First of all, if someone really knows what they're doing when they're meditating, the experience that they're going to have will remove any doubts about why they're doing it. What they're going to experience

will be profoundly liberating from anything that's ever happened, every single time, because a meditative posture releases one from the world stream, releases one from being trapped in time.

Meditation is the experience of a particular state of consciousness that has certain qualities, which are also the qualities of enlightenment itself. This is why I always say that meditation is a metaphor for enlightenment. So when we sit down to meditate, we are consciously choosing to assume the enlightened relationship to our own experience, which means we take a position in relationship to our experience that is free—free from compulsive identification with the thought stream. If you meditate regularly with a strong intention, it gives you a deeper confidence in the limitless, inherent freedom of the empty ground of being that is your own deepest Self. It builds a conscious conviction in no-limitation, and as I teach it, this is the most significant purpose of meditation. If you are really interested in higher development, then it's more than essential that the foundation of your personality or self sense is grounded in that absolute conviction. So until your conviction in your own freedom

is unwavering, and you're able to prove it through unbroken consistency in the way that you *live*, you need to keep having that experience.

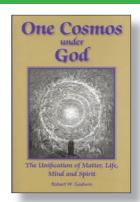
Now to be honest, a lot of people meditate without having discovered that conviction, and that's why they begin to doubt whether they should be doing it or not. Ultimately, when that conviction is found through real experience, meditation becomes much more than just sitting in a particular posture for a period of time. It becomes your ultimate refuge in relationship to life at all times, in all places, through all circumstances. But often people who meditate don't really contemplate the implications of taking that position in relationship to their experience. The implications are always profound—because the position is not relative. And you can't say that about many things.

WILBER: Just God.



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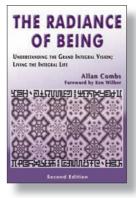


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INTRODUCTION

James Leininger was born a normal healthy boy, but it became clear at an early age that he had an abnormal obsession—airplanes. He would play with nothing else. Around the time he reached his second birthday, however, the planes he loved so much had begun to disturb his sleep. He would wake up from nightmares screaming, telling his mother, "Airplane crash on fire; little man can't get out." Eventually, his mother began to wonder if there was more to James's fascination with planes than just boyhood fancy. She remembers watching him go over one of his toy planes as if he were doing a flight check. She once bought him a model plane and pointed out the small bomb that was attached to its underside. "That's not a bomb, Mama, that's a drop tank," James corrected her. His mother had never heard of a drop tank and was certain that this three-year-old boy never had either.

As time went by, James began to reveal more about his nightmares, and the outlines of a past life slowly came to light. James told his parents that he was once the pilot of a Corsair on a boat named the Natoma, and he even came up with the name of one of his friends on the boat: Jack Larson. James's father, who had initially been skeptical of the idea of past lives, decided to do a little research. Soon, he hit pay dirt. The Natoma Bay had been an aircraft carrier stationed in the Pacific during World War II and Jack Larson (who was still alive and living in Arkansas) had been one of the pilots on board.

One day while looking through a book on World War II with his father, James pointed out the island of Iwo Jima, Japan, in a picture and indicated that it was where he had been shot down. He said that the plane had been hit directly in the engine. Curious to know more about his memories, his parents asked him what his name had been in his previous life, but James would only answer "James." However, they noticed that he was signing all of his drawings with the name James 3. His father did some checking and found out that only one pilot on the Natoma had actually been shot down over Iwo Jima. His name: James M. Houston, Jr.

KRISHNA TAUGHT IT; PLATO BELIEVED

in it; the Buddha revised it; Augustine considered it; Emerson wrote about it; Freud rejected it; Tolstoy was passionate about it; Sagan was curious about it. All of these great minds were fascinated, entranced, or troubled by one powerful idea: reincarnation. Of the many ways in which humans have tried to understand what happens after death, reincarnation is one of the most common and most enduring. Contrary to popular belief, it is not merely an Eastern notion but one that has flourished in cultures around the world. from indigenous tribes in Alaska to Islamic sects in the Middle East, from Christian cults of the Middle Ages to Nigerian tribes of today. Even some of the great founders of the Western worldview—Plato and Pythagoras, for example—believed that the soul would be reborn after death. And if you think that modernity's forward march has managed to put an end to this ancient metaphysical idea, think again. Recent surveys have shown that twenty-seven percent of the American population believe in reincarnation. That's over seventy-five million people who are convinced of the existence of past lives. While I doubt that many have stories that are as dramatic as James Leininger's parents', in a predominantly Judeo-Christian culture, seventy-five million should raise a few eyebrows.

And reincarnation is just one part of a larger story. Today, across the country, there is a broader transformation occurring in the way we look at life after death, a transformation that is perhaps most obvious in the extraordinary amount of cultural attention dedicated to the subject. From popular books (Spook: Science

Tackles the Afterlife to hit TV shows (Crossing Over, Medium) to the scripts of Tinseltown (The Sixth Sense, Birth), there is a resurgence of interest in what some scholars call survival, a term that is short for "survival of bodily death." Survival research explores whether or not any part of the human self is actually capable of surviving the death of the physical body. Some say there hasn't been such an active interest in the issue since Spiritualism swept America in the late nineteenth century, back when table-rapping, trance-channeling mediums entertained the intelligentsia and Theosophy was a prominent new religious movement. But if you have somehow missed all of the excitement. don't worry. Just head down to your local Barnes & Noble, where you can pick up a copy of The Complete Idiot's Guide to Reincarnation or check out the inevitable bestsellers by popular mediums before coming home to watch Ghost Whisperer on CBS.

Now what makes this resurgence of interest in survival all the more noteworthy is that it's not happening just in pop culture or on the outer fringes of the New Age but in private institutes, academic research centers, and professional conferences that span a number of different disciplines. Esalen, the legendary human potential center, has been sponsoring a yearly private gathering of scholars from around the country, many from major universities, to explore the subject. In fact, a surprising number of scholars are working within the usually conservative confines of the academy. What is stirring the excitement of these researchers is a large and growing body of evidence that can be objectively and empirically analyzed, all of which is suggestive of the existence of an afterlife. Some data is coming from near-death experiences, some from out-of-body experiences, some from past-life memories, some from experiments with mediums, and some from visions of apparitions. None of these experiences are, in and of themselves, new to human culture. But never before in the history of knowledge has there been such a wealth of cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary data converging from so many different streams of experience, all of which is providing hints of what lies beyond the physical veil. It is leading us into territory that until recently was the sole province of mythology, esoteric

upset the apple cart of a great deal of accepted scientific thought and raise some provocative questions. Some of these have been debated by philosophers for millennia—questions regarding past and future lifetimes, the nature of the soul, theories of karma, and so on. But the question that really began to fascinate me as I considered the notions of survival and rebirth was not just philosophical but also quite practical. If reincarnation is true, I wondered, where do we actually go after death? What happens in between lives? That is not a small question. And as I embarked upon my research, I wasn't entirely sure if it was even possible to look at it objectively. Maybe, in the end, it all comes

Never before in the history of knowledge have there been so many hints of what lies beyond the physical veil.

philosophy, and religious tradition. In some cases, the data being uncovered correlates remarkably well with traditional religious conceptions of death and rebirth. In other cases, it radically diverges. All of it, however, is contributing to a potential new science of survival, rebirth, and the nonphysical dimensions of existence.

So when the idea to pursue a feature article on reincarnation was broached in an editorial meeting last year, I was intrigued. I knew that reincarnation was one of the most active areas of survival research and one of the most controversial. Indeed, if it were ever to be proved that reincarnation is a fact, that would immediately

down to subjective beliefs and personal opinions. Maybe all speculations about what happens after death are just that—speculations.

Well, maybe and maybe not. What I learned as I began to look into the evidence for rebirth, both empirical and anecdotal, is that what I thought I knew about the subject is just the tip of a very big iceberg. Reincarnation may be a premodern belief but for some it has become a postmodern obsession. And the contemporary evidence being gathered in support of this ancient notion is making a powerful case that may forever change the way we think about what happens after our corporeal form kicks the bucket.





of gathering the data that may one day fill the pages (or web pages) of a contemporary version of this ancient guide-book. Indeed, we live in an age of great discovery, and the veil between this world and whatever lies beyond seems to be yielding its secrets as never before to the endless curiosity of the human mind. And like explorers setting foot on a new continent that was once only the subject of rumor, belief, and speculation, we are establishing beachheads on the subtle sands of the nonphysical realms and getting a sense of the initial landscape. Much to my surprise, I discovered that one of those beachheads is in Charlottesville, Virginia.

"At this point, we have registered over twenty-five hundred cases of children from all over the world who remember their past lives." The man speaking to me was practicing child psychiatrist Dr. Jim Tucker, a researcher at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. With his warm southern accent

Reincarnation may be a premodern belief, but for some it has become a postmodern obsession.

and gentle demeanor, Tucker didn't strike me as a nonconformist, but he has one of the most unusual academic jobs in the country—researching young children who spontaneously recall previous lives.

Tucker is part of the Division of Personality Studies, a branch of the university's psychiatry department that is dedicated to survival research. In a nondescript two-story house that sits on the corner of the main campus, a staff of almost a dozen researchers and assistants is exploring the diverse aspects of survival: near-death experiences, out-of-body experiences, visions of deathbed apparitions, after-death communication, and reincarnation. The department was founded in 1967 by Ian Stevenson, who has become a legend in the parapsychology community for his four decades of meticulous investigations of children who claim to remember previous lives. As philosopher and author David Ray Griffin writes, "Nowadays reincarnation research in the West is virtually synonymous with the work of Stevenson." Stevenson himself is in his eighties and rarely makes an office appearance, but Tucker is probably the closest thing he has to a successor, and he has taken the research baton and run with it. Each case in the department's voluminous files tells a unique and unconventional story.

For example, I came upon the case of William, a young boy who was born with a serious heart condition called pulmonary valve atresia—a birth defect in which the main pulmonary artery has not formed completely. When William was about three years old, he began to talk about his grandfather's life in ways that shocked his parents. For example, one day when he was misbehaving, his mother exclaimed, "Sit down, or I'm going to spank you," and William replied, "Mom, when you were a little girl and I was your daddy, you were bad lots of times, and I never hit you!" William seemed to know details of his grandfather's life that often left his parents scratching their heads trying to figure out where he could possibly have come by the information. He surprised his mother by accurately remembering the names of long-dead pets that had belonged to her when she was a young girl. He also recalled the exact circumstances of his grandfather's death, and even the day of the week on which it had occurred. William's grandfather had been a New York City policeman killed while attempting to prevent a robbery, shot six times. The killing bullet had entered his back, cutting through his lung and slicing open a major artery—the main pulmonary artery.

Another file tells the story of Mehmet Bekler, a Turkish man born in about 1940. He grew up in a small town called Ekber and worked in the family's flour mill. One day, a local customer arrived at the mill and proceeded to start an argument with Mehmet. The argument became physical, and at some point the customer attacked Mehmet with a flour shovel, delivering a sharp blow to the head and wounding him fatally. The year was 1965. Sometime later, a pregnant woman in a nearby village had a memorable dream. In it, a young man approached her and said, "I was killed with a blow from a shovel. I want to stay with you and not with anyone else." Soon after, in 1966, the woman gave birth to a son, Süleyman, who was born with a marked depression in the back of his skull. As soon as Süleyman was able to speak, he began to reveal details of a previous life, including his former name, "Mehmet." The child insisted that he had been a miller in his past life and had been killed in an argument with a customer. From an early age, he would point across the Turkish countryside and say he wanted to go to "the stream." Eventually, his parents relented and let the young boy lead them to the nearby town of Ekber where the mill stood, next to a stream. In Ekber, the parents were able to verify many of Süleyman's memories, and they also encountered the family of Mehmet Bekler. Eventually, all family members from his past and present life were persuaded of the legitimacy of his memories. As Süleyman grew up, he would occasionally see the customer from the mill who he claimed had murdered him. He always expressed anger toward the man, and one day he even asked his father to give him a gun so that he could take his revenge.

These are only two out of the twenty-five hundred children who have told their stories to researchers in Virginia. Cases have been found in the U.S., India, Burma, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Brazil, Lebanon, Britain, Nigeria, and elsewhere.

And they have many striking similarities. For example, most of these children report past lives that occurred in places that are geographically close to their current lives, helping to make their memories easier to verify. Most of them begin speaking about their former lives soon after they can talk, around two or three years of age. Many seem to have knowledge way beyond their years and outside of their life-circumstances—like the three-year-old Sri Lankan girl who stunned her parents by knowing obscure details about incense-making and naming specific brands of incense not available in her local area. Or the six-year-old Turkish boy who accurately recalled features of a house that he claimed to have lived in, decades before his birth in a city he had never seen over five hundred miles away. Some children even remember secrets that were known only to their past life personality—like a hiding place where money is discovered to be stashed.

Tucker and Stevenson are like crime-scene investigators, and each case in their files has detailed notes attached to it. They often interview the children, the parents, and family members from both the present and previous life, and any friends or acquaintances who might be able to shed light on the memories. They are looking for answers to questions such as: How accurate was the child in describing the past life? Does the child exhibit any unusual traits, behaviors, or phobias related to previous life memories? Was there any alternate way the child could have come by the information? The stronger cases, Tucker explained, are those in which "the child makes a number of specific statements and—this is the critical part—somebody writes down the statements before anyone goes to verify that they're true. At the last count I think there were thirty-three cases where there was documentation written beforehand. But even in many of the cases where there isn't prior documentation, the children have made these statements repeatedly, dozens or hundreds of times over a number of years."

It seemed significant to me that there are no Napoleons or Cleopatras in these files. The old joke that past-life memories always seem to involve famous people didn't apply to these kids. "They are remembering ordinary lives," Tucker told me. "Usually just somebody in a village who lived maybe twenty miles away." But there is one factor that is extraordinary about a large number of the cases. Over seventy percent of the children, Tucker said, have reported previous lives in which they died of unnatural means, often violently. Car wrecks, bus accidents, murders, gunshot wounds, fatal fights-all of these causes of death are littered throughout the files. There is no shortage of speculation as to why violent deaths figure so prominently. The most common suggestion is that perhaps something about the shock of these sudden or untimely ends caused memories to be retained that would otherwise be forgotten. "It implies that the usual process has somehow been short-circuited," explained Tucker.

As I stood in the dusty hall closet of this one-of-a-kind university department examining the floor-to-ceiling file cabinets filled with case reports, I was struck by the sheer quantity of evidence that has been painstakingly gathered since Stevenson began his field research in the early sixties. I simply had no idea, prior to beginning this article, that such a formidable body of scientific research had been conducted, and at a major American university no less. Individually, the stories are striking and convincing, and many simply defy prosaic explanations. Indeed, the explanations that immediately come to mind—fraud, fantasy, faulty memories, wishful thinking on the part of the parents—do not readily apply to a significant number of these cases. The stories have been carefully researched, and family members and friends have been interviewed. Taken as a whole, these files constitute what is probably the single best collection of evidence for reincarnation on the planet today. What may be a matter of faith for billions of people around the world has been, for the last forty years in this small office, a matter of empirical study.

I was curious whether Tucker felt that the evidence in these files was enough to prove that reincarnation is real. "We certainly don't use the word proof, because these are not cases that are done under tight laboratory conditions where you can rule out everything," he cautioned. "This is the messy real world. If you're studying naturally occurring phenomena, you take what you can get. Ian Stevenson has said that reincarnation is the best explanation, but not the only one, for the strongest cases. They provide evidence. But they are not proof." While they may not amount to proof, the stories of these unusual children certainly force us to temporarily suspend our disbelief (or our beliefs) about life after death. But I had not yet finished my journey down this Charlottesville rabbit hole. Tucker's next stories surprised me even more, and after seeing the cases, I can honestly say that I'll never look at birthmarks the same way again.

THE BODY REMEMBERS

Kathy was an unmarried young woman who became pregnant at sixteen and had a son, James, in 1978. Initially, James seemed like a healthy young boy, but at sixteen months he began to limp, and he soon developed a prominent nodule about an inch above his right ear. Eventually, he was diagnosed with neuroblastoma, an often fatal form of cancer. As his young mother tried to care for him, the cancer spread over James's body, and his condition deteriorated. A tumor blinded his left eye, and his weakened body could no longer keep food down. In desperation, the doctors attempted to feed him with an IV through his right jugular vein, leaving a nasty scar. The medical efforts were in vain and James passed from this world in April of 1980.

Two marriages later, Kathy was in her thirties when she had another son, Chad. As she was emerging from anesthetic after the delivery, one of the doctors approached her cautiously. "Has your husband told you yet?" he asked. Petrified that her baby had died, Kathy was relieved to hear that he was in fact alive. But her relief soon turned to shock when she saw Chad for the first time. The newborn boy had a cyst one inch behind his right ear, was blind in the left eye, and had a dark birthmark that looked like a scar running down the right side of his neck near the jugular vein.

As Chad grew up, he began to exhibit other similarities to James, both physically and emotionally. He had the same temperament, and as he began to walk, he developed a limp. When he was four years old, he turned to his mother and asked about their "other house." He then proceeded to accurately describe the apartment where James and Kathy had lived almost two decades before, recalling details even Kathy's husband would not have known. "Why do you want to go back to this other house?" she asked Chad. Without hesitating, he answered, "Because I left you there."

Kathy's story was originally researched by Carol Bowman, author of *Children's Past Lives*, a book that, with its numerous stories from American families, helped to shatter the illusion that children who remember past lives exist only in cultures that believe in reincarnation. What makes the case of Kathy and Chad so remarkable is the physical similarities between the two boys—particularly Chad's birthmarks and birth defects that corresponded to James's physical ailments. As it turns out, such things are not uncommon in the Virginia case files.

For example, there is the Turkish child who, at the age of two, remembered a past life as an outlaw. This particular criminal had been well known in Turkey and had died in a standoff with the police only a few days before the child's birth. Trapped by the authorities, knowing he could not escape, he had committed suicide, holding his gun under his own chin and pulling the trigger. The child grew up remembering accurate details of the criminal's life and death, but what was even more striking was that he also had a birthmark underneath his chin that precisely matched the bullet entrypoint of the criminal's self-inflicted wound. When Stevenson investigated the case, he inquired about a second possible birthmark at the top of the head. Pulling the young boy's hair back, he discovered a hairless birthmark on the scalp at the exact location of the bullet's exit wound.

I learned that there are, in fact, *fourteen* different cases that follow this same pattern. In all fourteen, Stevenson has documented a small, round birthmark corresponding to a bullet wound that a child remembers suffering in a previous life. And in each case, the birthmark is accompanied

by a larger, more irregular-shaped birthmark on the opposite side of the body. "As much as possible, we verify that these birthmarks do in fact match wounds on the body of the deceased," Tucker told me. "When we can, we get autopsy reports or medical records. If those aren't available, then we try to obtain eyewitness testimony from people who saw the body and can talk about where the wounds were. Sometimes we even get police reports." As Tucker showed me one picture after another of birthmarks taken from cases they have investigated, I couldn't help but consider the implications of what I was seeing.

These types of cases provide some of the most suggestive data in support of reincarnation, yet they also raise fascinating questions. We know that genetics is the source of the physical makeup of any individual and that environmental circumstances play a role as well. This evidence, assuming for a moment that reincarnation is the best explanation, suggests that perhaps there is another factor in our development. It would seem to indicate that whatever matrix of energy is passing from one body to another is interacting in some way with the physical form—even with the genetic code—and impacting its development. Perhaps physical trauma, as well as memories, may survive death and carry on in nonphysical form, destined to affect the makeup of future incarnations. As I looked at the slide of a sixteen-year-old boy with round

A boy with round birthmarks littered across his chest remembered dying of a shotgun wound in a previous life.

birthmarks littered across his chest, who remembered dying of a shotgun wound in a previous life, I wondered: How often does this happen? Why does it seem to happen in some situations but not in others? How might this affect our understanding of biology? Whatever the answers, there is certainly evidence of a remarkable correlation between memories of trauma suffered in a previous life and birthmarks or birth defects in the current life.

Birthmarks and birth defects were some of the more incredible aspects of the stories I heard in Virginia, but there were plenty of other mind-stretching cases hiding in those file cabinets. Some are simply hard to categorize, and they challenge one's ideas about reality no matter what perspective one approaches the material from. For example, in some Native American tribes, there are cases of more than one child having accurate, documented memories of the *same previous life*. "You see this in the Pacific Northwest tribes," one researcher told me. "There have been cases investigated where there



will be half a dozen grandchildren who remember being the same grandmother in a previous life." There are the cases of Burmese children who remember being Japanese soldiers stationed in Burma during World War II. They grew up complaining about the spicy Burmese diet and the hot climate, using words that their parents could not understand and requesting to eat raw fish. There are even cases where a child remembers having been aborted. For example, in one case a young girl formed an intense bond with her swim coach immediately upon meeting her, a bond so strong that it surprised both the mother and the coach. Soon the child began to make strange statements to her mother. She insisted that she had once been a baby in the coach's "tummy" and that a "bad man had come and pulled her out," though she "desperately tried to hold on." As it turned out, the coach later admitted that she had had an abortion years before, and she was shocked that the child could possibly have known.

SUPERPSI ME

Even for researchers who recognize in Stevenson's children a legitimate phenomenon, there is a great deal of disagreement over how to account for it. One of the most popular and enduring alternative explanations has come to be called "superpsi." Psi stands for parapsychological phenomena and is the more accepted name in research circles for what used to be known as ESP, or extrasensory perception. Superpsi refers to a particularly powerful version of psi. In this case, it would mean that the information is being obtained not from an actual past life but from a powerful psychic perception.

There are several versions of the superpsi hypothesis. One is that the children are telepathically reading the minds of existing individuals—maybe friends and family of the deceased—to obtain the information. Or perhaps the children are actually traveling back in time and clairvoyantly reading the mind of

the person who they claim to have been in a "past life." While some may balk at the idea of such abilities, the theory is attractive for one particular reason. As philosopher Michael Grosso puts it, "superpsi is . . . preferred [by some] because it appeals strictly to the abilities of living people." In other words, accepting the superpsi hypothesis means that one need not believe in the existence of reincarnation and the whole metaphysical Pandora's box that comes along with it. No rebirth. No soul surviving the death of the physical body. No afterlife. One need only believe that individuals are capable of powerful psychic perceptions. Very powerful psychic perceptions. In fact, that's also the problem with the theory. These kids would have to be psychic superheroes in order to account for much of the data. And there is little evidence that such abilities exist at all—certainly not in these relatively normal children, many of whom are now decades older and show no extraordinary psychic capacities.

Most of the researchers I spoke with were highly skeptical of superpsi. Transpersonal theorist Chris Bache voiced the feelings of many when he told me that "Stevenson has done a very careful analysis of superpsi and explained in specific cases why the hypothesis doesn't really fit the data. Besides, no one has ever really demonstrated superpsi in the laboratory. The psychic ability which they are proposing is just astronomical."

Still, even as superpsi has been widely discredited as an explanation, more sophisticated variations on the theory have arisen to take its place. For example, in his recent book, Science and the Akashic Field, systems theorist Ervin Laszlo attempts an explanation that sounds like something Jean-Luc Picard might refer to in a rather wild script of Star Trek. First, he theorizes the existence of a metaverse beyond the universe. (Nothing radical there. Physics journals these days are full of metaverse theories.) Then he proposes that this metaverse (or quantum vacuum, or Akashic field, or A-field, as he refers to it) contains within it both the universe itself and, more importantly, all the experiences of living things in the universe—a universal quantum memory bank, if you will. It's not a new idea, just new to science. Clairvoyants such as Edgar Cayce have long referred to something they called the Akashic Records, the metaphysical name for an astral record of everything that has ever happened. Laszlo has taken the name, added a healthy dose of contemporary science, and created a new version. And he uses it to explain reincarnation memories. The children aren't recalling previous lives, Laszlo suggests toward the end of his book; they're accessing information from the A-field.

These alternative explanations may have some merit and may be applicable in certain instances. But I could find no expert on the subject who believed that any one of these theories was sufficient to account for the data in total. Some cases may be explained, but sooner or later one runs into particular examples that just don't fit the model, at least not without some major leaps of logic.

"Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence," the great cosmologist Carl Sagan famously declared. Sagan was one of the original skeptics. In fact, one of his last books, *The Demon-Haunted World*, was specifically dedicated to debunking the pseudo-science in our culture. Yet in that same book, Sagan expressed interest in Stevenson's data and felt that it deserved a fair scientific hearing. That hearing has, for the most part, yet to occur. Very few scholars outside the field of parapsychology have seriously considered the cases collected by the University of Virginia. A few have been supportive, but most have been dismissive or extremely critical. Indeed, Stevenson's most oft-quoted critic is the late philosopher Paul Edwards. In his book *Reincarnation: A Critical Examination*, he critiques Stevenson's

When speaking about their past lives, most of these kids seem unusually lucid, clear, and serious.

work on a number of counts. But his primary argument against the reincarnation hypothesis is not actually an argument against the data itself but against the paradigm-shattering notion of reincarnation as a theory. Edwards writes that reincarnation simply clashes with too many accepted scientific conventions to be considered seriously. Therefore, he bases much of his argument on what he calls the failure to overcome the "formidable initial presumption against reincarnation."

This is perhaps the primary reason why curious researchers and fascinated scientists haven't been beating a path to Tucker and Stevenson's door. Of course, many do have questions about the evidence. They worry about faulty memories, sloppy methodologies, problems with translators, biased investigators, etcetera. But the more I studied the critics, the more it became clear to me that the main problem Tucker and Stevenson are encountering with their peers in the academic community has to do with exactly Edwards' main concern—that the reincarnation hypothesis simply overturns too many precepts sacred to certain branches of science.

For example, most neuroscientists and cognitive scientists believe that consciousness cannot exist independent of the physical apparatus of the brain. And that fundamental assumption effectively rules out reincarnation. And even if we presume for a moment that consciousness can exist outside the brain, we still have absolutely no idea how a "soul" or an immaterial component of the human personality might survive a transfer between bodies. Try bringing up that possibility at the next conference of biologists or neuroscientists and see how quickly they escort

you to the door. As Susan Blackmore, a former parapsychology researcher turned skeptic, told me, "The problem with reincarnation is that there is absolutely no sound theoretical basis for it, whatsoever, of any kind."

Tucker understands that the lack of an acceptable theoretical framework for reincarnation makes scientists reluctant to take the data seriously. However, he was quick to point out that this is not a new story in science. "It used to be anecdotal that French farmers complained that rocks were falling out of the sky and landing on their farms," he told me. "Scientists completely scoffed at that, because how could rocks fall from the sky? There aren't any rocks *in* the sky. Of course, once they figured out what meteorites were, then it changed. So they should've been paying attention to what those farmers were saying. But often, you just ignore the anecdotes until you have a theory that lets you make sense of them."

Stevenson and Tucker are also not without high-profile supporters. One of the most vocal has been retired Georgia State University philosophy professor Robert Almeder. He carefully reviewed the research over a decade ago, refuted the critics, and presented a more positive assessment. In fact, Almeder felt that Stevenson himself was underestimating the power of his own evidence. According to Stevenson's

"Tell me about heaven," the girl asked her baby brother. "I'm forgetting."

conclusions, Almeder writes, "It is *not unreasonable to believe in reincarnation* in order to explain his best cases." But the "proper conclusion," Almeder claimed, was that it was "unreasonable" for someone to categorically deny reincarnation. In other words, he felt that while the jury might still be out on the subject, given the evidence, a rational mind would have to consider it as a possibility.

Somewhere between the believers and skeptics lies a public largely unaware of the data. And the scientific community is still investing few resources in pursuing such unconventional research. The current head of the Division of Personality Studies, Dr. Bruce Greyson, told me during my visit to Charlottesville that the new chair of the university's psychology department strongly disapproves of their studies. Despite their self-sufficient endowment and the impeccable credentials of the staff, Greyson is worried about their status and wondering how long their affiliation with the school will survive.

In the meantime, novel theories—some conventional, some unconventional, some skeptical—will continue to try to account for these unusual children who keep appearing

in our world. And now, with Carol Bowman's pioneering books on American children who remember past lives, we are likely to hear much more about this phenomenon in the West. Over time, I imagine that more research and new theories will shed further light and perspective on this complex enigma. But as the green lawns of the University of Virginia faded into my rearview mirror, I was left with an inescapable conclusion: at this point, reincarnation seems to be the theory that best fits all the facts.

MEMORY, MEMORY, QUITE CONTRARY

One of the interesting characteristics common to young children who spontaneously remember past lives is that almost all begin speaking about those lives soon after they learn to talk, between eighteen months and three years of age. Parents report particular circumstances under which the children tend to share these memories: when they are relaxed, when they are between sleeping and waking, when they have just had a bath, when they are on a long car ride, and so forth. Some are not even conscious of the memories outside of these specific conditions. When speaking about their past lives, most of these kids seem unusually lucid, clear, and serious, in contrast to those times when they're just engaged in childish fantasy or imagination. And most of them lose the memories at around seven years of age, no matter what culture they are raised in. Significantly, this corresponds with the beginning of a specific developmental stage in psychology—"concrete operational," if you're using Piaget's scheme—a stage associated with the development of the logical, rational part of the mind. And the amnesia is not just in relationship to past lives—as developmental psychologists have shown, children lose memories of their infancy and early life experiences at this same age (a phenomenon known as infantile amnesia).

Given these consistent patterns, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that these particular memories somehow operate within a different frame of reality than do everyday memories. As children grow up and become more connected to *this* life, they become less connected to whatever they may be remembering from the past. In the recent documentary *Experiencing the Soul*, based on the book of the same name by Eliot Jay Rosen, one psychologist relates a powerful story told by a couple who had a three-year-old daughter and a newborn baby boy:

During a period of several days, this little girl kept coming to the parents and saying, "I'd like to spend some time alone with my new baby brother." The parents were a little nervous about this. They had heard of sibling rivalry, so they thought, "Well, maybe it'll pass." It did *not* pass. She persisted in her request, so they decided that they would allow her to do this. But they had a monitor in the room so they could listen over the intercom to what was going on. So the day came; they let her enter the room, and as they listened on the intercom, all was quiet for a few moments. And then they heard their daughter's voice to the boy-child: "Tell me about heaven. I'm forgetting."

Now, exactly what she meant by "heaven" is not entirely clear, but myth and literature have long supported the notion that growing up involves a process of forgetting. Plato, one of the original philosophers of reincarnation, wrote about the river of forgetfulness through which all souls pass before their rebirth. And Wordsworth evocatively described birth as "but a sleep and a forgetting." But whatever amnesia we fall under as we come into this life, it would seem that for some of us, traces of a previous existence, and sometimes much more, survive, even well into adulthood. One of the most dramatic examples of this is a case from the 1960s, related in the book *The Cathars and*

Reincarnation by British psychiatrist Dr. Arthur Guirdham.

In 1961, a woman walked into Dr. Guirdham's office with an acute and confusing problem. She had been the victim of unrelenting nightmares since the age of twelve, and sometimes she screamed so loud she worried that the neighbors would awaken in distress. The content of the dreams was usually something related to horrible murders and massacres. After months of pursuing normal psychiatric approaches, the doctor discovered that when she was much younger, she kept a diary in which she had written some of her dreams as well as other odds and ends that came to her mind. As it turned out, the contents of her diary contained information about life as a Cathar in Toulouse, France, in the thirteenth century. The Cathars were a Christian sect that was persecuted in the Inquisition, and one of their heretical ideas was a belief in reincarnation. Her diary also contained verses of songs written in Medieval French, a language spoken in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Moreover, the woman had unknowingly recorded, in horrifying detail, the massacre of the Cathars. They were burned at the stake, and she included a gruesome description of having been burned at the stake herself. She recalled details

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of the event that only later were recognized by historians to be factual. Her memories of family names and aspects of relationships between different members of the Cathar sect were later

Immediately upon arriving in Siena, she was overcome with a powerful sense of familiarity.

verified by a detailed analysis of the records of the Inquisition. She even claimed, in contrast to the accepted history of the time, that Cathar priests wore dark blue. Historians insisted that they always wore black—that is, until 1966, when new facts from the Latin archives were discovered and the history updated. Cathar priests, we now know, did wear dark green and dark blue.

Whether or not these revelations helped this patient is unknown, but some swear by the healing power of unearthing memories of past lives. This particular example occurred long before the phrase "past-life therapy" came into vogue, but the intervening years have seen an explosion of people seeking to explore the healing effects of reliving past-life memories. And it's not just psycho-physical healing. Many have reported profound spiritual breakthroughs, deep experiences of the soul, and powerful transformations of

relationships—all through coming to terms with psychological patterns that have driven them not just in this life but through multiple incarnations. Sometimes it's accidental. The therapist tells the patient, under mild hypnosis, to go to the source of his or her problem, and suddenly the person sitting opposite is no longer Dick or Jane of twenty-first century America but a seventeenth-century watchmaker in Europe, a peasant in India, or a monk in Japan. Therapeutically, it's a mind-boggling proposition. Just think of common psychosocial issues rooted in childhood—the Oedipal complex, repression, defense mechanisms, problems in ego development—and then add a hundred variations over thousands of years. I think even Freud would feel overwhelmed.

Yet across this country, thousands (if not millions) have tried this experimental therapy, reliving times long since forgotten and experiencing cultures and epochs that historians would love to get a glimpse of—all from the comfort of the therapist's couch. Everything from asthma to eczema to stuttering to nightmares to anxiety attacks has been cured, the stories tell us, using this therapeutic practice that takes depth psychology to a whole new level. It is a movement that has helped Dr. Brian Weiss become a New Age star and inspired Shirley MacLaine to walk out on a limb. It has helped convince many in the Judeo-Christian West—which Arthur Schopenhauer once described as the part of the world that does not believe in reincarnation—that rebirth is a fact. And

Common Signs of Children's Past-Life Memories

Matter-of-fact tone

When children speak of past lives, they become calm and almost adult-like. Their tone becomes serious and noticeably different from the lilting quality of fantasy babble.

Consistency of detail

Unlike childhood fantasies, the details and facts of the stories remain the same over time, though children may fill in more details as their language skills improve.

Knowledge beyond experience

Children show a surprising knowledge of events or facts from the past that are not part of their current life experience. They also can demonstrate an uncanny adult understanding of emotions that are beyond their level of development.

Memory of death

Children will matter-of-factly tell their parents about how they died in their previous life. Often the story is a violent one, and sometimes they will relate it in graphic detail.

Adapted from: Carol Bowman, Children's Past Lives: How Past-Life Memories Affect Your Child (New York, Bantam, 1997)

it has motivated serious therapists to test the edges of their own profession, walking well outside the boundaries of mainstream psychology and donning a mantle more commonly associated with Madame Blavatsky than Sigmund Freud.

However, there is a snake in the grass when it comes to hypnotic regression—a problem technically known as cryptoamnesia. It means that we may not be consciously aware of all of our memories and that long-forgotten pieces of information, stored forever in the obscure byways of the human brain, can easily emerge under hypnosis. In other words, I might remember a World War II lifetime under hypnotic suggestion and be able to describe that lifetime in detail. When questioned closely, however, it would become clear that I was unconsciously weaving together a mixture of memories gained through watching television shows or perhaps reading books. It may sound unlikely, but a number of tests have shown that it is possible. As well-known science author Martin Gardner writes, "Almost any hypnotic subject capable of going into a deep trance will babble about a previous incarnation if the hypnotist asks him to."

For many therapists engaged in past-life hypnosis, however, the veracity of the memories is not what's important. Indeed, the goal in a therapist's office tends to be wholeness and healing. Popular author and past-life therapist Dr. David Hammerman explained, "People will often ask me, 'How do I know if this past-life memory is real or not?' And my own stance is that I don't think it's terribly important to therapeutic purposes whether the story that somebody's coming up with is totally made up by their mind. Does it have healing power? That's the most important thing. Is the narrative that comes through therapeutic?"

Nevertheless, all of the therapists I spoke to were clearly convinced that at least *some* of the memories their clients relived were real. For example, Dr. Hammerman, who has had clients reexperiencing past lives that go all the way back to prehistoric times, conveyed to me a story of a patient who relived a past life in which she remembered a dramatic wartime scene in sixteenth-century Germany. The patient pursued information about the past life and eventually tracked down all of the relevant records, confirming her memories. And there are probably hundreds of cases like this scattered through the literature on reincarnation, some more fully documented than others. One of the most remarkable accounts is told by well-known past-life therapist Roger Woolger in Stephen Sakellarios's 2002 documentary *In Another Life: Reincarnation in America*.

One day in a hypnosis session, a client of Woolger's remembered a previous life in which she was a minor painter living in Italy during the Renaissance. Of the many details she remembered, one was the name of the painter. After the session, she decided to do a little investigation, but an exhaustive search through records of the Renaissance at local librar-

Behavior and phobias

Children may exhibit inexplicable behaviors and acute fears that bewilder their parents. In the context of a past-life memory, these can suddenly make sense and are often related to the mode of death.

The age window

Children generally start speaking of their past-life memories soon after they begin to talk. By the age of seven, the memories have usually faded.



ies revealed nothing. Then, almost a year after the initial experience, a friend recommended that she try a particular art institute that kept records of European painters. Buried in a five-volume history of Italian art, she found the name she had been looking for. The painter, as it turned out, had lived in Siena, Italy. Inspired by this discovery, she decided to take a trip to Italy, her first visit to the country. Immediately upon arriving in Siena, she was overcome with a powerful sense of familiarity and was able to walk straight to the house where this painter had lived. There on the wall outside was a historical plaque making reference to this Renaissance artist.

Few attempts have been made to study past-life hypnotic regression in a more systematized, scientific manner. What may be the most impressive and ambitious foray into this territory did not take place in a therapist's office at all. It started in a Quaker library in New Jersey in 1966.

Helen Wambach was a practicing psychologist and teacher in Long Branch, New Jersey, when her life took a surprising turn. Visiting a Quaker center, she found herself unexpectedly transported to another time. Describing the event in her 1978 book, *Reliving Past Lives*, she writes:

As I mounted the stairs to the second floor, a feeling of being in another time and place came over me. As I entered the small library room, I saw myself going automatically to the shelf of books and taking one down. I seemed to "know" that this had been my book, and as I looked at the pages, a scene came before my inner eye. I was riding on a mule across a stubbled field, and this book was propped up on the saddle in front of me. The sun was hot on my back, and my clothes were scratchy. I could feel the horse moving under me while I sat in the saddle, deeply absorbed in reading the book propped before me. . . . I seemed to know the book's contents before I turned the pages.

Deeply impacted by this event, Wambach was compelled to ask: Were such unexplained and subconscious memories buried deep in the psychology of all human beings? How could we know, she wondered, if these past-life memories were actually genuine? Ten years after her initial experience in the Quaker library, Wambach thought she found her answer to the question. It came in the form of two numbers—50.6 and 49.4.

50.6% and 49.4% are statistics that came out of Wambach's research in the late seventies. In the most extensive experiment ever conducted using past-life hypnosis, Wambach regressed over one thousand people to different time periods in history, asking them to record any past lives that they experienced. After the sessions, participants would

fill out forms answering specific questions about the lives they had remembered—questions about gender, clothing, skin color, types of food eaten, living arrangements, and so forth. Many participants reported numerous past lives from different time periods—some male, some female. When all was said and done, Wambach tallied up the results, and she found that 50.6% of the reported lives were male and 49.4%

If we assume for a moment that reincarnation is real, then what happens when we are freed from our physical moorings?

were female. And this statistic did not seem to depend on the percentage of men and women participating in her research sessions. In other words, if there were 75% women and 25% men in a session, the gender of the reported past lives remained steady, right around the 50.6%/49.4% split. This statistic is striking because it matches our best projections of what the global gender distribution has been throughout history.

Some people have called Wambach's results the best evidence yet that at least some of the lives remembered under hypnotic regression are actual past lives. Could thousands of fantasy lives, they ask, conjured up by individual psyches really succeed in nailing such a key statistical figure so precisely? Her regression research was the first of its kind, in terms of the careful quantitative analysis of such a large volume of data. And it is an experiment that has never been repeated.

Despite Wambach's efforts, past-life regressions ultimately count for little as empirical evidence for reincarnation within the academic community. Given the problem of cryptoamnesia and the hypnotic subject's propensity to create imaginary memories, that is understandable. Stevenson himself has been highly critical of the whole field. But I found myself unable to dismiss all of the anecdotal accounts as mere fad or fantasy. There are simply far too many unexplained pieces of the puzzle and impressive stories from reputable sources that seem difficult to account for in other, more conventional ways.

WAITING FOR THE JURY

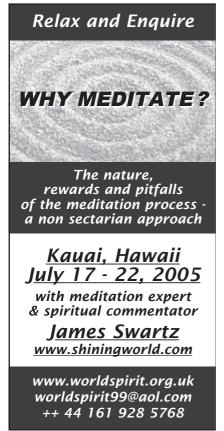
Past-life memories obtained under hypnotic regression and children who remember previous lives are the two most common sources cited as evidence for the existence of reincarnation. Those hoping that these two fields of study can provide concrete proof will not, at the end of the day, be satisfied by the accumulated data. At this point, strong evidence has been gathered, but it is far from irrefutable. Reasonable people can disagree on what the evidence means. And we must also remember that there is much at stake in this debate. Worldviews, religious beliefs, and many deeply held convictions about the nature of life itself are all called into question by the idea of reincarnation, and it's going to take more than twenty-five hundred unusual children and some impressive anecdotes from hypnosis subjects to overturn the status quo.

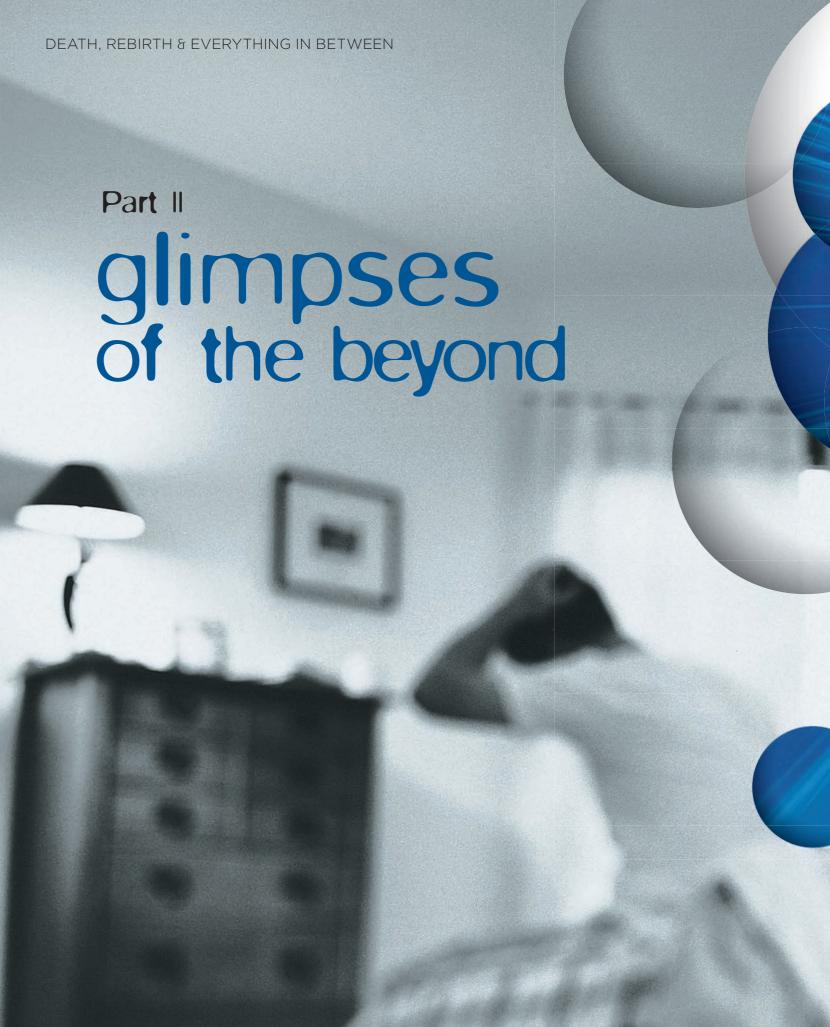
Nevertheless, the sheer volume of data *suggestive and supportive* of rebirth presents an impressive case for all but the most predisposed skeptics. I could not escape the fact that no one I spoke to—skeptic, agnostic, or believer—could come up with convincing alternative explanations for many of the cases I came across. At best, they would come up with a theory—fraud, faulty memories, cryptoamnesia, psi—that might fit *some* of the cases. And I began to see that there is a big difference between *possible* alternatives and *convincing* alternatives.

Before I began my research into the subject, I had little investment in reincarnation as an idea. It was never a part of my own religious beliefs and it was never a subject I felt strongly about. After months of looking into the stories, examining the literature, and interviewing the researchers, I still had no final answers, but I certainly felt that there was sufficient evidence to warrant a deeper exploration of survival studies. You see, if we assume for a moment that reincarnation is *real*, then that brings up an important question: What happens when we are freed from our physical moorings? If we do, in fact, survive death and exist beyond the body, then *where* exactly are we? What is the nature of that nonphysical experience?

Of course, there are many traditional answers to this question. However, I began to notice something interesting. As I read through the latest research in the field of survival studies, I realized that there were some intriguing similarities between stories of reincarnation and accounts from the strange and captivating world of near-death experiences and out-of-body experiences. And I started to wonder: Could all of these experiences be pointing to the same dimension of existence?









experience (OBE). It is a phenomenon, now well documented, where one temporarily experiences oneself as being disconnected from one's physical body. Monroe's first book, *Journeys Out of the Body*, was a fascinating and mind-bending voyage through his many years of experimenting with this unusual

Eventually he was able to develop the capacity to leave his body almost at will.

state of consciousness, and it caused a minor sensation when it was released in 1971. His second, Far Journeys, was a travelogue through his subsequent explorations and included his own conclusions about the nature of what he began to call the nonphysical world. Monroe's initial OBEs were spontaneous and unexpected. But he was eventually able to develop the capacity to leave his body almost at will and pursue his own adventures in nonphysical dimensions. Monroe, who died in 1995, was more of a bold explorer than a spiritual practitioner, but the maps of the nonphysical world he constructed from his OBE journeys are full of intriguing similarities to neardeath experiences as well as some traditional metaphysics—in particular, the Tibetan Buddhist bardos. While I had long been curious about the out-of-body phenomenon in and of itself, my visit to the Monroe Institute was inspired by the relationship I saw between OBEs and reincarnation.

I had begun to notice that in many accounts from those who remember past lives, there are intriguing descriptions of time spent in the afterlife, or the "interlife," as some have called it—meaning the time spent *between* lives. These accounts may give us a tantalizing glimpse into the nature of what lies beyond the physical veil. What I wanted to know was: Are those who remember an interlife referring to the same dimension or realm as those who are having out-of-body experiences? Dr. Carlos Alvarado, a researcher at the University of Virginia who studies the out-of-body phenomenon, confirmed the possible link:

Reincarnation is a form of survival of bodily death, but whatever comes back must have existed at some point and there must have been a point of transfer between personality one and personality two. So we could speculate that at some point when you die, you have to be out of your body and survive before you reincarnate again. Where you are at that moment may be the same as what people experience as an OBE or out-of-body experience. In fact, spiritual traditions talk about death as basically a permanent out-of-body experience. So

if you accept these types of ideas, then there is a clear link with phenomena such as reincarnation.

Monroe's initial explorations were done before near-death experiences (or NDEs, as they're often called) became such a widely discussed phenomenon. But the similarities between the two states are clear. In some respects, NDEs are simply OBEs that occur when a person is close to death. Moreover, descriptions of both OBEs and NDEs do have many similarities to the interlife descriptions from reincarnation research. Indeed, Dr. Bruce Greyson, who studies near-death experiences, informed me that there have already been some studies examining these connections:

One of the medical students who was working with Jim Tucker last year compared the reports of Burmese children who remember the interval between lives with the reports of Buddhists who have had near-death experiences. And she found that the descriptions were very similar. There's a period of hanging around the body, often watching the funeral; there's a period of waiting around while you're being reassigned or waiting to choose your next life; and then there is the period of entering into the next life.

Now if that doesn't sound like your idea of a heavenly afterlife, you'll be glad to know that there is some variation in the reports—in fact, tremendous variation. And yet, "waiting around" in some way, shape, or form does seem to be a popular theme. In his recent book *Life Before Life*, Tucker writes that out of 217 children in the Virginia files who remembered time spent in an interlife period, 112 recalled existing at least temporarily in "another realm," 45 spoke about memories of their conception or rebirth, and 69 said that they had witnessed their "previous personality's funeral." Most of the memories are just brief snippets, bits and pieces of information, fleeting descriptions of an existence before birth.

For example, there is the child who remarked to his parents one day that "when you die, you don't go right to heaven. You go to different levels—here, then here, then here," and he moved his hand up as he referred to each level. Or there is the four-year-old girl who announced to her family that "when you go to heaven, you have a little time to rest, kind of like a vacation, but then you have to get to work. You have to start thinking about what you have to learn in your next life. You have to start picking out your next family. . . . Heaven isn't just a place to hang around forever. . . . You have work to do there." Some speak of other planets, other realms; some remember seeing a light, going toward it, and then being reborn; some remember going through a tunnel and then "meeting God"; some talk about time spent in "heaven" and describe their activities while there.

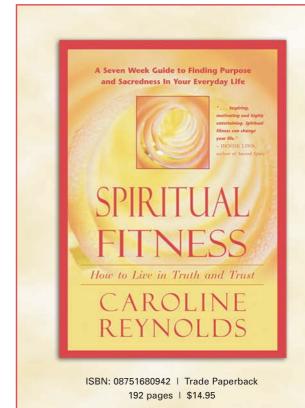
One of the most common themes in afterlife accounts is what is often called a "life review." Kenneth Ring, author of *Heading Toward Omega*, analyzed NDEs from all over the world and noted that a life review was one of the most commonly reported features. It usually consists of an almost instantaneous retrospective of one's entire life, sometimes in fine detail. It has been described as being similar to "viewing a three-dimensional hologram of your life in full color, sound, and scent" or "viewing hundreds of television screens with each screen showing a home movie of one event in your life."

Life reviews are common in NDEs and in past-life regressions but are only hinted at in reports from children who remember an interlife existence. The experience can be positive and it can also be unpleasant, even hellish. Most report that during the life review one is unable to employ the usual egodefense mechanisms. There is no self-deception or pretense possible. The life review echoes, in many respects, traditional accounts of the individual soul facing some sort of judgment after death, though in this case the judge is one's own self. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* even mentions the "Mirror of Karma" that is held before the soul in which the previous life's actions are reflected clearly. "It is, in a sense, remorseless," explained

one person after a powerful NDE. "Nobody judges you; you judge yourself. You cannot lie; you cannot cheat. Not *there*, you can't. You just cannot. You're faced with it . . . and you *have* to accept it. Nobody says 'you've been bad'. . . . You do it. You know. You know better than anyone, because it's your thoughts and your motives. . . . And one gets precisely and exactly what one deserves. It's utterly fair."

Another common element reported in the interlife state is the experience of being in the presence of a higher power or intelligence. Sometimes that presence takes the form of light or a feeling of love or a "being of light." Sometimes it's a review board composed of masters or elders—three Egyptian gods, twelve wise men, three forms of Jesus or Krishna, several Native American elders, etcetera. They are very common in past-life regressions, children's interlife memories, and NDEs. These review boards, we are told, assist individuals in reviewing their karmic situation and choosing their next birth.

One has to tread very carefully in drawing any conclusions about this data, especially given that there seems to be a highly subjective element to these experiences. Christians often see Jesus; Native Americans may experience a review board of their "ancestors"; New Agers tend to talk about light beings;



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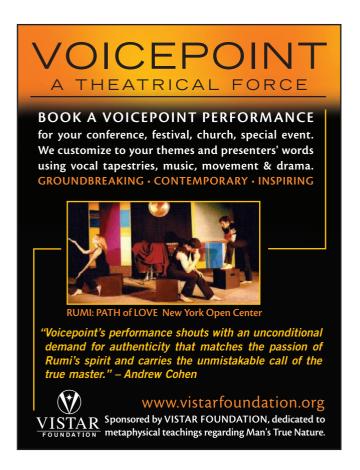
shows in her deep

insights and instinctive understanding of the



New from DeVorss Publications 800-843-5743 | www.devorss.com Indians see Krishna. There is also some evidence that reports of the afterlife have changed dramatically over the years. In the recent book *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife*, scholar Jan Bremmer tours some of the more notable examples of NDEs throughout history and concludes that individuals tend to report afterlife experiences that are consistent with the beliefs of the time they live in. For example, during the Middle Ages, NDEs were filled with heaven-and-hell images and souls being tortured for their sins. Some contemporary Christian accounts contain similar images.

Another reason for caution in drawing conclusions about this data is that even if we could be confident in the veracity of all the reports, we may still only be seeing a narrow slice of the death/reincarnation process. Crucial pieces of the picture may still be missing because of the limited scope of our vision into this other world. Yet I don't think the highly subjective nature of these accounts nor the limited nature of our perception means that there is *nothing* objective to glean from the stories. In fact, the more I learned about the afterlife or interlife realm, the more I realized that the subjectivity of the reports may be one of the keys to understanding how this subtler dimension of reality actually operates.



CREATIVE THINKING

"You and I sit in this room and we call this reality, because we have a common experience of a chair and a couch. What if people are having common experiences in some nonphysical place? Does that make it real?" The person sitting across from me nonchalantly talking about nonphysical realities was

The nonphysical world is a dimension in which reality is very plastic, almost in the same way dreams can be.

Skip Atwater, director of research at the Monroe Institute. A former army counterintelligence officer, Atwater has spent the last several decades working closely with individuals exploring the limits of the human capacity to perceive subtler realms of reality beyond our normal three-dimensional existence. The Monroe Institute has published many scientific papers on this topic, and they pursue a rational, left-brained approach to experiences that would leave most of us pinching ourselves to make sure we weren't dreaming. Reincarnation is not a focus of their work, but Atwater told me that many of the people who participate in their programs do at some point "become aware" that they have lived during other time periods.

I asked Atwater if he thought there was a common experience of what happens after death. "We just pose a model," he replied. "It's like we're saying it might be helpful to think about it this way. We're not saying this *is* the way it is. But there seems to be something like a 'reception station,' and it can be different for different people. It can look like a transit station, an auditorium/gathering place, or some sort of healing/regeneration center. It might be a library where you can look things up and review past lives or a planning center where you decide what the next course of action is."

In the literature of survival research, there are numerous accounts in which a person describes exactly the sort of place Atwater is talking about. "It was like a train station," said one person after returning from a near-death experience. A man who witnessed his grandfather's passing in a lucid dream recalled, "We ascended through a blue mist until we came to a huge, beautiful campus in the sky. . . . We walked . . . to a gigantic dome-shaped auditorium." He woke up to find that his grandfather had indeed died. Another man who underwent a dramatic near-death experience remembers: "The heavenly structure resembled an amphitheater similar to those found in ancient civilizations." Therapist Roger Woolger similarly describes how one of his patients told him that she reviewed

her past lives in the interlife state: "[She] reported being taken by . . . a luminous being to a celestial temple, where she was shown a huge book in which the life she had just remembered and 'many more' were clearly written."

So does that mean that a celestial temple or an amphitheater or an auditorium or a bus station really exists? Well, remember

"I was given a tour of all the heavens that have been created," claims one near-death experiencer.

that we're navigating a world in which reality, if most accounts are to be believed, is very plastic, almost in the same way dreams can be. As the great religious scholar Huston Smith once wrote, "Everything we experience on the *bardos* is a reflection of our own mental machinations." Dr. Alvarado confirmed that most OBE accounts report something similar. "A lot of people say that their thoughts and their expectations and their fears can create

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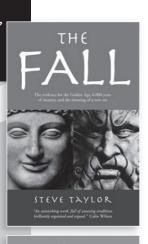
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astral reality or phenomena in the out-of-body state," he said. "They say that it is a real dimension, a different plane, but that it interacts with the mentality of the individual." Professor Chris Bache also echoed those descriptions when he told me that "a number of teachers have said that your experience of the *bardo* is self-generated. It's psycho-plastic."

This potentially explains the subjective nature of the accounts we hear about this in-between world. No wonder Buddhists often experience Buddhist realms and Christians often see Jesus. In fact, in Monroe's cosmology of the nonphysical world, there is a place he calls the "Belief System Territory" where all of the afterlife experiences that correspond to various belief systems around the world exist as possible destinations for individuals after death. "I was given a tour of all the heavens that have been created," claims one well-known NDE account. "The Nirvanas, the Happy Hunting Grounds, all of them. I went through them. These are thought form creations that we have created. . . . I saw the Christian heaven. . . . Some heavens are very interesting, and some are very boring. I found the ancient ones to be more interesting, like the Native American ones. . . . The Egyptians have fantastic ones. It goes on and on."

The great Indian philosopher-sage Sri Aurobindo constructed an elaborate metaphysics of the nonphysical realms. In his system, the "mental" plane was a place in which the "stuff" of reality is very malleable to thought. He wrote:

This world contains not only the possibility of large or intense or continuous enjoyments almost inconceivable to the limited physical mind, but also the possibility of equally enormous sufferings. It is here therefore that there are situated the lowest heavens and all the hells with the tradition and imagination of which the human mind has lured and terrified itself since the earliest ages.

There are several other characteristics, described in Monroe's books and confirmed by Atwater, that are near-universal when it comes to describing the nonphysical dimension—descriptions that apply across almost all accounts, from OBEs to NDEs to children who remember their past lives, and even to mystics like the eighteenth-century Swede Emanuel Swedenborg. One is the nature of communication in these realms, which is described as being nonverbal or telepathic. For example, Monroe, in his book Far Journeys, explains that in his travels through the nonphysical worlds, the primary method of communication was a powerful version of mental telepathy. He writes that "NVC [nonverbal communication] . . . is direct instant experience and/or immediate knowing transmitted from one intelligent energy system and received by another." Swedenborg, in his classic Heaven and Hell, described "heaven" as being a place where "people actually

speak directly from their thought, so that we have there a kind of thoughtful speech or audible thought." And that description from a mystic philosopher in the eighteenth century dovetails neatly with a description from a five-year-old child in the twenty-first century who remarked one day to his parents that "when you die . . . you don't talk in words. God doesn't use words like English or Spanish. He hears thoughts."

Another important element that we find corroborated across many accounts is the description of the way navigation works in the nonphysical world. As Atwater explained:

When we think about navigating in the physical world, if we want to go someplace, we have to go in this direction for this amount of time at this speed to get from here to there. But in the afterlife or the in-between life or at the level of the bardo immediately after death, navigation has to do with the relationship and interconnectedness we have with people. Some people call it the "realm of the line of forces" where you and I now have a permanent string between us, because we will always remember this conversation and each other. And so navigation after death doesn't become, "How do I find Mike again? Do I have to travel east for five hours at a walking pace to get to Mike?" All I have to do is to think of Mike. Navigation becomes a matter of the interconnectedness between people and not a matter of physical dimensions.

Dr. Eric Weiss, a professor at the California Institute of Integral Studies, is one of the few scholars alive today who has made the study of nonphysical worlds the focus of his professional career. Like Atwater, he told me that travel in these subtler realms is a matter not of locomotion but of attention. "I don't move through the astral world by putting my legs one in front of another. Rather, I move in the astral world by refocusing my thoughts and feelings," he explained. "I can focus on the overall 'feel' of my memory of [a person], and then I would immediately either be in communication with that person, or else I would find myself in their presence." Dr. Weiss is also working on an entirely new geometry that he feels can begin to explain the nature of form and movement within these realms, one that is fundamentally different from the basic Euclidian system that defines our everyday experience of the physical three-dimensional world of space and time. He hopes that understanding the geometry of these nonphysical worlds will help us to discover more about how they work. "Understanding the spacetime of a world is the key to understanding its causal interactions," he told me, "and thus is the key to forming a scientific understanding of what is happening there." Indeed, the laws of the nonphysical world may be mysterious to us now, but then again, so were the laws of the subatomic world just a couple hundred years ago.

This kind of cross-discipline, cross-tradition, cross-experience analysis is in its most preliminary stages, but already the results are intriguing. I have listed only a few of the corroborating stories here, but there are many, many more. They indicate realms that are being experienced independently by multiple witnesses. The overall landscape they are describing and the characteristics they report paint a remarkably consistent picture across different types of experience, different ages,

The laws of the nonphysical world may be mysterious to us now, but so were the laws of the subatomic world a couple hundred years ago.

different cultures, and different belief systems. There is therefore compelling evidence for the existence of these nonphysical worlds, but . . . where? Where are they? How do you speak of a "place" when these realms exist outside of normal spatial realities? Indeed, it may be more accurate to think of the interlife realm not so much as a place that exists separate from the physical universe, a place where one goes after death, but rather as a dimension that interacts with and is interrelated with the physical dimension. In this paradigm, death would be less a journey into another world than a falling away of the physical body, revealing deeper structures of reality and levels of consciousness that are in some sense always present. Integral philosopher Ken Wilber echoes this conception of the subtle worlds when he writes, "We see that the energy fields thought to be hovering metaphysically beyond matter actually [exist] in intimate correlation with . . . matter. These subtle fields cannot be reduced to matter, but neither are they ontologically disconnected from matter."

For the most part, however, there is simply so much that we don't know about the nature of the nonphysical world. Like prehistoric humans witnessing the phenomenon of lightning, we may recognize that there is a dimension of reality that we do not yet understand. We may know some of its effects and observe that it interacts with the physical world in significant ways. We may even be able to understand many of the characteristics of this phenomenon through anecdotal accounts of its occasional appearances. But we are still infants in comprehending its true nature. Indeed, whatever knowledge may be emerging through recent investigations of the nonphysical realms, there is little doubt that we are still at the beginning stages of our education.



Reincarnation 2.0

The soul is not bound by the formula of mental humanity: it did not begin with that and will not end with it; it had a pre-human past, it has a superhuman future.

Sri Aurobindo

"Man has never yet applied the methods of modern science to the problem which most profoundly concerns him—whether or not his personality involves any element which can survive bodily death." Those words are from the founding father of survival research, Frederick Myers, whose groundbreaking book Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death was published in 1903. In the intervening century, interest in the subject has waxed and waned, but Myers himself could not have foreseen just how much the field he pioneered has expanded in the last decades. With a tremendous influx of new data and a growing number of scholars subjecting that data to rigorous analysis, there is hope that we may soon have a scientific answer to the question of what happens after death. But even as we consider the growing evidence for reincarnation and survival, we also need to ask another question: How does the way we think about death and rebirth—the philosophical framework through which we interpret the data—need to be updated for a postmodern, post-traditional world? As I spoke with many of the contemporary scholars who are pioneering this field, this question kept arising in my mind. Indeed, as reincarnation becomes more accepted through the work of people such as Ian Stevenson and others, and as we begin to dip our exploratory toes into the nonphysical dimensions of existence, it makes sense that many of the traditional metaphysical systems associated with these concepts may need to be reexamined. Otherwise we may be in danger of defaulting to old assumptions and outdated conclusions about how it all works and what it all means.

Reincarnation is, after all, a premodern notion that came to prominence around the same time as many of the world's great wisdom traditions. Those traditions developed elaborate metaphysical systems of death and rebirth and detailed maps of the nonphysical realms. But they constructed their philosophies based on an understanding of the world that was significantly less developed than our own. As profound and important as these ancient systems are, they can often be problematic in a modern context. They tend to contain many elements mythologies, beliefs, and superstitions—that no longer seem relevant given what we have learned about the world during the last two thousand years. For example, premodern traditions knew nothing about evolution. They did not know what science has come to understand—that we live in an unstable, evolving universe full of flux, change, and contingency. That is exactly the opposite of the picture painted by most traditional maps of reality. So it is no wonder that many of the metaphysical systems given to us by our religious traditions do not mesh well with the world revealed by modern science. Ancient belief in a static universe once begat a static metaphysics; contemporary knowledge of a living, evolving universe should give birth to a living, evolving metaphysics.

Ken Wilber is one of the first philosophical voices to recognize this. He points out that the esoteric maps and cosmologies of our religious traditions were based upon "*interpretations* of living *experiences*." And those interpretations were consistent with the philosophical assumptions of the time. These maps,

he explains, should not be related to as if they were "fixed, rigid, ontological grids that are true for all eternity." Indeed, as we examine the data revealed in our own "living experiences" of these same nonphysical realms—as we analyze OBEs, NDEs, interlife memories, and other such experiences—we have to be willing to update our maps for our own time and, even more importantly, keep updating them.

What would this mean? Well, let's start with a common premodern idea associated with reincarnation—the soul. It is natural, if we believe in reincarnation, to acknowledge the existence of something like a soul—an aspect of the self that is able to survive death, navigate the nonphysical world, and eventually incarnate in a new physical body. Stevenson has called this entity the "psychofore," and physicist Amit Goswami has

How does the way we think about death and rebirth need to be updated for a post-traditional world?

taken to referring to it as the "quantum monad." Wilber himself equates the traditional soul with what he calls the "subtle body." But regardless of what we call it, the essential point is: How would an updated philosophical context change the way we understand the soul?

In most premodern traditions, the soul is thought of as immortal—a permanent entity created by a higher power designed to interact with physical form. Some traditions talk about "the descent of the soul into matter" or describe the soul as being "sent down to be mixed in with this material world." That was similar to how many religious traditions used to see human beings—designed in God's image and placed on earth by a divine hand. Darwin's revolution helped overturn that entire worldview, and we took our place within a much larger developmental stream of life. With the advent of this perspective, humans were no longer seen to have been fashioned in the workshop of a creator but were instead the latest step in a journey of evolution that has been in process for billions of years. Like all plants and animals, humans were understood to have emerged over time, products of the evolutionary process. But thus far, evolutionary theory has been applied only to the physical dimension, the spiritual dimension of life having been left out of the revolution. As the great French philosopher Henri Bergson noted in the early twentieth century, "The great error of the doctrines on the spirit has been . . . isolating the spiritual life from all the rest, by suspending it in space as high as possible above the earth. . . . "

Indeed, we have not yet extended the evolution revolution

to apply to the nonphysical dimensions of existence. But why shouldn't we? What if souls, for lack of a better word, didn't just emerge out of creation fully formed but were actually created through the process of evolution in the same way that brains were? That would mean that the soul is not a permanent, ever-existing entity any more than a cell is a permanent, ever-existing entity. It has, instead, evolved over time and will continue to evolve in the future. While many of the people I spoke with talked about the "evolution of the soul," what they were referring to is individual development from lifetime to lifetime. I began to realize that very few were really looking at the soul as being part of the larger stream of ongoing cosmic evolution. Dr. Bruce Greyson speculated with me about how we might understand the evolution of an entity called a "soul":

You can look at the evolution of a soul from a physical perspective and try to make hypotheses about why having a soul makes your survival and your reproductive potential higher—what function did souls serve in terms of keeping our bodies alive? Or you can also look at it from a spiritual perspective and say that souls are evolving spiritual entities and that the body developed as a way of helping the soul develop. In that context, the development of the soul is the evolutionary process that's important and the body is just a tool that the soul uses to further its own development.

Or you can take a more wave/particle view and say that the physical and the spiritual evolve together and you can't have one evolving without the other; they're two sides of a coin. Then, when you talk about physical evolution, there's also a corresponding spiritual evolution that goes along with it. So at what point did primitive molecules organize enough to be called a cell? When can you say that something becomes an animal? That something becomes a human being? I think you can ask the same question about a spiritual entity—at what point does something become a soul?

What if we applied Greyson's line of reasoning not only to the soul but to the subtle worlds we have been examining? Indeed, the nonphysical dimensions of existence are also easy to leave out of the evolutionary drama of life. Like our traditional notions of the soul, these realms, when they are acknowledged at all, are considered to be permanent, always existing, and outside the stream of evolution that most of us have come to accept as affecting all of physical existence. They are considered to be, to borrow Wilber's phrase, "fixed, rigid, ontological grids that are true for all eternity." But what if we didn't assume that? What if the nonphysical dimensions of life are evolving in the same way that the physical dimensions of life are? What if it is all tied together? Indeed, if there is anything the data from NDEs, OBEs, and

children's interlife memories seem to agree on, it is that the subtle worlds of the interlife are, to some degree, psycho-plastic to our own consciousness. They are deeply affected by our thoughts, motives, and intentions, and we can surmise that they are themselves changing and evolving in accordance with our own psychological, spiritual, and cultural evolution. That would mean that it's all—physical and nonphysical, material and immaterial, gross and subtle—part of one evolutionary process.

Viewing nonphysical dimensions of existence within an evolutionary context has a rather dramatic result. It means that the actual *process* of reincarnation is probably not entirely the same as it was two thousand years ago, and two thousand years from now it won't be the same as it is today. It suggests that *its* evolution is likely intrinsically tied to *our* evolution. And that would mean that our own actions and our own consciousness—our own evolution, in other words—will profoundly contribute to the unfolding and development not only of what we call the material world but also of all the realms, dimensions, and processes that are interacting and interconnected with it. Perhaps even the process of reincarnation is destined to evolve in ways that we cannot now foresee.

Many of the great revolutions in human thought have had two important consequences—they have brought greater humility and new perspective to human life. The revolution of Copernicus placed humans outside their privileged place at the center of the universe for the first time in history, forc-

What if souls were actually created through of the process of evolution in the same way that brains were?

ing a dramatic change in our collective self-perception. And it simultaneously opened up whole new vistas for our attention and exploration. The revolution of Freud showed us that the conscious ego is not necessarily at the center of the self and that there are other unconscious influences, personal and collective, that make up who we are. And it simultaneously opened up territory for inner exploration. The revolution of Darwin placed humanity within the context of a much larger evolutionary scheme, embedding us within the overall matrix

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of life on earth. And it opened up the doorway for us to take responsibility for our own development and dream as never before of a brighter future. Could the recognition of reincarnation and a new appreciation of the nonphysical dimensions of existence ultimately have the same humbling and expanding effect on human consciousness? Could it be that we will yet again be awed by the recognition of how much more there is to this vast universe than is yet dreamt of in our philosophy, how much more there is to human life and the human self than we could possibly understand by referencing only one brief lifetime? Will we begin to comprehend that we are deeply connected to other processes, forces, and dimensions, seen and unseen, physical and nonphysical, that are acting on us and influencing us at levels of which we are barely conscious? And could that recognition in turn inspire us to take greater responsibility for those forces and to create a future in which we are no longer unconsciously stumbling through the cycle of reincarnation but evolving in such a way that might ultimately transform the very nature of death and rebirth itself?

The trouble with statements about death, as one popular aphorism points out, is that 99.9 percent of them are made by people who are still alive. Death continues to be, at this

point in time, one of life's enduring mysteries. Whatever the miracles of modern science, and whatever glimpses we have been afforded of the world beyond, an objective understanding of what happens after death may always an enticing but ultimately ungraspable goal, a mirage forever receding on the horizon of our culture. But we live in a rapidly changing world, and in so many areas of life, the previously unthinkable is becoming possible. Perhaps one day in the not-too-distant future, we may wake up to find that, miraculously, death itself has become transparent to the ever-expanding field of human knowledge. And like the Tibetans hundreds of years ago, we may find ourselves rewriting the book on what happens at the end of life . . . and at the beginning.



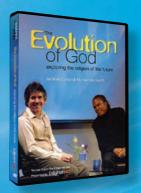
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Who Reincarn







Lhacham Mandarava (8th century) Genyenma Ahkön Lhamo (17th century) Jetsunma Ahkön Lhamo (1949-)

In 1988, an American named Alyce Louise Zeoli became the first Western woman to be officially recognized and enthroned as a Tibetan tulku, or reincarnated spiritual master.



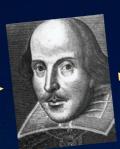




Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) Adi Da Samraj (1939-)

According to the contemporary Western guru Adi Da Samraj, his soul, or "deeper personality," is the miraculous fusion of the great 19th-century Eastern masters Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.







William the Conqueror (1028-1087) William Shakespeare (1564-1616) Paramahansa Yogananda (1893-1952)

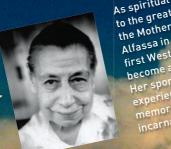
One of the most influential Hindus of the 20th century, Paramahansa Yogananda was a powerful leader and prolific writer who purportedly made many references to his previous incarnations.







Queen Hatshepsut (late 16th c. BCE-1482 BCE) Queen Tiy (1397-1360 BCE) Joan of Arc (1412-1431) Mona Lisa (1479-1528) Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603) Catherine II of Russia (1729-1796) The Mother (1878-1973)



As spiritual partner and heir to the great Sri Aurobindo. the Mother (born Mirra Alfassa in France) was the first Western woman to become an Indian guru. Her spontaneous mystical experiences included detailed memories of many illustrious incarnations.

ated as Whom?

by Tom Huston

Many careers last a lifetime. And some last . . . well, a little bit longer than that. Being a spiritual teacher, for instance, seems to be one of those rare gifts that just keeps on giving. Witness the countless saints and sages throughout history who have claimed to remember their past lives as *previous* saints and sages (among other notable occupations). From Gautama Buddha's spontaneous recall of his many incarnations as various wise men in the *Jataka Tales* to Jesus Christ's supposed New Testament allusions to having been in a student-teacher relationship with John the Baptist in another era, the awakened ones seem to have a commitment to their sacred work and an awareness of their souls' history that mere mortals can scarcely imagine.

Intrigued by this phenomenon, WIE decided to find out which recent and contemporary spiritual leaders have also claimed to have unusually strong powers of past-life recollection . . .





Lama Thubten Yeshe (1935-1984) Lama Tenzin Osel (1985-)

Soon after the great Lama Yeshe passed away in 1984, a child was born to two of Yeshe's Spanish disciples. Following a series of tests, young Osel Hita was recognized by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to be the reincarnation of Lama Yeshe.





Shirdi Sai Baba (1838-1918) Sathya Sai Baba (1926-)

Sathya Sai Baba claimed to be the reincarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba in his teens and took his name. Both mystics became renowned for their demonstration of *siddhis*, or supernatural powers.



Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) Ajja (1916-)

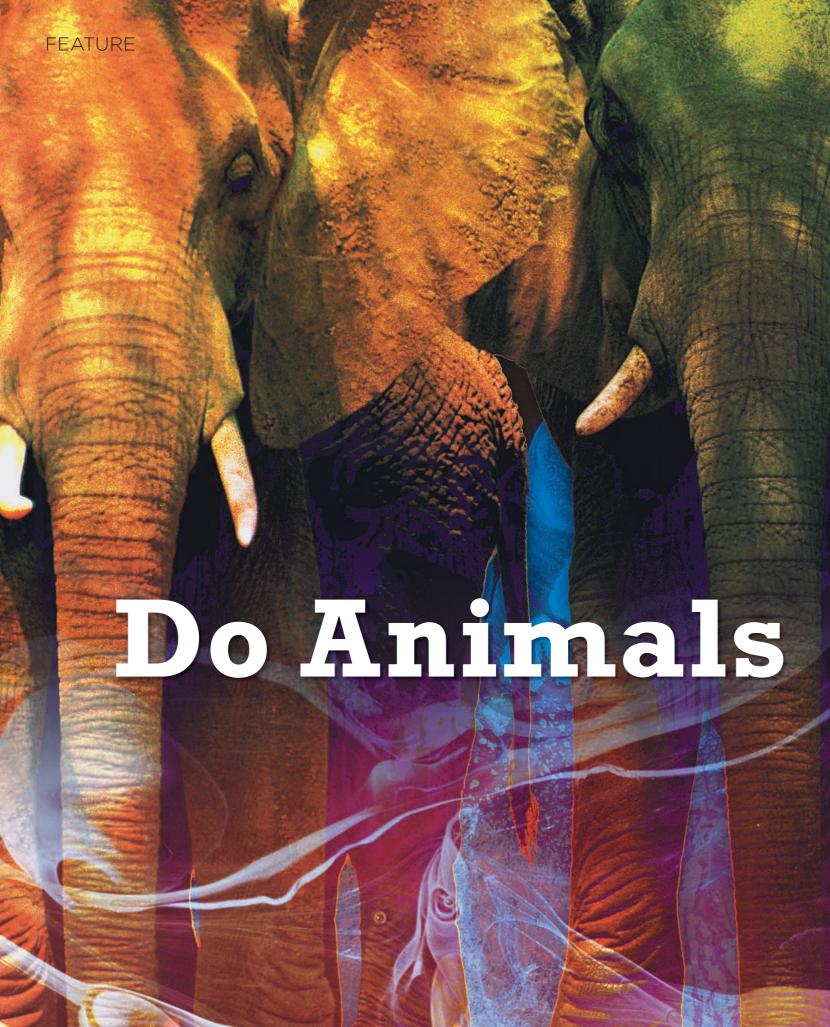
According to his disciples, when the farmer-turnedenlightened-sage Ajja left his body during the profound experience that radically transformed his life, the spirit of Gandhi entered it—and never left.

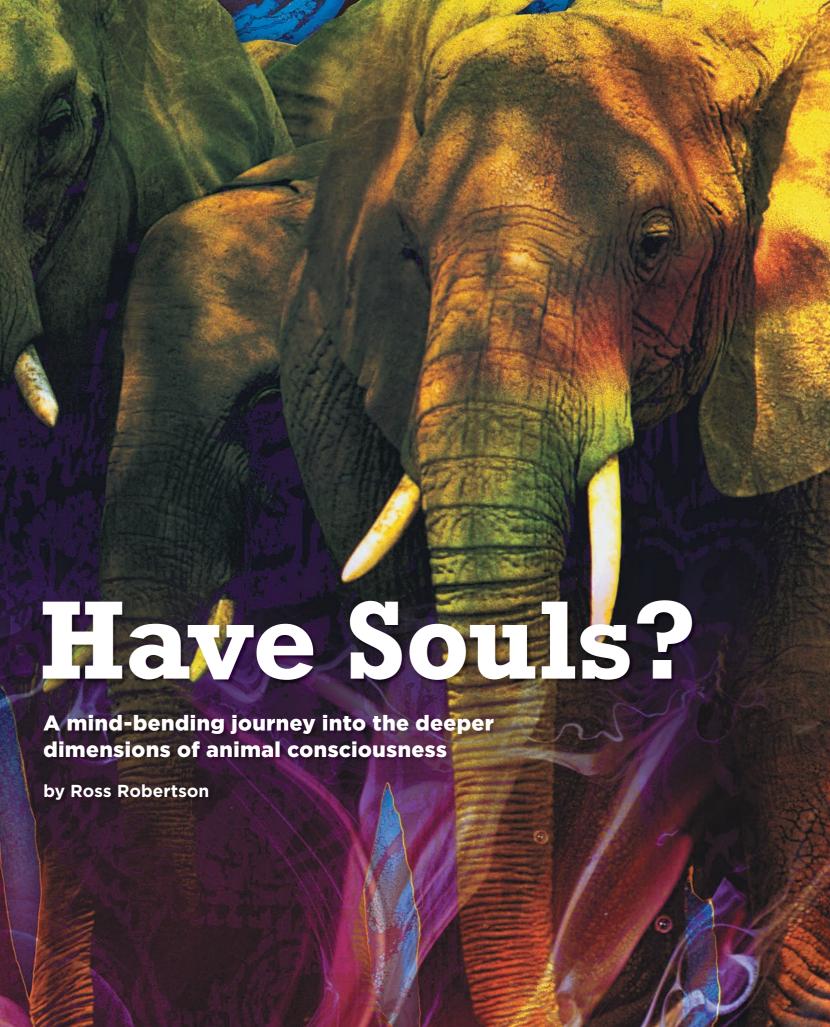
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ONE DAY WHEN YOGA INSTRUCTOR

Kari Harendorf was practicing backbends, her dog Charlie padded over and started stretching out beneath her on the hardwood floor. In a flash of insight that may or may not recall some ancient yogic pioneer's moment of inspiration for Downward and Upward Dog, the modern-day discipline of doga was born. Doga, or doggy yoga—"the path to enlightenment for humans and their pets"—is the subject of Animal Planet's new show "K9 Karma," cohosted by Kari and Charlie; it's also the topic of recent books like Bow Wow Yoga and Doga: Yoga for Dogs. "My relationship with Charlie is definitely special," Harendorf says. "It's intangible, and it goes beyond language, beyond a species barrier. He's just . . . he holds my heart, and I hold his."

From man's best friend to man's soul mate and partner on the path of spiritual liberation? If the picture of a New York City yoga studio full of people chanting "Om" to their pit bulls and Pomeranians seems both comical and slightly strange, consider for a moment that popular curiosity about animals' spiritual status has never been higher. Nowadays, twice as many American households include pets as include children, and even mainstream religion is embracing questions like "Do

animals have souls?" Animal souls?
Actually, Americans are split down the middle on this one—of the ninety-some percent who believe in heaven, roughly half think their pets will join them there. Theologians are grappling with the question, too, rethinking whether or not Benji or Fido is going to make it through the Pearly Gates when he dies. And priests and ministers are doing their part to breathe new life into the phrase "pets are people too" by performing official blessings, burials, and even marriages for animals.

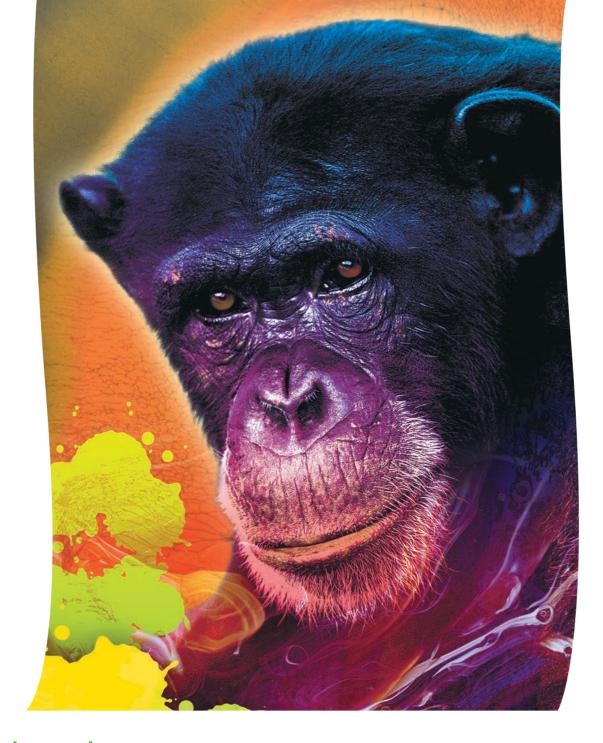
Wait a minute. Heaven in the next life and marriages in this one? What's going on here? I've never been much of a pet person myself—too many dogs ran me down and bit me when I was a kid—but in spite of that, I can certainly appreciate the impulse to find meaning in animal relationships. My brother and I used to love chasing after sandpipers on the beach, and I searched endlessly for crayfish in the streams near my house with my friends. As I got older, I spent more and more time in the mountains, trailing deer through the trees and keeping my eyes peeled for elusive black bears. But what has opened my eyes more than ever before to the mystery and beauty of our animal kin has been the enlightening onrush of stories that began, interestingly enough, with

my research for this piece.

They came across my desk one after another, too fast to process, about all manner of animals and their relations—relations with their own kin, with individuals of different species, and, of course, with people too. There

"I looked into his eyes. It was like looking into the eyes of a man."

were cutting-edge studies of animal cognition and moving descriptions of compassion in elephants and morality in coyotes. There were unbelievable tales of wolves who practiced aikido with a human master, stories of great apes instant-messaging each other on AOL, even astonishing reports of a telepathic parrot. Some stretched my mind in directions it had never been stretched before; some pulled unfamiliar strings in my heart; more than a few seemed completely outlandish. But through it all, there was the ever-deepening realization that I knew a lot less than I thought I did about the puzzle of life and evolution, about the soul's elusive temperament, and, most of all, about the boundary lines between animal and man.



The impulse to make contact

When world-famous primatologist Jane Goodall was only eighteen months old, she gathered up a handful of earthworms from her parents' London garden, brought them inside, and made a little nest for them in her bed. After her mother patiently informed her that the worms could never survive in this dirtless environment, she hurried to get them back home again among the flowers and weeds. But the little girl who would one day travel farther than anyone before her across the borders of the nonhuman world had taken her first steps toward her destiny. What was it that gave birth to this impulse in one so young, the impulse to make contact with another

species? What deeply felt curiosity or connectedness did she experience that drew her to want to be closer to them?

Oftentimes during her lectures and travels, Goodall tells the story of a man named Rick Swope who risked his life to save a chimpanzee named Jo-Jo from drowning in the newly constructed moat surrounding his enclosure at the Detroit Zoo. Among this particular posse of Michigan chimps, Jo-Jo was the head honcho, but when a younger and stronger alpha-wannabe threw down the gauntlet one day and attacked him, Jo-Jo ran, wisely or not so wisely, over the safety barrier and into the water. Chimps can't swim,



AIKIDO WITH WOLVES

At Wolf Haven sanctuary in Tenino, Washington, O. Fred Donaldson used to practice aikido with wolves. Employing a classic style called *randori* (freeform sparring against multiple opponents), he danced with the pack on the edge between harmony and chaos. One wolf named Sybil, he writes, would even let him lift her off her feet in a rotary throw called *kaiten nage*:

She also seemed to revel in what was an amazingly quick movement of trust. She began by closing her jaws around my forearm. Usually I allow her to decide when to let go, but this time as soon as she tightened her hold, I swung my arm in an outwardly extending circle. She left her feet, while maintaining her hold on my arm. I brought her down on her back with my arm still in her jaw. She momentarily released her hold, showed me a smile in her eyes, stood up and shook all over. She mouthed my arm, and we repeated the "rotary throw."

It was an awesome thing, this touch we shared. It made me feel one with her. . . . If I had any doubts about the possibility of mutual caring, about O'Sensei's goal for Aikido as the realization of love, I have none now.

which is why zoos build moats around them in the first place; chimps are also very dangerous, which is why the zoo-keeper on duty that day made no attempt to rescue Jo-Jo when he panicked and sank like a stone. Against the keeper's dire warnings, and much to the distress of his wife and kids, Swope jumped in and lifted the 130-pound ape as well as he could up the embankment. "I looked into his eyes," he said later. "It was like looking into the eyes of a man. And the message was: Won't *anybody* help me?"

What was it in Jo-Jo's eyes that made Swope keep himself in jeopardy (three angry males were charging down the bank toward him) in order to support the stunned and waterlogged chimpanzee until he could finally grab a tuft of grass and pull himself to safety? Are the eyes, as the saying goes, really windows to the soul? I can still remember the day when, after an embarrassingly great many years of unsuccessful fishing trips with the Boy Scouts, I finally caught my first fish. As I tried, also unsuccessfully, to extract the hook from its mouth and throw it back, I gazed into its eyes and saw something I thought was sadness. It was hard not to flinch away from that dying look, in which I could see my own carelessness nakedly reflected, but somehow I felt honor-bound not to disturb this intimate channel that, for a brief moment at least, had been opened up between us.

I made other efforts at "interspecies communication" when I was a kid, walking through the woods with my Audubon bird call and mimicking the chirps and trills I heard up above. And though I have no evidence of any definitive success, my crude attempts at avian language were nevertheless a kind of animal soul music, at least in my own mind—a curious call to the nonhuman world in search of the echo of consciousness returning back to me. Who, or what, I wanted to know, was out there listening?

Guitarist Jim Nollman must have been wondering something similar when he anchored his boat off the coast of Vancouver Island, dropped a submersible speaker overboard, plugged in, and tried to get the dolphins and killer whales to jam with him. From recordings he's made using underwater microphones to capture their hornlike whistles and songs (Nollman compares one particularly responsive whale to *Bitches Brew*—era Miles Davis), he appears to have succeeded. Other Western musicians whom Nollman has invited aboard to try out his gear have tended to elicit either clear responses from the whales or no interest at all. A Tibetan lama chanting religious prayers, on the other hand, brought forth a palpable hush. As he intoned his Himalayan melody, the whales approached the speaker quietly and just huddled there, listening.

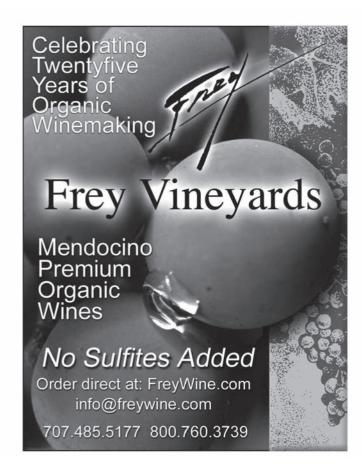
Will all thinking, feeling, caring beings please stand up?

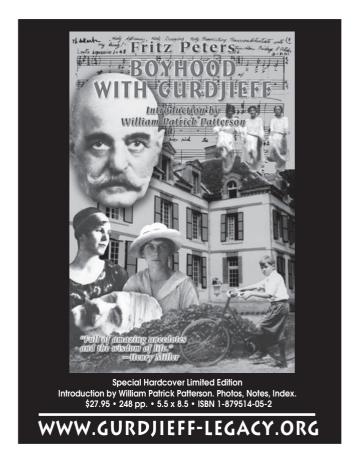
When pods of killer whales fall strangely silent to eavesdrop on a chanting Buddhist monk, what exactly are they responding to? Is it to the vibrations themselves, sounds and sensations either pleasing or baffling to their ears? Or are they hearing the resonance of something more intangible, some transcendent echo reflected back from deep within them? What is it in us, for that matter, that responds to these things? Is it the soul?

Whatever else the soul might be, it seems safe to say that it is part of that dimension of consciousness that makes us most fully human—part of that which makes us thinking, feeling, caring beings. Could the same be true of the animal soul? Not so long ago, noble qualities like *reason*, *emotion*, and *morality* were all thought to be exclusively human traits. But the steady march of science is chipping away at old ideas. In 1960, Goodall observed chimpanzees at Tanzania's Gombe Stream Reserve stripping leaves off twigs and using the sticks to fish termites

out of their nests, thereby poking holes in the long-held belief that human beings were the only species to make tools. "Now we must redefine tool," said her mentor Louis Leakey, "redefine man, or accept chimpanzees as humans." Since then, nearly all major arguments for human uniqueness—claims that we alone possess rationality, self-consciousness, culture, empathy, language, morality, etc.—have been increasingly called into question. So if you still find yourself attached to the belief that animals are hopelessly undeveloped—dull of mind, poor of heart, and devoid of soul—breaking news from the scientific arena is here to recommend otherwise.

Let's take *reason*, to start. According to Descartes, animals were mere machines, while men were machines with minds. Indeed, the bulk of Western thought, from Plato and Aristotle to Aquinas on up, puts great stock in rationality as *the* basic factor setting human beings apart from the rest of





animalkind. And since you can't just walk up to a guinea pig or an anteater and ask it to describe its experience of cognition, it hasn't exactly been easy to test this claim. One way scientists

A woman shipwrecked off the Philippines was saved by a giant sea turtle that carried her on its back for two days.

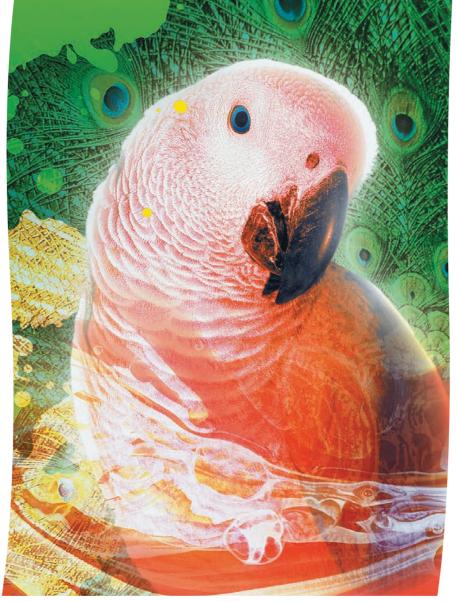
have tried to get at the problem is by searching for evidence of animal deception, a cognitive skill that depends on the ability to recognize that others have thoughts and intentions different from one's own. They've shown that monkeys and baboons can distract each other in order to steal food, sneak around rocks to do things behind each others' backs, and wait until others are distracted (like during fights) to put the moves on receptive females. Just recently, a raven named Hugin passed the deception test as well, fooling a dominant bird into hunting for food where Hugin knew there was none in order to buy himself some time alone where the food really was.

Impressive as Hugin's trick may be, it must look like kids' stuff to one of the most accomplished birds known to science: Alex the parrot. Only last summer, Alex raised the bar on avian intelligence to new heights by demonstrating a rough understanding of the number zero, a conceptual abstraction never fathomed by even the most learned mathematicians of ancient Greece. How did he do it? Trainer Dr. Irene Pepperberg laid out a tray with four groups of blocks on it—two blue, three green, four yellow, and six orange—and then called out a number of blocks, asking Alex to identify the color of the corresponding group. But for some reason, he refused to cooperate, insisting instead on repeating the word "five" over and over again. When she finally replied "OK, smarty, what color five?" Alex quickly answered "None!" A bird with a brain the size of a walnut had understood the "absence of quantity," something human children don't typically grasp until age three or four.

How did Alex *feel* about his accomplishment? As recently as ten years ago, researchers would have argued over whether it was possible for him to have felt anything at all. But scientists no longer dispute the presence of emotion in birds—or in many other species, for that matter. African elephants, for instance, "share with us a strong sense of family and death and

they feel many of the same emotions," Kenyan conservationist Daphne Sheldrick says. "Each one is . . . a unique individual with its own unique personality. They can be happy or sad, volatile or placid. They display envy, jealousy, throw tantrums and are fiercely competitive, and they can develop hang-ups which are reflected in behaviour. . . . They grieve deeply for lost loved ones, even shedding tears and suffering depression. They have a sense of compassion that projects beyond their own kind and sometimes extends to others in distress." Animal behavior expert Marc Bekoff adds that elephants are known to stand silent guard over stillborn babies for days with their heads and ears sunk low; orphans who witness their mothers' deaths "often wake up screaming." Sea lion mothers howl and cry while killer whales dine on their babies, he says. Dolphins struggle painfully to resuscitate dead infants. Once, he even saw a grieving red fox bury the body of another who had been killed by a mountain lion: "She would kick up dirt, stop, look at the carcass, and intentionally kick again. I observed this 'ritual' for about 20 seconds. A few hours later I went to see the carcass, and it was totally buried."

Now that most biologists have accepted that animals have richly varied emotional lives, a far more radical proposition is taking center stage in current research. Beyond simple raw emotion, some say, animals are displaying the subtler, more complex signs of moral sensibility. "There is good evidence that chimpanzees keep track of favors and repay them," writes primatologist Frans de Waal. And it goes both ways, Bekoff tells me: "If you're labeled as a cheater in a pack of wolves or a pack of coyotes or a group of chimpanzees, you're going to have a lot of trouble getting other individuals to interact with you." He calls this "wild justice," and it's not just for primates and canines. Cows hold grudges and nurture friendships too. North African meerkats forfeit their own safety to stay beside wounded family members who would otherwise have to face death alone. Stronger rats sometimes even let the weaker ones win when they play at wrestling. And—remarkable as it sounds—morality in animals also crosses species boundaries. "You see animals help each other all the time," Bekoff says. "Dogs and monkeys hug one another, console one another, travel with one another. During the tsunami last year, a baby hippopotamus was separated from his family and taken to an animal rescue shelter in Kenya. When he got there, he was adopted by a 130-year-old tortoise, and they've been inseparable ever since." Not long ago, de Waal watched a bonobo named Kuni pick up an injured starling, take it outside, and place it on its feet. When it didn't fly, she helped unfold its wings and then carefully tossed it into the air.



Then there are the stories of animal heroics that involve human beings, some of which have achieved the status of legend. Eleven-year-old Anthony Melton's pet pig, Priscilla, made headlines in 1984 when she dove into a Houston lake to save his life. Swimming out to the boy, who was in over his head and starting to panic, she towed him to shore with her leash. In 1975, a woman shipwrecked off the Philippines was saved by a giant sea turtle that surfaced underneath her and carried her on its back for two full days until rescuers finally arrived. Once, an elderly Tennessee woman was even rescued by her pet canary. Upon seeing her trip and fall unconscious, the bird proceeded to find its way out of her house, which it had never left before. It then traveled the length of several football fields to her niece's nearby home and banged hysterically against the windowpane until she finally got the message and went running to check up on her aunt. The canary promptly collapsed and died from the effort, but the old woman's life was saved.

Of all such tales of interspecies love and bravado, perhaps the most enigmatic and the most miraculous involve

dolphins, renowned the world over for keeping unconscious people afloat, shielding swimmers from sharks and sea lions from orcas, guarding pregnant whales while they give birth, and herding beached whales back to open sea. Most incredible of these might be the story of Pelorus Jack, a dolphin famous for guiding steamships through a notoriously treacherous channel off the coast of New Zealand around the turn of the last century. French Pass was known among sailors for claiming vessel after vessel in its swift jaws-that is, until Pelorus Jack came along. For over twenty years, every time a ship approached the mouth of the hazardous strait, he would unfailingly appear, bobbing along the surface to lead it safely through the rocks. On his watch, none ever foundered. Then in 1904, a drunkard on board a ship known as the Penguin took a potshot at him and Jack swam away trailing blood. Although he healed a few weeks later and diligently returned to his chosen task, nobody on the Penguin ever saw him again; it later ran aground in French Pass, and crew and passengers drowned.

Defining the soul: a sixty-four-thousand-dollar question

While stories like these may provide the most direct and compelling evidence of soul and soulfulness among our animal kin, the meaning of the word "soul" itself is usually the domain of religion. It's been hotly debated by philosophers and theologians alike down through the centuries, yet the true nature of the soul remains an alluring riddle—hard enough to fathom in human beings, let alone in the rest of the animal kingdom. Still, the question "Do animals have souls?" depends in no small measure on what you think the soul *is* in the first place.

In times of tribal animism, the boundaries between animal and man were relatively indistinct. All of nature was suffused with the essence of the supernatural, and everything had souls, including rocks, trees, horses, and jackrabbits. Later, as increasingly sophisticated cultures evolved across the ancient world, the lines between us and other species tended to remain fluid. The Aztecs and the Egyptians thought some human souls became bees when they died; the Greeks and the Japanese said some became butterflies. But with the rise of the world's great religious traditions came the first ideas of a transcendent God or absolute higher power, and the first sense of a dimension within the human self—the soul—that was specially connected to it. Generally speaking, religions both East and West thought animals had souls, too, but they were souls of a lower order, bound up in physical passions and trapped by mortal existence. The human soul, on the other hand, was privileged with immortality. According to Western theology, that was because humans alone had reason and free will; in Eastern thought, it was due to the fact that our unique capacity for self-awareness gave us the all-important potential for attaining enlightenment. But in either case, it was only the human soul that could escape the bonds of this earthly plane to share eternal life at its maker's feet.

From the perspective of religious salvation, therefore, animals are clearly out of luck. Yet history's canvas is filled with images of yogis and saints who loved their animal brethren and honored them as moral and spiritual beings. Twentieth-century Indian sage Ramana Maharshi taught that animals could reach enlightenment directly without needing to advance first through human birth. He was famous for having close spiritual relationships with dogs, cats, cows, peacocks, squirrels, birds, and monkeys; his favorite cow, Lakshmi, is said to have achieved final liberation when she died. Back in the day, fish supposedly poked their heads



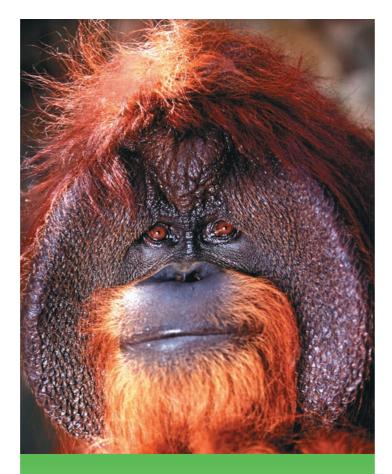
DOES A DOG HAVE BUDDHA-NATURE?

A monk asked Chao-chou:
"Does a dog have Buddha-nature or not?"

Chao-chou replied: "No."

According to Mahayana Buddhist doctrine, Buddhanature is an innate, indwelling radiance present in all sentient beings, representing even the lowliest life forms' essential potential to reach enlightenment. That's why the monk in this classic Zen koan is confused when his master says dogs don't have it. Of course, the koan can always be read as the proverbial Zen mind-stopper, carefully designed to mess with your head enough to shock you into awakening. But according to Buddhist scholar T. Griffith Foulk, it was also the source of prolonged scholastic debate in medieval China over the differences between sentient and insentient beings.

The upshot of the debate? Yes, all things great and small have Buddha-nature, but unless they *know* it, it doesn't do the unenlightened brutes a heck of a lot of good. About his own dog, Foulk writes: "He surely has not glimpsed his own Buddha-nature. Nor does he recognize that of squirrels: The mere sight of one, and all of his bad karma, born of beginningless greed, hatred, and delusion, comes rushing out in an eye-popping snarl. And when it comes to oak trees, lampposts, and other insentient things, not even their Buddha-nature can save them from the indignity of being his territorial markers."



APES ON AOL

Chantek the orangutan was raised as though he were human, brought up in trainer Lyn Miles' own home until the age of nine and "enculturated" into human society. She taught him American Sign Language, had him cooking spaghetti on the stove, and made him clean his room every week. They played at the playground, ate fast food out, and celebrated Christmas together (he called it "red hat day").

Today, Chantek lives at the zoo, makes custom jewelry and postmodern "found art assemblages," and—talk about soul—plays the drums in an Atlanta band called Animal Nation. He's one of the world's first dual-cultural hybrids, says Miles, "successful as both a natural orangutan and an 'orangutan person' by virtue of his intellectual abilities based in human culture."

Miles dreams that eventually chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas, and orangutans will even be able to surf the web together—an idea rock musician Peter Gabriel has supported by founding a consortium called ApeNet to help get Chantek and his buddies wired up to AOL. If they have their way, language-using apes at zoos and preserves around the planet will one day be able to shoot the breeze anytime they want, via special ape-friendly keyboards and ape-to-ape video-conferencing, in their own permanent online chat room.

above water to hear St. Anthony preach. St. Martin de Porres trained animals in ethics and virtue, and St. Francis gave sermons to flocks of birds from around the world. Once, Francis even tamed the terrible wolf of Gubbio, walking straight into its lair and demanding that it stop eating the local livestock—and the local townspeople. To everyone's surprise, this tactic actually worked: the wolf bowed its head, placed its paw meekly in the saint's hand, and followed him into town, where the people agreed to keep it well fed in exchange for its pact of peace.

With the advent of science, the religious belief in sharp distinctions between humans and animals has taken somewhat of a beating. As Bekoff explains, it is consistent with evolutionary biology that everything humans have (including souls), animals have, too—if perhaps in less developed form. "Variations among different species," the argument goes, "are differences in degree rather than differences in kind." Charles Darwin called this idea evolutionary continuity, and it has become a fundamental axiom in the study of animal behavior. Yet while some scientists such as Bekoff probably take Darwin's insight too far by saying that the *only* major difference between us is that animals don't cook their food, there are others who recognize far more significant distinctions. In her studies of the chimpanzees at Gombe, for instance, Goodall concluded that their lack of a spoken language has been a fundamental evolutionary ceiling, making it impossible for them to develop higher capacities like shared moral codes. "Chimpanzees show behaviors that seem likely precursors to human morality—as when a highranking individual breaks up a fight to save a weaker companion," she writes, "but for the most part, in their society, 'might' is 'right,' and the subordinates have to be submissive whether or not they are in the wrong."

Where all this leaves us is ambiguous at best. As philosopher Daniel Dennett says, "Current thinking about animal consciousness is a mess." Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori even goes so far as to say that *robots* possess the unquenchable spark of awakening known as Buddha-nature. Robot souls? I guess anything's possible, but it's hard enough to come up with definitive answers about animals, let alone artificially intelligent machines. There *is* one more realm of evidence we have yet to examine, however. And there, things operate by a different set of rules entirely . . .

The further horizons of animal consciousness

Biologist Rupert Sheldrake has spent upwards of fifteen years researching psychic phenomena in animals—things like the impossible synergy of bird flocks wheeling together in unison or the uncanny knack some dogs and cats seem to have for knowing when their owners are coming home. "Unexplained abilities like telepathy," he says, "are widespread in the animal kingdom." Indeed, one of his most intriguing studies involves a famous Manhattan parrot named N'kisi who not only shares a telepathic bond with his owner Aimée Morgana but, by virtue of his advanced language ability, also has the tools to *prove* it. Schooled from a young age as though he were a human child, N'kisi knows roughly a thousand words; he conjugates his own verbs, cracks jokes, initiates conversation, and invents novel word combinations with delight. He also has the unnerving ability to read your thoughts and repeat them back to you out loud.

In a series of double-blind tests, Sheldrake placed Morgana and N'kisi in different rooms on different floors of a building and simultaneously videotaped them as Morgana flipped through a series of pictures she'd never seen before and N'kisi chattered away happily on his perch. Three times more often than chance would allow, N'kisi was talking about the image Morgana happened to be browsing at that very same instant. "Can I give you a hug?" he

"Unexplaineda bilities like telepathy . . . are widespread in the animal kingdom."

Rupert Sheldrake

chirped as she viewed a photograph of a couple embracing. "What'cha doin' on the phone?" he said when she saw one of a man talking on his cell phone. Sometimes, N'kisi even eavesdrops on Morgana's *dreams*: "I was dreaming that I was

working with the audio tape deck," she remembers. "N'kisi, sleeping by my head, said out loud, 'You gotta push the button,' as I was doing exactly that in my dream. His speech woke me up."

I was surprised to find that interspecies telepathy was not only more common historically than one might think but that it seems to be turning into the foundation for a whole new *occupation*: professional animal communicator. Considered by many to be the field's chief pioneer, Penelope Smith has made psychic contact with everything from horses to horseflies over the past thirty years—not to mention training several hundred others in the subtle spiritual arts of animal mind-reading and even animal *therapy*. This small brigade of clairvoyant counsel-

ors means business. They're there to listen to your pet's point of view and help you sort through whatever issues may have come between you, even over the phone. If you're lucky, they might even help you wake up to what animals have to offer you. "Animals have tremendous understanding of our problems," Smith says. "They're always trying to help de-stress us, to help us play and meditate and all the rest, you know?" As bizarre as that might sound, she's not the only one who thinks so. Epona Farm in Sonoita, Arizona, is now hosting human development seminars facilitated by telepathic horses; the dolphins of Dolphin Heart World offer workshops in life skills, community-building, and alternative healing modalities via their nonlocal "Dolphin Consciousness."

Revolutionary dolphin researcher John C. Lilly talked about the wonders of dolphin consciousness, too, but he may not have been sober at the time, and he certainly wasn't capitalizing the term and using it to sell life skills workshops. Inventor of the isolation tank and psychedelic compatriot of Timothy Leary, Lilly took enormous doses of LSD and ketamine while he was with dolphins and came back raving about vast, incandescent matrices of information surging through their powerful group mind. Your guess is as good as mine on that one, but it's interesting to note that the gifted American psychic Edgar Cayce might have agreed with him—Cayce also believed that the deepest dimensions of the animal self exist not at the level of the individual but of the entire species. "Cayce would say that there is a group soul, for example, for all cats," explains scholar Kevin Todeschi. "And this overseeing energy, which is part of the divine, is really responsible for the cat world. Rather than each cat having its own individual soul like a human being, each attracts a piece of that group soul as its individual personality. And it's possible to attract that same personality more than once, so you could have a cat die and another cat come along, and you might say, 'My cat came back to me.'"

Speaking of animals "coming back," the literature of supernatural experience is positively teeming with the ghosts of pets haunting places and people they knew while they were alive. Once, for example, a veterinarian treating a sick white horse gave its owners some baffling instructions: he told them that for safety's sake, it would be best to separate the ailing animal from the other white horse in its corral. "What other horse?" they asked—and were dumbfounded as the vet went on to describe, in unmistakable detail, a second horse of theirs who had recently died. On another occasion, two young boys were



close to drowning in a cold lake near the Austrian border when their father leapt into the water to rescue them. Swimming as fast as he could, he saw that the family dog Fritz had beaten him to the punch and watched as the faithful pet steered his boys back to the beach. The wrinkle: Fritz had been dead for over a year. When they all got to shore, his ghost disappeared, but not before a dozen onlookers had seen him too.

When chimps get religion

Ultimately, the precise parameters of human uniqueness may be too elusive to pin down, the character of the animal soul too loosely understood to be tied off with any authority. Even so, there's one last question on my mind: What lies in store for the future? Just last September in the rainforests of the Congo, new types of tool use were observed among wild gorillas. Then in November, researchers in St. Louis made the startling announcement that higher mammals like whales and humans

aren't the only ones smart enough to be able to sing—now *mice* have been overheard performing complex (and catchy) ultrasonic love ballads to woo potential mates. And new findings like these seem to be cropping up by the month. Of course, science itself is always progressing, but could these discoveries also suggest that animal consciousness is evolving? If so, are their souls evolving too?

However one understands the soul's nature and function in human beings, is it possible that animals—audacious as it may seem to ask—could even have their own spiritual inklings? One of Goodall's most famous stories is of a great forest waterfall in the Kakombe valley where she occasionally observed the chimpanzees performing strange, spontaneous dances. Their behavior was inexplicable, she writes, but for the sense that they were responding to "feelings akin to awe...a feeling generated by the mystery of water; water that seems alive, always rushing past yet never going, always the same yet ever different." J. Allen Boone reflects on a similar incident in *Kinship with All Life*, marveling at a German shepherd watching the sunset from a mountaintop



ledge: "His gaze was focused on a point in the sky considerably above the horizon line. He was staring off into fathomless space. Out there beyond the ability of my human senses to identify what it was, *something* was holding the big dog's attention like a magnet! And it was giving him great satisfaction, great contentment, great peace of mind. That fact was not only

"Everywhere but in man, consciousness has had to come to a stand; in man alone it has kept on its way."

Henri Bergson

written all over him; it was permeating the atmosphere like a perfume. I had watched human pilgrims in such meditative poses on sacred mountains in the Orient. I wondered . . . and wondered . . . and wondered . . . "

What does this mean? Goodall speculates that it was "similar feelings of awe that gave rise to the first animistic religions, the worship of the elements and the mysteries of nature

over which there was no control." Bill Wallauer, a videographer who has spent nine years with the chimps in Tanzania, adds, "We can't come to any real conclusions, but I honestly do believe that chimps have the capacity to contemplate and consider (even revere) both the animate and inanimate." Unlikely though it seems, it's fascinating to consider the notion of some sort of proto-religious impulse in animalkind. Yet evolutionary philosophers such as Teilhard de Chardin and Henri Bergson would likely have seen such a development as no longer possible. Now that the wild upward thrust of consciousness in the universe has finally burst the bonds of matter through the awakening *human* mind, they believed, it has no more need to push its way forward through other species.

"Everywhere but in man," writes Bergson, "consciousness has had to come to a stand; in man alone it has kept on its way." Nevertheless, the future is an open book. What unseen potentials of soul and consciousness might one day rise to the surface of the animal mind? Reflecting on my own few moments of fleeting communion with the spirit and intelligence of wild creatures, I can't say for sure. But I've heard that in the high, cold mountains above Dharamsala, India, Tibetan monks in exile recite the dharma to their dogs in hopes that someday they, too, will be able to practice it themselves . . .



To Be Soulful, You Have to Flow

An Interview with

MICHAEL BECKWITH & RICKIE BYARS-BECKWITH by Andrew Cohen

WHETHER IT'S SOUL MUSIC OR SOUL FOOD or finding one's soul mate, the intangible quality commonly referred to as soul moves like a powerful undercurrent in contemporary culture. So we wanted to ask: What does it mean to be a living, breathing manifestation of this ineffable and yet most compelling dimension of human life? What does it mean to have soul?

To find the answer, we could think of none better qualified to respond than Michael Bernard Beckwith and Rickie Byars-Beckwith. This power couple represents the confluence of what many in Western society associate with soul and soulfulness—spirituality, love, music, community, and African-American culture. The late, great blues guitarist Mississippi John Hurt once remarked, "Soul... was nurtured by the Black Man in America." And, as Rickie clearly demonstrates, the Black Woman, as well.

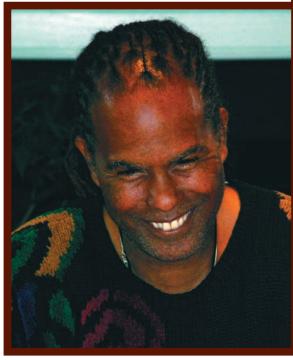
Dr. Michael Beckwith, a founding member of the Asso-

ciation for Global New Thought, is the guiding inspiration behind the Agape International Spiritual Center in Culver City, California. With more than nine thousand members, it is one of the largest multicultural, transdenominational spiritual communities in the United States. Dr. Rickie Byars-Beckwith, affectionately called a "grace note of God" and beloved for her inspirational music, is a composer, singer, and performer. She leads the Agape International Choir, a multiethnic 150-member choral group, whose a cappella prayer and rousing musical celebrations drive Agape's Sunday services.

After attending a recent service at Agape, it was clear to WIE editor in chief Andrew Cohen that one would be hard-pressed to find a fuller expression of soul that side of the Great Divide. In the following interview, Cohen engages Michael Beckwith and Rickie Byars-Beckwith in a lively and soulful exploration of the topic.

−J.R.







RICKIE BYARS-BECKWITH

ANDREW COHEN: What does it mean when we say that someone "has soul"?

RICKIE BYARS-BECKWITH: To have soul, you must somewhere be connected to the divine presence. People who "have soul" have a certain way of expressing themselves. What they're saying is real; they have the facility, the ability to touch you. There's the sense that they're not trying to transmit anything. Yet, transmission is taking place. They're in tune. They have rhythm. They have an understanding of the way things are, and there's a commitment to the heart. They have a natural way of being, and in their way of being, there's something that is universally on point, whether they know it or not. For example, a soulful person may not necessarily be the one who dances well, but they may have a great appreciation for those who can! And in their love for it, they're poised. Soulful people love; they have a connection to this greater love and to the divine. John Coltrane . . . he had soul.

COHEN: *Is there another way to describe this capacity for soul?*

BYARS-BECKWITH: When someone's connected, when a person totally *gets* it, things come together. They're not speaking

from their intellect; they're speaking from something greater. There's something speaking through them that is it—that is beyond. It's divine. It's the ability to love; it's not just the ability to care more. It's creative love, as opposed to destructive love! It's soulful. I mean "One Love" in the way Bob Marley meant it. It's that love. It's beyond self-preservation. It's something that cares. In that love, there's no other. We are it. It's us, and so we share it. I believe that a soulful person is someone who is swimming in this, who's dedicated to it, who's here for this.

MICHAEL BECKWITH: That's soulful! And I *like* the word "soulful." There's a rhythm; there's a harmony, a vibration. And soulful people have the ability, consciously or unconsciously, to allow that vibration to move through them. Sometimes they don't even know they're doing it. Have you ever listened to Sam Cooke or Ray Charles? In the music of certain people, you hear them touching that ineffable place. They become instruments to translate and transmit it to the audience. And when it hits the audience, you can *feel* it.

Soul can also be expressed in a person's smile or in their movement. We talk about *soul food*. The food itself might not be any good—the actual substance that it's made from—but a

People who "have soul" have a certain way of expressing themselves. What they're saying is *real;* they have the facility, the ability to touch you. There's the sense that they're not trying to transmit anything. Yet transmission is taking place.

mother's or a grandmother's love infuses the food with something that transmits to the family, to the children, and carries them for a long, long time. In the same way, sometimes a musical artist will take a song written by someone else, a song that didn't do that well when it was originally released. But when the artist takes that same song and those same lyrics and infuses them with soul, it becomes a hit.

COHEN: What exactly is it that they are infusing into that song, and how are they able to do it?

BECKWITH: They're in tune with something beyond the gross level, and it's subtle and real. It's eternal. It doesn't go in and out of style. Every time you hear that soulful song, you think, "Wow, that *does* something to me!" Some people have the capacity to hold that space. And it's love; it's surrender; it's availability; it's sensitivity to that ground, to that frequency, to that vibration, to that rhythm. Some people have it in their walk or in the way they hug you or in the way they talk. Some people have it in their cooking. I think it's expressed in all aspects of life. Everyone has it or has the capacity to have it, but some people *don't* express it. I heard a speaker recently and everything that person was saying was right, but there was no

music in it. He wasn't in sync with what he was speaking about and so it didn't touch me.

COHEN: Why do some people appear as if they don't have soul?

BECKWITH: I believe that everybody's born with soul. We all have soul because we're individualized expressions of this Great Good. We're here *as it.* But in some individuals the expression of soul is not actualized because their intention for life may be different. As a result the person is out of time, out of step, and their attention and intention are off. They're not in the flow of life. To be soulful, you have to flow.

COHEN: Two ways in which you have described soul are in terms of love and realness. When someone's "got soul," you know it. Can you describe other qualities that define soul?

BYARS-BECKWITH: To be honest, I think it's unsoulful to try to describe soul, but I'll try anyway! It is love and realness. And it's *timing*. There's a time for you to express that song. Some people will know it's time, and others won't recognize it. We spoke about the songwriter who writes a song that doesn't initially achieve popularity, a song that another singer comes



Soulful people *love;* they have a connection to this greater love and to the divine. John Coltrane . . . *he* had soul.

along and makes a big hit. This happens because the singer feels he has a job to do. He is carrying the song in his being, and he is so deeply resonating with the lyrics that he magnifies them and increases their power.

COHEN: For example, Ray Charles singing "Georgia." It is hard to imagine anyone performing that song like he does.

BYARS-BECKWITH: I heard Ray Charles sing "Georgia," and I cried.

COHEN: So, when you hear Ray Charles sing "Georgia" and you cry, something very specific happens and everybody feels it. It comes alive.

BYARS-BECKWITH: Everybody gets it. And everybody cries because the song opens the heart and it makes you *care*.

BECKWITH: The soul has the capacity to uplift, inspire, and bring out the best in other people. It gives a taste of the eternal. It hits you and it makes you vibrate at that same level. A soulful individual can help you remember a realm that's deeper than yourself.

COHEN: When I was much younger, I went to jazz performances and I sometimes remember feeling that the universe was literally

coming to life. Certain musicians were able to convey a powerful and compassionate emotion that would catapult people into nothing less than transcendent states of consciousness. It was powerful and overwhelming. But having the opportunity to meet some of these musicians backstage, I recall being shocked to see that the soulful, religious, spiritual feeling they expressed through their music often stood in stark contrast to the kinds of individuals they seemed to be. There can be this enormous split between an artist's capacity to transmit soulfulness, majesty, and the spiritual wonder of life and death, and the individual's actual moral and ethical state of development. So my question is: What is the difference between having soul and having moral virtue?

BYARS-BECKWITH: For people who are able to convey this kind of inspiration in a performance, I would say that's the highest they can give us. Their performance is a window for the divine, but they may not *live* from that place. What we're talking about is high art—art that's connected—where love, virtue, and soul *are* the same thing. Hopefully one's life will be an extension of that inspired moment, of that transmission. That's the ideal, and in that, there will be awareness all the time.

BECKWITH: To me virtue and soul are not the same. An athlete can run really fast, or a person can open up and a tremendous melody can come out of their mouth. An average person will say, "Ooh, they can run! They can do this or that!" But it

doesn't necessarily mean the performer or athlete has virtue or wisdom. It just means they have the facility. Even people who have been in the spiritual walk of life may have a mental facility and may know its tricks. They may have a *siddhi* of some kind. They may be able to manifest something, which can certainly mean that they're in tune with the rhythm and the harmony within themselves; they've developed a certain part of their mind or their brain. But it doesn't necessarily mean that they're *enlightened*. It doesn't necessarily mean that they're the full package, in the sense in which we're speaking about it.

COHEN: Is there another way in which to consider this dramatic split in some of the greatest artists? For example, Billie Holiday had a God-given gift and yet was incredibly self-destructive.

BECKWITH: Sometimes that self-destruction or lack of self-love or depression is the opening for the transcendent to come through them. They're humbled by their pain, and they release that pain in a song. But they don't have the capacity

or the wherewithal to have the rest of their life vibrate at a higher level.

BYARS-BECKWITH: And there's someone like Marvin Gaye, who was brilliant. And Bob Marley. In our travels all over the world, I hear more Marvin and more Bob Marley than anyone else. That's what they came to give. And their pain helped them sing better. *It's all connected*.

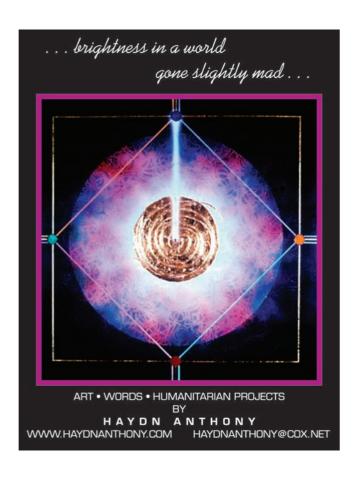
COHEN: So from one perspective, there's this profound split in the individual. But from another point of view, that split enables them to give their gift.

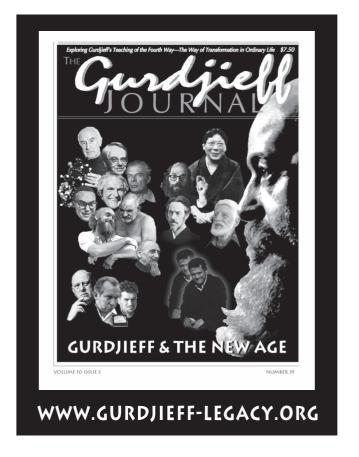
BYARS-BECKWITH: Yes, and it *all* has to be considered.

BECKWITH: *That* sounded very soulful! ■



To listen to the full-length interview with Rickie Byars-Beckwith and Michael Beckwith, go to wieunbound.org/beckwith







Sacrifice Is the Language of Ove

The Incredible Story of a Modern-Day Saint by Maura R. O'Connor

Thirty years ago, Mother Antonia left behind her life as a mother of seven in Beverly Hills to care for thousands of inmates within the hellish confines of a Mexican prison—the place, she says, that "freed" her.

Then you think about it, very few of us ever come in contact with holiness in our lifetime. Most of us have to dust the word off just to use it. We may have visited sacred sites such as cathedrals in Europe that house holy relics—the ancient remains of a saint tightly sealed within a crypt, a mummified toe or a bone maybe. But authentic holiness, what the German theologian Rudolf Otto called *Ganz Andere*, "Total Otherness"—that type of holiness capable of melting our personal significance into its greatness—remains largely alien to us. No doubt, it's in part due to the times we live in. Most of us have been raised in a secular culture that avoids even the intimations of hierarchy and absolutes, perfection and reverence. Look "holiness" up in the dictionary and you'll find that someone who is holy is by definition morally and spiritually perfect; they evoke reverence in those around them as a result of their conviction and fearlessness; they are

in a persistent state of godliness. Do we believe in perfection nowadays? Are we capable of reverence? Is godliness something we bother to strive for?

These were the sorts of questions I found myself absorbed by while reading about the life of Mary Clarke. In a new book called *The Prison Angel*, Pulitzer Prize—winning journalists Mary Jordan and Kevin Sullivan tell the story of how Mary, the daughter of Irish immigrants, grew up in glamour-infused Beverly Hills, was married twice, and raised seven children

There's something inside us that yearns to give ourselves up for the sake of other people."

in relative domestic bliss. Then, at the age of fifty, she experienced a calling to serve God so strong that it led her to literally sew her own habit and move to one of the most infamous penitentiaries in Mexico in order to help the inmates there. For nearly fifteen years, she had no ecclesiastical support for her work at the prison. Now eighty years old, Mother Antonia, as she is known, is considered by many to be a living saint, someone who has walked directly into the middle of prison riots and gunfire to save lives. By all accounts, there isn't anything she wouldn't do for her "beloved *hijos*" (sons), and she has given everything to them, unconditionally, for nearly thirty years. To this day, she lives in a small cell, unequipped with either heat or hot water, alongside drug addicts, murderers, and the poor.

I spoke with Mother Antonia several times in the process of writing this article, and I can tell you that she is perhaps the most effusive and enthusiastic person you could ever meet. "I have not been depressed one day in thirty years," she once marveled. "Perhaps sad, but *never* depressed." Indeed, after every conversation with Mother Antonia, I found myself strangely lifted, as if I had been in touch with the Divine. Though I was in awe of her seemingly bottomless joy, like others I was also mystified by it. "The first time you meet her, you think she's not real," a friend explains in *The Prison Angel*. "She's nuts, she's not normal. But in twenty years I've never seen her change. . . . There's an exuberance about her relationship with

God. . . . It is normal. It's what we're supposed to be and we all wish we could be."

Ever since she can remember, Mother Antonia was drawn to help the poor and the disenfranchised, even while growing up and then raising her own seven children in Beverly Hills among movie stars and directors. In 1965, a priest by the name of Henry Vetter heard about her ambitious charity work sending clothes, medicine, and supplies around the world on container ships whose captains she had coerced into helping her. He invited her

to go on a tour of Tijuana with him, and during the trip they stopped at a prison called La Mesa. At that time, La Mesa was already well on its way to earning its reputation as what some have called the "Black Legend," a place overrun by corruption and human rights violations. Mother Antonia relates the horror of seeing "F-Tank" for the first time—nothing more than a stretch of dirt behind chain-link fence where insane prisoners were kept without access to running water or toilets. But most striking to her was what happened when they visited the prison's infirmary. As soon as the sick inmates

saw Father Vetter and Mary, they instantly stood up from their cots out of respect. "I immediately felt this caring and a love for them," she told me. "I felt their goodness." Over the next decade, Mary began to travel to La Mesa more and more—often several times a week—bringing anything she could to help the prisoners. "Charity is not a thing you do," she says in *The Prison Angel*. "It's love. It's who you become. I was a salesman for the poor."

In 1977, when all of Mary's children were independent and her second marriage had ended in divorce, she had a life-changing realization: "I'd been an outsider to suffering all my life. I had been on the outside helping people on the inside, whether it was in Africa or Bolivia or anywhere else." As she explained to me, "I think there comes a time when it's not enough for us just to help other people. There's something inside us that yearns to give ourselves up for the sake of other people. Sacrifice is the language of love. Without sacrifice, there is no love." Indeed, Mary felt that she was being called to give up her life "completely." She sold everything she owned—her business, her house, her belongings—donned a black dress and veil that she had sewn herself and believed looked "nunny," and took the name Mother Antonia in honor of her deceased spiritual mentor, Monsignor Anthony Brouwers. Before he died, he had told her, "That little cottage that you wanted to go away to and make Toll House cookies-that wasn't meant for you. This was meant for you. The



front lines. God put you in that role." With that, she crossed the border into Tijuana for good.

Unlike other prisons in Mexico or the United States where individual cement cells are used to contain inmates. La Mesa's system of incarceration was highly unusual: located within the prison walls was a kind of miniature city called El Pueblito, or "Little Town," a city built by the inmates themselves. Though surrounded by guard towers, the squalid streets of El Pueblito were relatively unpoliced and contained thriving businesses taco shacks, tequila bars, brothels—run by the prisoners. The inmates lived in a mixture of shantytown-like sprawls where the very poorest struggled to survive and small apartments where entire families lived, wives and children moving in with convicts and leaving the prison walls every day for work or school. Dotting the city were luxury apartments replete with hot tubs, televisions, tiled bathrooms, and cell phones; some sold for as much as thirty thousand dollars on the prison's black market. It's said that the richest drug lords would have prostitutes brought to them every night and their favorite dinners flown in from San Diego. If a prisoner couldn't afford to pay for one of the available dwellings or build one himself, he slept outside on the bare cement.

For the first few years that Mother Antonia lived in El Pueblito, her "cell" was located over a raw sewer drain, and the stench was so unbearable she slept with a surgical mask over her face. Her days were often eighteen hours long, spent feeding, giving medicine to, and talking with criminals, guards, wives, children, and the dying. Thousands suffered horribly in the prison's system. For example, during evening roll calls, guards would mark inmates as present only for a charge of fifty cents. If prisoners couldn't pay the bribe, they were considered absent and thus lost one day served toward their prison sentences. Everything cost money in El Pueblito—clothes, food, blankets, toilet paper, even showers—and without it, inmates were left to fend for themselves. As a result, Mother Antonia's work was often as simple as making peanut butter and jelly

There's an exuberance about her relationship with God. It's what we're supposed to be and we all wish we could be"

sandwiches to give to the hungry or handing out the miniature hotel shampoos and soaps that friends sent to her in bagfuls.

At other times, however, her work was unimaginably painful. Once, for three days and nights, she cried and banged on the door of an interrogation room where she could hear the screams of a prisoner being tortured. She would enter El Pueblito during riots, begging inmates to drop their weapons and then negotiate deals with riot squads and police on the outside. She was, as she has said, "an instrument of peace in this war zone. Wherever there is torture or there is hate, it is a war zone." Occasionally, prisoners who died, whether from stab or gunshot wounds, beatings, or disease, were left unclaimed by family in the prison morgue. After nine days, Mother Antonia would take the body

in a coffin, flag down a passing truck, and ask to be driven to the cemetery in Tijuana. There she would pay a few dollars for a simple grave site and cry for them, writing on a wooden cross "We Love You." She not only earned

the adoration of the inmates by doing these sorts of things, but she also earned the trust and respect of the prison guards. They were often suffering as well, whether from depression or poverty, alcoholism, or methamphetamine addiction.

Drugs were a constant problem in El Pueblito. In fact, it's said that marijuana was cheaper on the streets of Little Town than anywhere else in Mexico, and it's estimated that as many as fifty percent of the prisoners were on heroin or other drugs. At night, soccer balls stuffed with cocaine would fly over the prison walls along with smuggled guns and food. Then in the summer of 2002, fifteen hundred armed police entered La Mesa at the command of the Mexican government and bull-dozed Little Town to the ground. Children who lived there



with their mothers or fathers were put in orphanages. Wives were put on the street and prisoners were put in "proper" cells. At the time, the prison held sixty-seven hundred inmates, two thousand more than its maximum capacity. Despite these efforts to clean up La Mesa, however, four years later it still retains something of its Black Legend status: a place where two justice systems exist, one for the poor and one for the rich,

"I wish to be buried with the poor," she told me, because in my heart I'm one of them."

where women and men prostitute themselves in order to survive, and where drug and arms trafficking is still rampant.

When trying to explain why she has stayed in this living hell on earth for nearly thirty years, Mother Antonia relates an unforgettable dream she once had, years before she ever knew about or visited La Mesa. In the dream, she was at Calvary (the location of Christ's crucifixion) and a Roman guard approached her, telling her that she was going to be crucified. Terrified and filled with dread, she prayed that God would take her away so she would not have to suffer. However, the Roman guard approached her again and said, "You don't have to pray. There's a man here and he wants to take your place." She saw a man standing in a white robe, and when he looked at her, she understood that he was going to die for her and that she wouldn't owe him anything in return. But then the Roman guard said, "He needs you to stand by him." She began to cry, protesting that she hated violence and couldn't bear to watch someone being crucified. The guard said, "Woman, he's there in your place." As Mother Antonia explained, "Suddenly, I loved more than I feared. I ran behind him and knelt down and took his face in my hands. But he didn't have a face any longer—it was blank where his face should have been. I said, 'I'm afraid, but I'm more afraid to leave you. I'm never going to leave you, no matter what they do to me.' I waited for the blow of the hammer, and then I woke up." Over the years in the prison infirmary, Mother Antonia would often hold the face of a dying inmate and think, "Look, Lord, I'm with you again. . . . I'm never going to leave you."

At the age of eighty, Mother Antonia suffers from a number of serious ailments and has to sleep with an oxygen tank next to her bed. On nights when she is especially exhausted, she wears a long nightgown to sleep just in case the guards have to retrieve her body in the morning; they've never seen her out of her habit. Nevertheless, her work continues. She pays for the release of prisoners who are convicted of nonviolent crimes

and helps them find jobs and apartments so they can support themselves. She still arranges for hundreds of visits by dentists and oral surgeons to fix prisoners' teeth in an effort to give them some measure of self-esteem. She prays for the souls of infamous murderers she has counseled so that they will repent in their hearts, and she visits their victims' families in the hope that they will discover the release of forgiveness. This tireless work on behalf of the suffering, this practice of self-sacrifice is, she says, the very thing that has given her freedom. "I don't just work for them; I am one of them. I live the way they live. Once you're on the inside, it's so different. Somehow

prison was the place where I finally experienced the freedom to be myself, to really be myself. I think prison freed me."

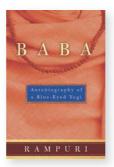
Even in death, Mother Antonia wants to be with the poor and the suffering, the people to whom she feels "thankful" for giving her the opportunity to serve God. Indeed, Mary Jordan and Kevin Sullivan write in *The Prison Angel* that she hopes to be buried in one of the mass graves at the same cemetery in Tijuana where she has brought so many of her beloved sons. "I wish to be buried with the poor," she told me, "because in my heart I'm one of them. And I know that the poor people in Tijuana or wherever they are, if I'm there, they'll say, 'Mother's buried here.'"

What makes someone capable of such self-sacrifice? How does a person come to love more than they are afraid, even of death? Mother Antonia gave me something of an answer to these questions when I asked her where her bravery came from. "I'm not brave," she said emphatically. "Brave were the gladiators. But the Christians in Rome who died for what they believed in, they were courageous. Maybe that's the gift I have—I'm courageous. But you know, Jiminy Cricket spoke the truth! 'Let your conscience be your guide!' My conviction comes from my conscience. And my conscience is my relationship with God."



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BABA
Autobiography of a Blue-Eyed Yogi
by Rampuri

(Bell Tower, 2005, hardcover \$23.00)

In 1969, nineteen-year-old William Gans of Beverly Hills left home and, like so many seekers of his generation, headed to India to find himself. Thirty-six years later, he gives us *Baba*, the true story of what happened when he arrived there with just twenty dollars in his pocket and a thirst to discover the Truth— "something so colossal that it wouldn't even fit into the twentieth century."

Traveling the length and breadth of India, Gans visits many gurus, sadhus, and mahatmas until one day he finds himself sitting in a cave in Rajasthan at the feet of a revered master yogi named Hari Puri Baba. "I don't know if I'm ready for this," he says when Hari Puri Baba gives him a new name, Rampuri, and offers to make him his disciple. "You will never be ready for this," the old man laughs. "This is not something you or anyone else is ever ready for."

With that, Rampuri steps onto the path of his destiny, and the enthralling tale of a fifteen-year-long spiritual journey in the land of saints and sages begins to unfold. As the first foreigner ever to be initiated into the ancient sect of the Naga Babas—naked, ashsmeared, ganja-puffing Hindu holy men—he opens a remarkable window on the secretive world of India's most famous order of renunciates. Detailing hidden practices and ceremonies, the rhythm of daily life and worship, and all the color and cacophony of grand

pilgrimages and festivals like the Kumbh Mela in Allahabad, Rampuri's odyssey is an educational carousel ride through the history and affairs of the Naga Baba lineage. Later on, the book even starts reading like a nail-biting mystery novel, as Rampuri becomes entangled in politics and intrigue within the order—much of it surrounding him and the growing conflict between those sadhus who resent the presence of a Westerner in their midst and those who embrace it as a stepping stone to their ongoing survival in the modern world.

As both universal spiritual adventure story and chronicle of one man's journey from the modern to the ancient world, Baba is good to the last page. "Magic happens anywhere worlds meet," Rampuri writes, referring to Hindu sacred geography, but the thought applies equally well to the author himself. In order to truly meet India on its own terms, he eventually has to confront—and transcend—his identity and conditioning as an American. And more than anything else, it's his authentic engagement with the disorienting clash of cultures in his own mind that makes his many meditations on Western and Eastern modes of thought, language, and consciousness so thought-provoking.

Ross Robertson

THE MESSENGER

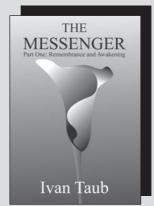
"This sensuous story of hope and redemption was inspired by the belief that each soul has the power to heal and forgive."

—Ivan Taub, Ph.D., Intellectual Heritage Program, Temple University.

THE MESSENGER recounts

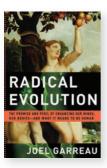
the thrilling and unusual adventures of Jonathan West and Gina Angelo, an artistic, young, American couple seeking love and spiritual enlightenment as they travel through Europe during the chaotic summer of 1970.

This vivid and fast-paced story seamlessly blends the past, present, and future, taking the reader on a riveting and unforgettable journey into the psychological depths of good and evil, a journey that climaxes in a life-transforming encounter with a powerful, mysterious, mystical Being.



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RADICAL EVOLUTION
The Promise and Peril of Enhancing
Our Minds, Our Bodies—And What
It Means to Be Human

by Joel Garreau (Doubleday, 2005, hardcover \$26.00)

In today's rapidly changing world, to say that "science fact is stranger than science fiction" has become, well, trite. However, when many leading thinkers seriously suggest that near-future scenarios for our beleaguered species could easily include those depicted in the *Terminator* and *Matrix* movies, one has to wonder if we've actually taken that statement seriously enough. This is due to a spate of rapidly developing technologies that will both dramatically blur the line between human and machine and enable us to engineer our own evolution. The result? According to Joel Garreau's *Radical Evolution*, an impending transformation of human nature.

Garreau has discovered, for example, that DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) is currently working on what they call the "metabolically dominant soldier," an unstoppable blend of man and machine coming soon to a war near you. DARPA hopes to be able to deploy this human weapon within the next decade. His impenetrable exoskeleton (read: bat suit) will amplify both his muscle movements and his thoughts via computerized implants; his digitally augmented eyes will see via a distant drone; his pain will be negated via vaccine; and his wounds will be healed via brain implants that enable him to simply will it. Add his chemically enhanced ability to discard sleep, and you have a 24/7 "lean, mean fighting machine." All this, of course, begs the question: At what point is a half man/half machine more machine than man-or alternately, at what point is the machine more man than machine? Small wonder that a growing number of experts cited by Garreau now believe that within thirty years, the civil rights of artificial intelligence entities will be a hot domestic issue.

Garreau attempts to grapple objectively with scenarios such as these. He points out that we are presently at the "knee of a curve" of exponential technological growth that is approaching a rate of development beyond which it is impossible to predict future consequences. He outlines a staggering list of impending innovations and concludes that we are entering the "bio-intelligence" age by actively engineering our own evolution. The question of how best to deal with our inevitable "post-human" future is a primary drive behind this book.

Garreau discusses the three most popular scenarios proffered by those who deeply understand these things: the Heaven, Hell, and Prevail scenarios.

In the Heaven scenario, the near future will spawn undreamed-of technological marvels, healing the ills of our world and merging flesh and machine to create "post-humans" who will have the best of their "machineness" augmented by the best of their "bioheritage." In the Hell scenario, we find its evil twin: mad scientists, white plagues, and the end of all life on the planet. The author meticulously examines the merits of both positions. In particular, he exhorts us to become intimately familiar with the real dangers of the Hell scenario so that we might still take measures to avoid them.

The Prevail scenario acknowledges that we cannot prevent these technologies from emerging and also acknowledges extreme perils because of them. However, it points out that humans have an uncanny history of muddling through in defiance of historical forces. This is credited to the ability of ordinary people facing overwhelming odds to rise to the occasion simply because it's the right thing to do. "Prevail" holds that humans will be able to shape the impact of these technologies in unpredictable ways, creating a combination of "the marvelously ordinary and the utterly unprecedented."

Were the book to finish at this point, it would be entirely worth reading simply for its sobering education. However, in its final pages, Radical Evolution truly soars. Here Garreau argues that the real cause of and solution to this crisis is spiritual, not technological. In fact, he believes that the increased interconnections between human beings, our increasing ability to engineer our own evolution, and the extremely dangerous waters we're entering will force us to deal with existential questions of meaning and purpose in ways that nothing else could.

Using Nietzsche and Teilhard de Chardin as his philosophical backup, Garreau argues that our current humanity is not an endpoint but the bridge to an ongoing moral and spiritual



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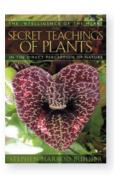
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Habitual identification with modified mental states and objective phenomena causes and sustains the illusion of separate existence. When this error in perception is corrected, our awareness is immediately restored to its original, pure wholeness.

- Roy Eugene Davis

development that is an expression of the universe becoming conscious. The next step for us, he believes, is the active creation of a new culture that will devote itself not only to mastering the forces of nature but to "harness[ing] the energies of love," to paraphrase Teilhard. "That humans are uniquely rational, intellectual, spiritual, selfaware, creative, conscientious, moral, or godlike seems to be a myth . . . to which we cling in defiance of the evidence," Garreau observes, quoting historian Felipe Fernández-Armesto. "[However,] if . . . we want to stay human through the changes we face—we had better not discard the myth, but start trying to live up to it."

Michael Wombacher



THE SECRET TEACHINGS OF PLANTS
The Intelligence of the Heart in the
Direct Perception of Nature
by Stephen Harrod Buhner
(Bear & Company, 2004,
paperback \$18.00)

The cover of Stephen Buhner's book The Secret Teachings of Plants—a photo of a gorgeous, vibrant, exotic plant—stopped me in my tracks. In spite of having little previous interest in plants, I was strangely compelled by it, so when the opportunity to review the book came up, I grabbed it. Diving into the reading, I found myself captivated by a whole new world of subtlety and complexity about the special powers of plants. And then about two-thirds of the way through, while reading about how plants can sense human need and reveal to us their healing properties, I thought, Hold on; I had an experience like that. One day, a voice came to me

out of the blue while I was meditating. It said, "Chlorella! You need chlorella!" I was completely surprised—but immediately recognized that this could be a solution to a dilemma with which I had been struggling. To take a stand against the mistreatment of animals in our society, I was adhering to a vegan diet, but my health was waning. So I heeded this mysterious directive and began taking chlorella, a 2.5-billion-year-old green algae and nutrient-dense superfood, and immediately began feeling stronger.

Had I not had this experience, I don't know if I would have been open to the author's core argument that wisdom can be transmitted between human beings and plants. Buhner, whose IQ has earned him membership in Mensa, is fully aware that his topic will be a stretch for many, and so he begins his book by elucidating the latest science behind certain fundamental properties of the natural world. For example, he demonstrates that the electromagnetic spectrum is the fundamental carrier of energy in nature. Buhner then shows how this works in relationship to heart functioning, citing recent discoveries in neuroscience (the scientific field related to the nervous system) and neurocardiology (the field that studies the heart as a neurohormonal organ). The physical heart is far more than a pump, Buhner tells us. The electromagnetic pulsations of the heart are part of an ongoing dialogue that helps maintain both our internal dynamic equilibrium and our communication with the external world. The beating of the heart produces a strong broadband electromagnetic field—a field five thousand times more powerful than that created by the brain. While today most people locate the seat of consciousness in the brain. Buhner shows that if we recognize that human consciousness is primarily located in the heart, a radical shift becomes possible that enables a powerful mode of holistic/intuitive/ depth cognition.

Buhner claims that the heart also acts as a sensitive receptor for emotion and that emotions are often the result of the impact of specific electromagnetic waves upon us. He argues

provocatively that over the four billion years since life began on this planet, living organisms have learned to use electromagnetic fields for intentionally conveying vital information. Buhner concludes that this type of communication with other life forms is an aspect of coevolutionary bonding and that if humans can access a more subtle level of heart functioning, then we could perceive these communications.

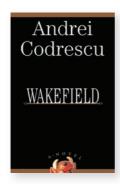
In the second half of the book, Buhner takes us on a mind-bending journey into his own experience of communicating directly with plants for the purpose of healing others. This capacity, he explains, is accessed by not knowing and through an acute refinement of sense perception. In a state of extreme receptivity, he finds that his consciousness can move deeply into other life forms. Then the medicinal properties of a plant are revealed to him from "within" the plant itself or a disease that a person has is revealed from "within" an affected organ. Buhner stresses that this is not easy work; it requires fortitude and moral development to be able to stay this open. While what he is saying sounds improbable, he conveys his experiences with an authenticity and humanity that seem very genuine.

In the final chapter, Buhner reveals his philosophical hand and draws some definitive (and questionable) conclusions. Understandably, he calls us to reclaim the capacity for direct perception that he believes we once knew as infants, but he also wants us to acknowledge a universe in which there is "no higher and lower, no up and no down, no better than and less than. No hierarchy at all." This philosophical thread weaves throughout the book; for example, he states that "it is better if you understand [plants are] superior." In a world where we so disrespect nature that we are causing mass extinctions, we could do with exercising more humility. However, despite the truth that all life forms are of the same essence, human intelligence—heart and brain together, as represented by this book itself—is obviously far more developed, complex, aware, and responsive than plant

life, and consequently we bear more responsibility for life itself.

So to embrace Buhner's case and take it one step further to uphold our greater responsibility, perhaps now we could bring these recent scientific discoveries and deep insights to bear on a new, consciously evolving relationship with the world of nature—one that includes deep care, respect, and gratitude for these other life forms from which we came and with which we symbiotically share this planet.

Jan Stewart



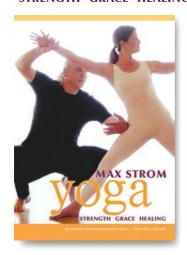
WAKEFIELD

by Andrei Codrescu (Algonquin Books, 2004, hardcover \$24.95)

Andrei Codrescu's latest novel Wakefield starts off with a bang, the Devil dropping by Wakefield's New Orleans apartment. You're a failure and a fake, he says. Time to die. Wakefield backpedals, makes excuses, keeps Satan talking. A deal is eventually struck: when the Devil fires his starter pistol, Wakefield will have exactly one year to travel the land and find an authentic life, or he'll be pushing up daisies. They lift a Scotch to the bargain.

It's a hell of a beginning, and a hell of a setup for Codrescu to apply his trademark flair for shrewd social commentary to the subject of (in)authenticity and the search for meaning in contemporary American life. Wakefield makes his living as a sort of anti-motivational speaker, and soon after the Devil departs, he sets off on a cross-country lecture tour with one wary eye over his shoulder,

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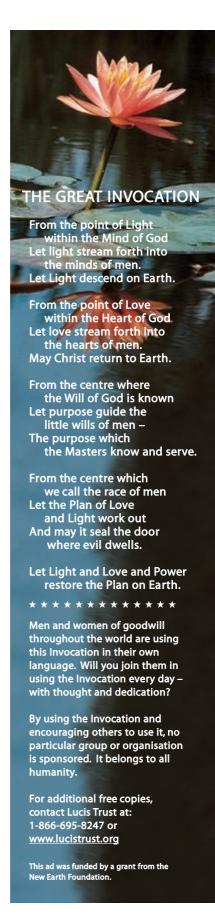
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the other looking out for his true calling, and both ears cocked for Satan's opening shot. From a quirky heartland town to big-city Chicago, the dusty expanse of an Arizona superhighway to the rain-soaked coastline of the Pacific Northwest, Codrescu dances Wakefield through the zeitgeist of late 1990s America, stepping on art and politics, business and pleasure, architecture and anarchism, and just about everything else. Wakefield makes friends, has affairs, goes to costume parties, dodges his ex-wife, reunites with his estranged daughter, confides in his New Age travel agent, and more. From time to time, Satan shows up to keep tabs on him, throwing his own hilarious commentary into the mix the Dark Lord's rants about why he hates Buddhists or why he can't stand being lectured to ("not since he was made to stand in front of the heavenly throne before being hurled flaming through space") are alone worth the price of the hardcover.

Codrescu's plot is as aimless as the speeches Wakefield improvises for corporate clients like the Fire Sprinkler Association of America. but whether that's one of the book's faults or the key to its charm is up for debate. Sometimes funny, sometimes sad, Wakefield is mostly a platform for Codrescu the essayist to observe, with the keen eve of an anthropologist, the strange poignancies and absurdities of American culture. It's also an opportunity for Codrescu the poet to show off his delightful talent for wordsmithery. (Wakefield's signature speech, for example, is written as twelve pages of hyperactive free verse: "The miracle of America is of motion not regret / in New Mexico the face of Jesus jumped on a tortilla / in Plaquemine a Virgin appeared in a tree . . . the voices of God are everywhere heard loud / and clear under the hum of the tickertape.")

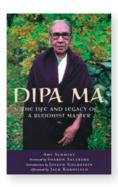
Somewhere between snowstorms in the Midwest and an anti-globalization protest in Seattle, what started out as a classic morality tale goes splendidly askew. The terms of Wakefield's Faustian bargain are steadily undermined—"Authenticity may not even be

possible," muses the omniscient voice of the narrator, "unless it's deliberately constructed"—and both of Codrescu's protagonists are sidetracked by other things. Returning home in search of peace and quiet, Wakefield launches a vendetta against an obnoxiously loud neighbor. The Devil has his own problems, beset by underworld "corporate types" attempting to restructure the divine order. The starter pistol never fires; Satan gets his badge pulled and ends up in therapy; Wakefield's off the hook. And while one wishes Codrescu had tried a little harder to follow through on the book's initial promise by holding Wakefield at least somewhat accountable for his lack of any real reason for being, perhaps it's the perfect postmodern statement—a novel about the authentic life that shies away from the possibility of ever finding it. That Wakefield never gets anywhere is not his problem, and what that might mean about the state of America's soul is not so much Codrescu's point. Always the ironic outsider, his genius is for poking holes in things, and with Wakefield, he pops every cultural balloon in sight, proving that even if it doesn't exactly add up to much, deconstruction can be devilishly entertaining.

Ross Robertson



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DIPA MAThe Life and Legacy of a Buddhist Master by Amy Schmidt (Bluebridge, 2005, paperback \$14.95)

Very few books document the story of the remarkable Buddhist teacher Dipa Ma, born in India as Nani Bala Barua in 1911. So although Dipa Ma: The Life and Legacy of a Buddhist Master is slim and at times indisputably light, it is a much needed introduction to this fascinating woman's life. Married at the age of twelve, Dipa Ma was sent to Burma to live with a husband twice her age. Despite her youth and the trauma of leaving her family in India, the two eventually fell deeply in love with each other but could not, for inexplicable reasons, have children. It was not until twenty years later when Dipa Ma was thirty-five that she miraculously gave birth to a baby girl, only to suffer the baby's death after a mere three months. She later gave birth to a second baby girl who lived, but this was followed by the

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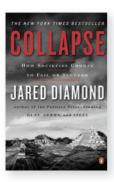
EDITORIAL CREDITS: p. 40, Voltairine de Cleyre quote, from Sharon Presley and Crispin Sartwell, eds., Exquisite Rebel: The Essays of Voltairine de Cleyre—Anarchist, Feminist, Genius, Voltairine de Cleyre (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005), p. 197; p. 100, 0. Fred Donaldson quote, from Richard Strozzi Heckler, ed., Aikido and the New Warrior (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1985), p. 129.

death of yet another baby and then her husband's passing shortly afterward. Struggling with inconsolable grief and sickness, and largely alone in a country still foreign to her, Dipa Ma made what she hoped would be a lifesaving decision to pursue the practice of Buddhist vipassana meditation.

On her second meditation retreat, under the tutelage of Anagarika Munindra, Dipa Ma, now fifty-three years of age, experienced the first stage of enlightenment according to the Theravada Buddhist tradition. Utterly transformed by the experience and purportedly free of her grief and worldly attachments, she embraced a radical new role in life—that of a spiritual leader and powerful meditation teacher to hundreds of Burmese and Indian women. It was arguably these women mothers, wives, and homemakers who generally had no access to the spiritual life—who Dipa Ma most profoundly affected. Eventually she also attracted an extended group of American students, even traveling in her old age to teach in the United States.

For the most part, Dipa Ma is composed of stories about these Western devotees' encounters with her and the teachings she passed on to them, as told to author Amy Schmidt. Many of the anecdotes are from major figures in the Western Buddhist community, such as Sharon Salzberg, Joseph Goldstein, and Jack Kornfield (they wrote the foreword, introduction, and afterword respectively), and some are both moving and humorous. But just as many fail to transmit any of Dipa Ma's purported spiritual mastery and human charisma. Whether this is because the vignettes tend to focus too long on the students' personal stories rather than on Dipa Ma or because they have lost their shakti in translation from interview to print is up for debate. But the result is that the book feels like an incomplete portrait; at times, it succeeds in offering a delightful glimpse into Dipa Ma's character, but it delivers little of the psychological or spiritual weight that she herself is said to have embodied.

Maura R. O'Connor



COLLAPSE

How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed by Jared Diamond (Viking Penguin, 2005, paperback \$17.00)

The Maya civilization collapsed in warfare. The Anasazi of Chaco Canyon perished as drought hit. The Polynesians of Easter Island depleted their forests, soil, and fisheries while dedicating themselves to the creation of their enormous statues and so descended into cannibalism. And the Vikings of Greenland fell to starvation while their Inuit neighbors, who



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made different choices, continued on. In each of these cases, the choices these cultures made determined their destinies, and this is the point of Jared Diamond's latest book, *Collapse*, a sequel to his Pulitzer Prize-winning *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. Synthesizing information from numerous disciplines, Diamond applies it across cultures, continents, and time, leaving you convinced that when it comes to the fate of civilizations, there are no accidents.

After touring the ruins of past cultures, he moves to the present day, pointing to troubling headlines from China, Los Angeles, and rural Montana and warning us that globally, we're making similarly perilous choices and running the risk of repeating past failures. It's hard to argue with his point, especially as he details, as just one of many examples, how the confluence of overpopulation and diminishing farm size magnified tribal conflict and catalyzed an explo-

sion of violence in Rwanda.

Collapse would be a totally disconcerting read if Diamond were not cautiously optimistic about the ability of human beings to get it right. Yet I also found myself wanting Diamond, a trained evolutionary biologist, to make a critical distinction that he flirts with but never fully engages: consciousness has evolved. There is an implicit undertone in his writing that suggests that we have not developed through all the millennia. But we arrived here, somehow, despite all the bad news. The evolution of consciousness brings with it new ways of thinking and an expansion of human capabilities. The understanding expressed in Collapse itself is an expression of this evolution—we are no longer only the cannibals of Easter Island. Granted, this distinction may mark a thin line, especially given that it appears that we are, continent by continent, marching toward the edge of a cliff. But it is that line that separates the past and even the present from a future worth aspiring for.

Collapse makes an important point—one that should, as Diamond hopes, wake us up. We do need to awaken to our failures, but perhaps more importantly, we need to embrace our human capacity to take responsibility for our choices not just as individuals but also as a global civilization.

Robert Heinzman



THE PHOENIX LIGHTS DOCUMENTARY

(Produced by Steve Lantz and Lynne D. Kitei, M.D., 2005, DVD \$24.95)

To the old question of whether or not society and religious institutions would suddenly disintegrate if humanity discovered that we weren't the only intelligent beings in the cosmos, it seems there is now a clear answer: "The Phoenix Lights." The fear of people taking to the streets in a fit of mass hysteria certainly seemed a valid concern in 1938, when Orson Welles' eerie Martian-invasion radio drama succeeded in terrorizing more than a few Americans already fearing a German invasion. But today it appears that even if a mile-long UFO were to hover over a major city in plain sight of everyone, it wouldn't inspire much more than a few home videos, cell phone snapshots, and mild curiosity. Well, except among some of the more sensitive, impressionable citizenry—people such as Lynne D. Kitei, a respected Phoenix, Arizona, physician and coproducer of the award-winning new film *The Phoenix* Lights Documentary.

Photographing her first UFOs over the skies of Phoenix in January 1995, Kitei didn't see anything else out of the



ordinary until two years later, when a series of personal sightings of strange lights in the sky culminated in the nowfamous events of March 13, 1997. On that clear, ordinary Thursday evening, a one-mile-wide V-shaped formation of glowing amber orbs glided silently through the heavens, attracting the attention of perhaps ten thousand people up and down the state of Arizona. Making headlines in local newspapers the next morning, the close encounter drew little national media interest until three months later, when, on June 19. USA Today and CNN decided to report on the persistent mystery of the event. Soon, every news affiliate in the country was wondering: What were those anomalous lights that drifted through the desert skies on March 13—caught in photographs and on video, yet invisible to the radar scans of Phoenix air traffic controllers?

That's the question driving The Phoenix Lights Documentary, a captivating account of the biggest and best documented UFO sighting of modern times. Featuring testimony from Arizona citizens who span all walks of life—from hospice workers to interior designers, from private investigators to Air Force personnel—Kitei's film makes it difficult to deny that many ordinary people saw something very extraordinary on that eerie night in '97. Add to this the multiple photos and video recordings of the event (including Kitei's own), and the case seems almost irrefutable that, as the documentary repeatedly suggests, "we are not alone."

Devoting most of its efforts to providing evidence for that claim in the form of extensive image analysis and an intriguing tour of UFO history (from cave paintings to the twentieth century), Kitei's documentary is wideranging and insightful, with some original ideas thrown into the speculative mix. But in the end, what is most striking about Kitei's coverage of the Phoenix Lights is the deeply spiritual significance that many of the people she interviewed ascribe to the phenomenon. Some declare that they've been irrevocably transformed by their

sightings, their minds flung wide open by experiences that seem impossible to comprehend. Others find meaning and significance in the sense of peacefulness, awe, and wonder they experienced at the time of their encounters. recounting deep feelings of "appreciation for being alive and witnessing it." Kitei herself, however, is surely the most profoundly affected, having committed much of her life to a passionate quest to understand her experiences. "Is humankind at large on the verge of understanding what experiencers of unexplained phenomena have known for millennia?" she writes in her book about the Phoenix Lights. "Are we now moving towards our next evolutionary level, the positive maturation and spiritual advancement of consciousness itself?"

I'm sure most of us would certainly hope so. But it's clear that in Kitei's estimation, if we wish to evolve, we need only to watch the skies . . .

Tom Huston

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Issue 30 September-November 2005

IMMORTALITY'S SIREN SONG

What a magnificent feast for both mind and spirit your current issue has provided me with. Nothing is more tantalizingly seductive to the almighty ego than suggestions of immortality. Being able to live forever would surely be the devious and threatened ego's ultimate trump card, for its greatest fear, as Andrew Cohen points out in his pithy dialogue with Ken Wilber, is its "inherent fear of death and dissolution."

What is so fascinating is that so many of our most illustrious futurists and fiction writers are time and time again deeply duped by the ego's ability to masquerade under the many guises offered by reason, science, nanotechnology, biotechnology, genetic engineering, cryonics, and the like. They are sadly unable to appreciate the profound interdependence of life and death—unable to see that they are two aspects of the same Whole, and that you can't have one without the other!

It is also noteworthy that within the illusional world of those seeking to live forever, there is, as far as I can make out, no mention of love, compassion, inner peace, and those precious qualities that make us human.

John H. Boyd Ontario, Canada

STAGNATION? IMPOSSIBLE!

When I turn my attention to my inner experience of life, I notice that there is a constant outflow that is creative,

expansive, curious, and adventurous. So what's all the hubbub about humanity stagnating if we become immortal? If you think Life is going to sit still and stagnate in an "immortal" human body for 5,000 years, I don't think you have really taken a good look at the nature of Life. Life will always be creating, innovating, and developing. Old forms morph into new. All this fretting about the possibility of extending the life of physical bodies is understandable, and many memes will continue to clash in the process of humans increasing their life spans. But "life extension" is already happening, and will always be happening. That's what Life does: It extends itself. It wants to expand and ripen forever, to actualize its infinite potentials.

Greg Tompkins

Novato, CA

IF MR. RAGNAR WERE TRULY ENLIGHTENED

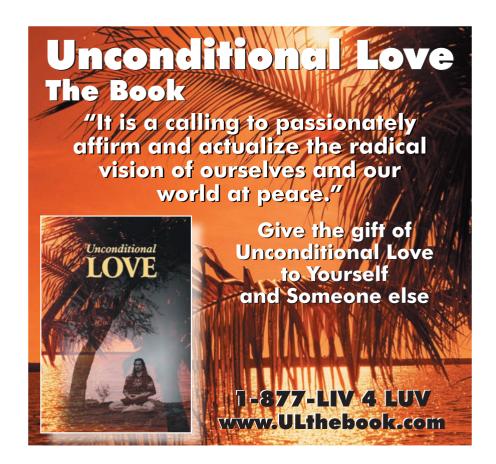
The amazing Peter Ragnar has certainly achieved a high level of mastery over the

INNER GUIDANCE OF THE WORLD

The guidance and inspiration of the inner subjective government of the planet stand behind all constructive human efforts. Given different names by people in the East and West — the Spiritual Hierarchy, the Masters of Wisdom, or the Company of Illumined Minds — its members function as custodians of the divine Plan. They watch over our evolution and guide the destiny of humanity. They carry this forward by implanting ideas in the minds of thinkers and by evoking consciousness, rather than by infringing upon the free will of the human spirit through enforced control. They are governed by love and wisdom.

More on this theme is given in a compilation of the writings of Alice A. Bailey and Helena Roerich, *The Spiritual Hierarchy: Inner Guidance of the World*, available free from:

School for Esoteric Studies 275 S. French Broad Ave., Dept. E Asheville, NC 28801-3951 www.esotericstudies.net



body and developed a number of siddhi powers—oneness with animals, healing powers, clairvoyant and telepathic abilities. However, if Mr. Ragnar were truly enlightened, he'd know these abilities are merely steps on the way to enlightenment. He would not make silly statements like "I quess there was one thing [the body] they [Ramakrishna, Ramana Maharshi, Buddha] didn't have mastery over," and "when I'm proven wrong, I'll apologize to them." Mr. Ragnar would know that there are greater purposes to serve than proving mastery over the body and greater dimensions of consciousness to attain than anything he has experienced so far.

Sarra Revati

Indianapolis, IN

SLOPPY JOURNALISM

I am a subscriber to WIE and enjoy your many formats for news and dissemination of ideas. However, I have grown increasingly tired of what I find to be a strong heterosexist bent to your writing. All the hype about What the Bleep Do We Know!? without even a mention that the film is blatantly heterosexist (recall the dancing scene in the bar) seems to me to be sloppy journalism. But the coup de grace was in the latest issue, with the article by Barbara Marx Hubbard. She says that the sacred meaning of sexuality is "to reproduce the entities that are engaging in sex." Really? As a gay man who enjoys sex, that has never crossed my mind. She feels that recreational sex, or "co-creational sex," is a higher form of sexual expression. Gay people have been engaged in this since the beginning of time—why not mention that and help the heterosexual world to realize that it is possible to be a healthy, evolved homosexual?

Jonathan Dimmock

San Francisco, CA

MULLING IT OVER

I've been struggling to understand why Cohen and Wilber's "A Vow to Live Forever" has impacted me more deeply than any of their previous discussions. Somehow, this dialogue locates the mystery, precariously suspended between heaven and earth,

where neither the transcendent nor the embodied alone is sufficient. This is certainly a whole lot more demanding! Thank you.

Mo Riddiford

Berlin

HAVE YOUR CAKE & EAT IT TOO

After reading Cheri Huber's piece in "Pulpit," I feel impelled to respond to what I perceive as an incorrect teaching of renunciation and ego death as a requirement for enlightenment. The ego is not something to be dismantled and "put out of commission," as Huber asserts. It is an essential function of the human mind, without which we'd be more like vegetables than humans. The only thing that needs to be renounced is the identification with the ego.

Once you know on the deepest levels that you are not the ego, then you are free to enjoy everything without being attached to anything. I totally disagree with Huber's assertion that family, sex, and money need to be renounced within

some kind of "monastic structure" for a nonsuperficial pathway to enlightenment. The enlightened mind embraces everything and renounces nothing. Pleasure is everywhere, in the color, texture, and scent of flowers, in the infinite different tastes of food, in the natural sounds of nature and music, and in the warmth and fulfillment of nourishing relationships, sexual and otherwise. These things are to be enjoyed lest one live a sterile and flavorless life.

To me, it requires far more integration, courage, and skill to strive to achieve one's full potential on both spiritual and material planes, to fully embrace both humanness and holiness without sacrificing one for the other. When Huber says that she didn't have to "give up" family, sex, money, and ambition because she didn't want them in the first place, what she is really saying is that she doesn't want to live in the world. But why else did we come here?

Dr. Jack Ebner Seal Beach, CA

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WIE presents Peter Ragnar on Health

Does the Food You Eat Attract Disaster?

It was too gruesome to watch. Mary and Sally didn't. Frozen at their desks, arms locked, with ashen faces, they were devastated at the proposed experiment. The other students had mixed emotions. Some even callously giggled as our biology teacher decapitated the frog. Some screamed as the headless frog suddenly jumped into the throng of teenagers. I didn't realize what it was that made the frog flee from the source of danger. Well, first consider this discovery from cell biology about cultured cells in a petri dish. They will move away from any danger, such as a drop of toxin. They will also move toward any nurturing substance placed in the dish. All single-celled organisms must protect themselves. Likewise, they must also grow in order to live. The problem is, they can't do both at the same time.

What allows for the movement of these single-celled organisms? It is their proteins' electromagnetic charges that are responsible for their behavior. The same is true for plants and people. Cluster cells together and you get multicellular organisms with genes: plant genes, insect genes, worm genes, human genes, etc. Science has discovered that there is little difference between the total number of genes found in humans and those found in primitive organisms. In fact, we have the same number as a rodent! The new science of epigenetics has determined that a cell's intelligent behavior is a result not of genes but of signals received by receptor proteins on the surface of the cell's skin or membrane. These stimulate the cell to move by way of its effector proteins. The life of the cell is in its awareness. To evolve, it must grow. In order to grow, it must instantly act on the environmental signals it receives.

Likewise, with you and me, the more conscious our cells become of environmental signals, the faster we evolve. Just like the decapitated frog, we have a built-in biological system that seeks life. Unfortunately, we have instructed our receptor proteins to accept our eventual physical demise. Your taste buds are governed by your beliefs, and how long you choose to live is governed by what you put into your body.

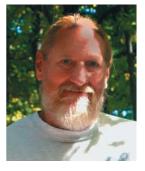
Your health is directly governed by the proportion of time that you spend in survival versus growth mode. The same is true for the foods you eat. Healthy plants have no need to protect themselves from pests and diseases. That means even organic pest control is not needed. Why? Because of the natural dissolved minerals that are found in plants' sucrose juice. Any pest willing to take a bite will fall off the plant like a drunk falling off a curb; the high level of sucrose is turned

into alcohol in the insect's system and kills it. The health of the plant is measured by the level of minerals and natural sugars, using what is called the "Brix" scale.

A refractometer is used to measure this by determining which direction a light beam goes in when plant juice is examined. If it goes to the right, it means the plant is healthy and growing—in its anabolic stage. If it goes to the left, it indicates a catabolic or destructive phase. Healthy foods, like healthy people, have healthy auras. That means the light combinations are right-spin, or life enhancing. Plant cells, just like human cells, seek life by their naturally programmed evolution. Healthy plants don't need poisons any more than healthy people need vaccinations.

If you consume food that is low on the Brix scale, you will throw your body into survival mode and you will be unable to grow. All non-organic commercially grown crops have low Brix readings; that's why chemicals must be used to suppress disease infestation. When you ingest these poisons, your immune system kicks into high gear and your vital organs begin shutting down in order to conserve energy needed for survival. This mechanism is referred to as the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal axis. Just like the single cell we first discussed, we are programmed for life. If threats come, in the form of food, storms, or war, no growth is possible. No growth—no health—no life!

Put a drop of poison in a petri dish and a cell will move away from it. Put a drop of poison in your body and all your cells will retreat. This is a retraction of your electromagnetic field, your aura. Just like a healthy plant's electromagnetic field, yours gives off measurable colors that determine sickness, health, life, and death. When do you think might be the best time to flee from danger—before or after you're decapitated?



Peter Ragnar is a natural life scientist, modern-day Taoist wizard, and self-master par excellence. A martial arts practitioner for over fifty years, he is renowned for his teachings on optimal health and longevity. He is the author of twenty books, including The Art and Science of Physical Invincibility.



To hear more about the life and philosophy of Peter Ragnar, go to wieunbound.org/ragnar

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The Only Solid Ground in the Universe

by Andrew Cohen

IN THE ALMOST TWENTY YEARS THAT I'VE BEEN A SPIRITUAL

teacher, I've learned an enormous amount about the nature of the human soul. Initially, this was not a subject I thought much about, nor did I have many preconceived beliefs or ideas about it. In fact, being a teacher of enlightenment, my early emphasis was on getting people to let go of and transcend any and all notions of self, including even most of the ideas we have about our souls. But gradually, I have come to understand and appreciate that the spiritual path is as much about the development of the soul as it is about the transcendence of the ego and conditioned mind. Indeed, these days I often wonder: Unless we have truly developed our own souls, are we ready or is it even appropriate for us to take that next step of transcending the mind? Unless we have developed our souls, will there be any solid ground from which to leap?

I've come to the conclusion that the most important reason to do spiritual practice is to develop the soul. A lot of us naïvely assume that our souls are fully developed, that our capacity for integrity, authenticity, transparency, conscience, goodness, and love is already there and just needs to be realized. But that's simply not true. The soul—which I'm defining as our capacity for these deeply positive human qualities—is something that, in most of us, desperately needs to be developed. Too many of us live in a fractured state, deeply divided against ourselves-often far more so than we are aware of or able to feel. We exist in a self-generated vacuum of moral ambiguity, where everything is relative and our attention is focused mainly on our emotional state. Most of us know a lot more about what really matters than we are willing to live up to. Indeed, we are attracted to that which is beautiful, profound, and meaningful but find ourselves lacking the soul strength to really struggle, to engage in a life-and-death wrestling match with our own division, cynicism, and inertia. The awful truth is that it is just easier for us not to care that much. In order to care that much, we have to be willing to feel a connection with life that is so deep that it hurts. We have to be ready to step onto the field of our own experience in a way that is authentic, unconditional, and deeply committed—to embrace a kind of fearless vulnerability where our transparency is our strength and the living experience of connection is permanent, unbroken, and inescapable.

The life-embracing capacity of the highly developed soul comes directly from the transformative spiritual experience of oneness, wholeness, and completeness. When the self has directly seen that its own deepest depths are absolutely full to overflowing, all existential doubt is extinguished and we are freed to embrace the life process without reservation. But even then, our conviction and our surrender will be tested, again and again and again. How much love do we have in our hearts, even when we are being challenged? How strong is our integrity, even at those times when it seems that the whole universe is conspiring to tempt us to compromise? How alone are we willing to stand in what we know to be true? Soul strength is spiritual strength. It is the ultimate source of dignity and self-respect. And it is exactly this position of unwavering conviction that we so desperately need to cultivate if we're going to change the very fabric of the emotional, psychological, philosophical, and spiritual field that we all share.

Nobody can do this for us. Others can lead by example, but we alone must develop our own souls. Interestingly, the aspiration to cultivate our capacity for integrity, authenticity, transparency, and conscience comes from the soul itself, the very part of ourselves that is crying out to be developed. The instant we surrender to the soul's demand, we will find access to the oneness, wholeness, and completeness that is the source of all spiritual strength. But that strength needs to be cultivated *daily*, never assumed or taken for granted. Spiritual practice, undertaken in earnest, gives access to that source, and that is why it is the ultimate reference point for the evolving soul in a deeply divided world.

Once we have found this source and have consciously said yes to the noble task of soul cultivation, there is no turning back. If, after saying yes, we do allow ourselves to hesitate and fall prey to the powerful forces of inertia and cynicism, we may not only lose faith in that source but also lose access to it. That is why it has been said that it is better never to begin on the spiritual path than to begin and give up before one has succeeded unequivocally. Once we have said yes, we must succeed, because we have seen with our own eyes, felt with our own heart, and recognized with our own mind what integrity, authenticity, transparency, and conscience truly are: the only solid ground in the universe.