

Chapter 1: In Search of Spirit

Ancestors, powerful spirits,

Who live amongst us:

Your tombs are the mountains,

Your waterfalls are the clouds: the plants are your jewels.

Sumatra Incantation

Have you wondered why a first toy given to an infant, is a rattle? Why are we, even as children fascinated by rocks and sea shells? What is it, about the camp fire that mesmerizes? What is it about the flute that charms? What is it about the beat of the drum and the continuous repetition of the mantra that lures our attention? What is stirred within? What primal memories are awakened? To what ancestral connections are we drawn? What dormant seeds are watered as we capture glimpses of animal shapes in the clouds that float overhead?

And when we are ten years old and pitch our tent in the backyard, or at the lake shore, are we remembering happier times, more communal times - more sacred times? Are the times in our modern tepee a recount of the events of other camps and of other fires?

Welcome on this journey to the sacred. Close your eyes for a moment as we begin the travel. Allow your soul to be fed by the lore of the Medicine Stories. Feel your connection to the Earth Mother. Reclaim the pride of your tribal role. Know that willingness to journey is the key to unlocking the shackles which bind the spirit. Break open the fetters. Let spirit soar. Let soul healing happen.

Spirit belongs to the Air Chief's Clan. Spirit rides the wind, and comes on the wind, taking the form of a cloud when there is a need to send a message to someone on the Good Red Road of physical life.

Recall the sacred stones. Remember their use in sacred ceremony and for healing purposes. Remember their whispered messages. Know that, like their shell relatives of the seas, they gladly share the history they hold with those who are versed in the sacred "language of the stones."¹

Remember the mantra, and the chant, and the rhythm of the dance. Recall the steady beat of the drum as it guides our journey to the world of spirit where we will receive guidance for healing. Its relentless rhythm will provide a constant reminder of the regular heart beat of the Earth Mother and will reinforce the profound and unremitting connection between the Earth, ourselves, and all of creation.

Allow the memories to rekindle. Permit every cell to resonate in joy as it refills with the beat of the drum, the call to reconnect in Oneness with the energy of Great Spirit.

Soul remembers. Soul longs to re-experience the wholeness of Sacred Union. We instinctively know that our feelings of brokenness result from being apart from this Oneness. We comprehend that the unending search to fill the desperate void is because we are unsure of how to reconnect with our spiritual essence. We have come to recognize "that the amber glow of the age of progress is not casting enough light on the path ahead."² Yet we spend years involved in activities to drown the sounds and blind the sights, effectively obliterating markers placed along our path to guide our journey inward.

For many, the catalyst creating the willingness to respond to soul's nagging comes only following the traumatic aftermath of a personal crisis. The painful sting of loss frequently initiates the need to reframe the view we hold of the world and of our place within it.

During such times, so deep are we in the depths of despair that we can barely grope along. We crave to feel the sun shining on our faces, and to experience the warmth of its glow, but we are unable to imagine how that could ever happen again, since we can barely remember what it once felt like.

We know the journey raises concerns related to our spiritual growth and development. Unsure of the path and fearing the terrain, often obscured by a veil of religious dogma and shrouded in a mask of cultural taboo, we struggle in our attempt to make the journey.

We need only examine past civilizations to comprehend that many road maps to guide our travels have been provided to human kind throughout history. Exploring ancient and sacred places such as Machu Picchu and Stonehenge can remind us that these places have been created by those who have already discovered what Robert Frost termed "the secret that sits in the center and knows."³ In their wisdom, these ancestors have left monumental markers for those who would follow behind.

One such ancient artifact is housed in a small unassuming monastery in Bangkok, Thailand. This powerful reminder of our own ability to unearth the sacred within came to light in 1957 when a small band of monks was asked to relocate in order that a freeway might be constructed through their property.

Their monastery housed a gigantic clay Buddha. As the crane lifted the huge structure, the clay began to crack. Fearing for the ancient treasure, the head monk ordered the equipment removed and the placement of a tarp-covering over the Buddha. Before retiring, he ventured into the rainy night to check the condition of the beloved treasure. To his amazement a gleam was reflected from the clay mound back to the light of his torch.

Beneath eight inches of chiseled-away cast-clay, the monks discovered a solid gold Buddha! The impressive creation stands eight and one-half feet tall, weighs two and one-half tons, and is said to be valued at over \$196 million.

Historians believe that, four centuries earlier, keepers of the Golden Buddha cast it with clay in an effort to prevent their treasure from being carried off by the invading Burmese. It would appear the monks were all killed, for their secret remained intact until that rainy night a few decades ago.

Gazing in awe at the Golden Buddha, one cannot help but reflect on the symbolism so aptly described by Jack Canfield.⁴ We are all like this clay Buddha, covered in a shell of hardness created out of fear and hurt.

For some, the clay has been forming even before birth. As we move through life, our layers thicken and harden, shielding us, we believe, from further hurt, but in actuality separating and isolating us from our connections to others and the world. And yet deeply buried underneath these many layers of hardened clay is our own “Golden Buddha,” “Golden Christ,” “Golden Essence,” which is our real self.⁵ Much like the monk with the hammer and chisel, our task now is to discover, once again, the brightness within.

In my doctoral study, and during the years of research and clinical practice that followed, I hungered to determine what constitutes spiritual well-being. While somewhat satisfied with the general findings, not until I marveled at the symbolism of the Buddha's clay covering, did I piece together a definition of spirituality which fit into the worldview that had been shaped by the knowing of my lived experience. For the first time I was able to define spirituality in a way that corresponded to this knowing. The Golden Buddha symbolized what I could now more fully comprehend.

Spirituality is often referred to as a journey. I knew my painful experience had forced me to retrace the steps of life numerous times and to trudge into new and unfamiliar terrain. It had been a long and arduous journey - one of searching and of longing - one that had taken me deep within the caverns of my soul. I knew Job. I had shared his lament. "If I cry out 'Injustice!' I am not heard. I cry for help but there is no redress. He has barred my way and I cannot pass; he has veiled my path in darkness; he has stripped me of my glory, and taken the diadem from my brow. He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone; my hope he has uprooted like a tree." ⁶

My pain constantly reminded me that I was not in charge and that I had placed my faith and trust in the wrong places and in the wrong things. Jesus, though far away for most of the journey, in his complete solidarity with me as a human being, was not spared my suffering. In the pit of despair, I learned as the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins had, "In a flash, at a trumpet crash, I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am." ⁷ And I choose to add "and 'is' what I am."

Eventually, like Jonah, ⁸I was spit back into life by the great fish. Although, like Arthur Frank in *At the Will of the Body*,⁹ I was “three days late, covered with slime and smelling like a fish,” I had found in the movement upward hope to live with integrity. I had learned the peace of solitary stillness. That is one fourth of the lesson. The second quarter of the lesson was to be with others. I learned to witness life’s suffering and to reach out. From the Talmud, ¹⁰ the Jewish book of wisdom, I learned that every blade of grass has an angel bending over it, whispering “grow.” Finally, from the Chinese holy book, the Tao Te Ching, ¹¹I learned to:

See the world as myself.
Have faith in the way things are.

Love the world as myself; for only then can I care for all things.

My journey to find healing enticed me to re-enter the halls of formal learning. I immersed myself in the numerous theories from various “-ologies.” The theories of psychology and sociology, anthropology, gerontology, thanatology and nursing gave me a language for my experience and helped immensely in the cognitive understanding of my grief. Unfortunately, and as every one who has ever experienced a traumatic life event knows, there are affective as well as cognitive responses to grief. My head and heart refused to work together. For my broken heart, I found no reprieve from the literature. I experienced immense vacillation. Just as my head felt comfortable with a solution I had obtained from one or another theory, my broken heart would cry out “and what about . . .?”

Most frightening was my awareness that the “-ologies” were void of any solutions for the tempest raging within my soul. For

the most part, the theories neglected to address the realness of the soul concerns which follow in the wake of trauma and result from the experience of loss.

While recognizing the immense cognitive and practical value of what I received in university education, the acknowledgment that the superficial content was unable to feed my ravenous soul drove me to hungrily research the root of each introduced notion and concept. Without conscious awareness, the investigation plunged me into a parallel process of seeking answers in the literature and practices of more ancient times. I was surprised, a number of years later, to discover that people referred to these ancient beginnings as “New Age” beliefs.

There is nothing new about New Age thought. What is referred to as New Age is far from new; it is ancient; it is primal. It is the knowing of the sacred and of the relationship between the sacred and healing, which was part of the lived experience of all, before the Age of Scientism.

I left the schools holding four degrees; none in theology (which is often described as the study of God). I have built instead a personal theology from an accumulation of one-quarter formal learning mingled with three-quarters lived experience. My theology pours forth from a discourse with God in which I dissected and debated every theory, every experience, every theological word and notion I had ever heard or believed in. Now, like Job, after three days in the slime and stink I choose to continue to view the vastness of the oceans, the skies and the land. I choose to continue to see the changing face of God. I do not want any longer to view the world through the eyes of modern-day “-ologies.” In their efforts to become scientific and researchable, each has designed parameters which dictate to

those who follow what is meaningful to observe, to measure and to describe. Observations that do not fit the measuring criteria are, therefore, easily rejected as being unreal. This has created a predetermined filtering system which places blinders over the eyes and muffs over the ears of those who belong. Placing a parameter around knowledge attainment blocks the very process of knowing. Knowing is expanding. To know is to grow in an evolutionary way. Just as a river never stops flowing until it reaches the ocean, so the evolutionary process in one's own life, and in the life of the collective, is a never-ending journey to know the ultimate - God.

During my time in the whale's belly, I opened the Pandora's Box of my belief system. The ghosts and the witches, the snakes and the bats stored within sprang to the surface for release. It took twelve years to gather the scatterings. I choose to no longer lid the container. I would rather let the dreads and fears flow through freely than to ever again force them down and seal them under. It is easier to trust when I can see first-hand what is coming and what is going, than to believe I must tuck away what is not nice to see, or hear or believe.

Our modern-day "-ologies" have made us "hide," and hiding makes us fearful. When we fear, we must control. We must control ourselves, others and the world around us. We must make very sure to shove down and blanket over anything which does not fall within the "normal" range as determined by our acceptable measuring instruments. But with each tucking, our need to control increases, for we dread what might escape should the lid be forced off.

I no longer choose fear. I choose to explore, to discover, and to know every possible path that can lead to the sacred. I want to

see the face of God in more and more shapes, in more and more places and in more and more practices.

My study of spirituality arose from a deep personal need to prevail until sunrise through the dark night of grief. I have wrestled with God. Oh, how I wrestled! I know the longing to receive the blessing dream as Jacob did.¹² I share with you the struggle, and I share with you the blessing.

My desperate need guided the focus of my graduate and doctorate work. The search to know healing took me far beyond the literature. It led to an understanding of practices developed in more ancient, perhaps more sacred, times. My bleeding wounds were bathed and bandaged in the ways of the indigenous peoples of North and South America, by the Kahuna healers of Hawaii, by the Chi and the Ki energy of China and Japan. I discovered in these methods an awareness of the sacredness often lacking in Western methods of health delivery. I studied at sacred sites in Europe, in Asia, in Peru, Venezuela and Mexico. I pondered the natural order, and I listened to the sacredness of the life's story being shared by those I journeyed beside.

My mind filled. My hands became skilled, my soul exploded.

The definitions and descriptions of spirit and soul, of spirituality and religion which follow, incorporate the knowledge I gained through these experiences, through course work, through the books I have read, the places I have visited, the people I have met, and the practices I have learned. Information incorporated has been gathered from Shamanism and from the religions of the East, which aided in discerning the truth concealed beneath the dogmas of Christianity, as well as from numerous sources

developed for connecting with Divine Guidance, including Mythology and Astrology. A knowing of energy fields and energy healing, and a belief in Hildegard of Bingen's ¹³ vision is included. In her visions, Bingen saw that consciousness is not contained within us, but that we reside within consciousness. Most importantly, my definition of spirituality includes a knowing of the Sacred Fire within.

I believe that spirituality can be defined as a triune journey to discover the three R's of life: remembering, relating and reconnecting.

The first journey is that of remembering. Spirituality is a journey of remembering who we really are. It is a journey of rediscovering, and of reclaiming our Golden Essence, our True Essence, our Divine Essence. It is remembering that the Spirit, the Life Energy that created all things also created us, continues to flow through us, is part of us. Our spirit, our life energy is a part of the Creative Energy, the Creative Force. The Fire of Creation burns deep within us. Our spirit, our life energy, is a part of the same life energy that penetrates all living things, even the burning core deep within the earth. We are a part of the Life Force of the Creator, and of all that has been created.

The symbol of the Golden Buddha reminds us that like the clay used to protect the true essence within, our heavy casting obstructs our radiance from shining forth, hindering others from seeing our Creative Fire. It likewise hinders us from detecting the gleam being reflected to us, from those around us. Happily, it takes only a few chinks, before a gleam can be picked up by the torch of another who might be trying desperately to find some light in the darkness.

Spirituality, then, is also a journey of relating. It is a journey deep within the cavern of clay, to discover there the Eternal Flame. The journey within becomes the catalyst for the journey without. Once the flame is fanned, the energy from the ever increasing brilliance penetrates and erodes the clay envelope. We become a beacon. We detect the gleam reflected from the luminescence of others. In our willingness to share the energy vibrations from our ever increasing fire, we come to be surrounded by those who are able to resonate in synchrony with us. Our ever increasing vibrations draw to us the ever increasing vibrations of the splendor that surrounds us.

Spirituality, then, is also a journey of reconnecting. It is the ever increasing awareness of the wonder and the expanse of the universe, an ever increasing attentiveness to the “awfulness” of the Sacred Fire in all of creation. Spirituality is realizing our place within the universe and our connection to the splendor, the might, the Godness in All, to know and honor that we are a part of the All.

Spirituality is a process. It is not a final product. Spirituality is an ever increasing awareness of the Sacred Presence within, within others, within all that has been created. It is the development of an ever escalating and deepening love relationship, an intimate bond with the Divine Energy that is within, and surrounding, and connecting All.

Spirituality is a journey that takes us deeper and deeper into our heart and into our mind. It is an infinite and circular process of expanding love and expanding consciousness. With each new lesson comes an increased capability for love. With each expression of love comes an increased capacity for learning and for understanding. The mastery of each lesson is the impetus for

propelling us deeper into further possibilities for love and for knowing love.

But like the clay covering on the Golden Buddha, our fear blanket can shroud us in darkness and block our process of knowing. Like moles, we can choose to trust the darkness of our encasement, and remain blind to the glow surrounding us. We can continue to hide in the darkness of our clay womb devising strategies to convince our soul the journey to light is not for us. We rationalize: "I have studied; I have learned; I have passed the exams; I have the answers. The experience does not fit my model, my image."

We have free will. The choice is always ours.

But if we are not ready to smash the idols we have created, we risk the possibility of retarding soul growth. Soul growth demands creation of new images which can support the acceptance of new knowledge as the journey unfolds.

*The Power that gives life to all things
and gives us of Itself that we may know It,
must not be taken for granted.
Fill my darkness, Light of Power,
Knowledge of the Unknowable.
I will worship You Light of Light
though I only see
one Glowing Spark
in the darkness of my soul.*

Margaret Joy Borle

