

The Ego and the Soul

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*“We are all visitors to this time and place. We are just passing through.
Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love, then we return home.”*

—Aboriginal saying

ABSTRACT SUMMARY:

A shift is occurring from the dominant Cartesian mechanistic model of health and healing toward the ageless wisdom of the paradigm of holism, where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. There is new common ground that is beginning to unite the fields of science and religion, or more aptly, science and spirituality under the premise of quantum physics and the concepts of light. Still the bridge across the abyss created over three hundred years ago is unstable. A common language and vernacular is still being created. Wisdom keepers speak of the three pillars of human spirituality that lead to a higher state of consciousness: relationships, values and a meaningful purpose in life. All of these aspects prove to be gateways or roadblocks on the spiritual path depending on the role of the ego. ‘Muscles of the soul,’ are those inherent inner resources to assist in dismantle the roadblocks before us. On the journey we call the spiritual path, there are many seasons the soul travels, similar to the earth’s own seasons: centering (fall), emptying (winter), grounding (spring) and connecting (summer). Explorations in the integration of spiritual well-being by those in the healing professions will certainly enhance and augment the transition in the shift of paradigms.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO HEALING

If you were to study the history of healing over the past ten thousand years, if you were to talk to the wisdom keepers of the world’s indigenous cultures, you would inevitably encounter the concept of *holism*, where the health of the human entity is comprised of the integration, balance, and harmony of one’s mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual components (1). In the construct of holism, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts and any attempt to separate, tease, or distill factors

from the whole negates a complete understanding of its entirety. In terms of health, what we refer to as the human condition must be looked at as a whole system, yet for the past three hundred years, the approach to health and healing has been very fragmented through the influences of reductionism, where specific aspects of the human entity (mind, body, and spirit) are separated, compartmentalized, and analyzed in search of proof of the mechanism involved. While there have been many great gains in the age of the mechanistic paradigm, the end result leaves the role of human spirituality completely out of the picture, particularly in terms of health and health care—to the detriment of patients and health care practitioners alike.

Why has the concept of human spirituality been neglected and ignored in virtually all aspects of Western society, including health and health care? Is there a cultural bias against human spirituality outside of religious practices? The answer appears to be an unequivocal yes! How did this happen? Enter René Descartes—scientist, philosopher and consummate Renaissance man who stated that for truth to become a scientific fact, observations must be made exclusively through the five senses and repeatedly measured for accuracy. So great has his influence been that Western science is built on the foundation of the Cartesian Principle of reductionism (2).

As scientific advances pushed our understanding of the world and technology advanced life expectancy (through vaccinations) and leisure (with cars, computers, etc.), a culture emerged where science began to eclipse if not replace various aspects of human spirituality. Matters of spirit and soul were left entirely to various religious organizations. Whenever concepts of spirituality manifested outside these circles, they were dismissed as nonsense because they couldn’t be proved scientifically. For

example, cases of spontaneous remission of cancerous tumors where the patients prayed for a miracle are often denied in the medical community because it doesn't fit into their paradigm of thought. But not all intellectuals trained in reductionism honor its premise.

In her memoir, *Reason to Hope*, renowned primatologist Jane Goodall writes, "I was taught as a scientist to think logically and empirically, rather than intuitively or spiritually. When I was at Cambridge University in the early 1960's most of the scientists and science students working in the Department of Zoology, so far as I could tell, were agnostic or even atheist. Fortunately, by the time I got to Cambridge I was twenty-seven years old and my beliefs had already been molded so that I was not influenced by these opinions. I believed in a spiritual power that, as a Christian, I called God,"(3).

New Common Ground Between Science and Religion

Interestingly enough, the abyss between science and religion is narrowing, and in some circles, the span is close enough to jump across. In a *Psychology Today* article titled *Desperately Seeking Spirituality*, it was reported that the American Association for the Advancement of Science conducted a symposium on religion and science in 1994—to a packed house. The article noted that this symposium was part of a much larger network of institutes sparking dialogue between science and religion (4). Seven years later, as the holistic paradigm takes root, countless conferences and symposia have been held attempting to unify what has been separated for the past three centuries and paradigms are shifting.

In the wake of scientific discoveries in the field of quantum physics, a bridge is forming to span the once humongous divide, and many people are quite excited about the connection being made. Common ground is being acknowledged, not ridiculed, between the disciplines of science and religion. However, in some cases, it is not science and religion that are forming an alliance, but science and spirituality. The common ground can best be described as an understanding of light (a term used in both camps) and energy, as described by Diarmuid Ó Murchú in his book *Quantum Theology*.

"Light has been the subject of intense scientific pursuit for the past few hundred years. The ancient Greeks considered light to be a form

of energy, but did not speculate about its essential nature. Newton, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, claimed that light consists of small, corpuscular bodies which travel in straight lines, and that within the light spectrum, sensation of color is determined by wavelength. This became the new tantalizing question that was finally resolved (not to Einstein's satisfaction) by quantum theory and its acknowledgment of the dual particle-wave nature of light. Light features dominantly in how people tend to describe their mystical experiences. Mystics, sages and philosophers of all ages and cultures have sought enlightenment, not just intellectual understanding or esoteric knowledge."(5)

A Language and Vernacular for Human Spirituality

How do you describe the indescribable? By all accounts the topic of human spirituality is difficult to articulate, in both general and specific terms. Perhaps it is safe to say that we as the human species—no matter what language is spoken, whether it is English, Arabic, Chinese, or Swahili, currently don't possess the vocabulary to give the concept of spirituality an adequate definition or description. Renowned philosopher, Aldous Huxley described human spirituality as the *perennial philosophy*; a transcendent or *divine reality* beyond the limitations of cultures, religions and egos (6). In recognition of the Western mind-body separation consciousness, the World Health Organization (WHO) made an attempt to place the spiritual dimension prominently on the health care map. Although this definition may itself appear inadequate, the significance of the statement cannot be denied. WHO defines human spirituality as *"That which is in total harmony with the perceptual and non-perceptual environment."* But the WHO didn't stop there. They went so far to say this as well: *"The existing definition of health should include the spiritual aspect and that health care should be in the hands of those individuals who are fully aware of and sympathetic to the spiritual dimension."*(7)

The results of the 2000 census indicate that America is no longer simply a Judeo-Christian country, with a growing percentage of naturalized citizens from Oriental and Arab cultures, Shintu and Islam respectively. As such, the language of human spirituality must be inclusive, not exclusive. Practitioners in the field of health and healing must learn to be

multilingual in their approach to re-integrate the spiritual aspect of healing to wellness. The reason for this is that because human spirituality is inclusive, not exclusive, experiential, not just theoretical. Like a mountain, a metaphor often used to describe the heights of the spiritual journey, everyone is coming at it from his or her own perspective.

In the paradigm of holistic healing, what is needed is an acceptable vocabulary from which to speak the language of human spirituality. Yet a vernacular in which to address the concept of spiritual well-being is not without its problems either, because at best human spirituality is ineffable. Moreover, our understanding of spirituality is often limited by the choice of words we use. Undoubtedly, spirituality includes the aspects of higher consciousness, transcendence, self-reliance, love, faith, enlightenment, community, self-actualization, compassion, forgiveness, a higher power, grace, and a multitude of other qualities. The recognition and acceptance of these words in terms of the nature of human spirituality *begins* to make this concept more tangible, even permissible to discuss in the health and healing process. Yet it should be remembered that no aspect alone is sufficient to describe the essence of human spirituality.

Looking back over time we see that in virtually every culture, spirit means breath, as in "*the breath of life*." Whether one uses the words *prana*, *Chi*, *holy spirit*, or *life force*, spirituality seems to clearly involve a unique aspect of energy. Because the concept of spirituality is so ineffable, we are simply left with the option to describe it through analogy, simile, metaphor and allegory, and this seems to be the real language of spirituality. Just because spirituality appears ineffable, it doesn't mean we should abandon efforts to acknowledge this essential aspect of the human condition. The consequences would be horrendous, as so often is depicted in our current health care system where patients at odds with their HMO's insist they are being treated in less than humane terms.

The Three Pillars of Human Spirituality

If you were to talk to the shamans, healers, sages, mystics and wisdom keepers of all times, of all ages, and all languages, and ask them what constitutes the core of human spirituality, unequivocally you would hear them say the same three things time and time again: relationships, values, and purpose in life—all leading one to a higher consciousness of the

divine. Even with the understanding that human spirituality is extremely difficult to articulate, relationships, values and purpose in life are understood to be the heart of what it's all about. Because of the interconnectedness to mind, body, spirit and emotions, any aspect of the human spirit affects all other components. Let's take a closer look at each.

Relationships:

One common theme among the various wisdom keepers speaks to the nature of relationships; that which we hold with ourselves and that which we create with each other. Through the wisdom of people like the Dalai Lama, Carl Jung, Rachel Naomi Remen, and Jesus of Nazareth, to name a few, we see how essential the concept of relationships is to our spiritual growth. This component of human spirituality has two aspects: internal (personal) and external (interpersonal) relationships.

An internal relationship regards how you relate to yourself, how you govern yourself, and how well you know yourself. The internal relationship involves a fair amount of habitual soul searching, through reflection, meditation or prayer. The internal relationship also involves keeping the ego in check. Most importantly, the aspect of an internal relationship involves a relationship with your Higher Self, (e.g., God, Jesus, Allah, or a Higher Power), whatever you conceive this to be. Some would even say the internal relationship is the integration of the self in conscious recognition with the Higher Self. At the heart of the internal relationship is the idea that we are whole, yet at the same time, we are a part of a much bigger whole. And while we may seem infinitesimally small in the scope of the universe, we are unequivocally essential to it.

External relationships are comprised of how we relate to everyone and everything outside ourselves. Friends and family come to mind as people involved with external relationships, but this also includes acquaintances and strangers. To go one step further, external relationships include how you relate to everything. In the Native American culture, it is said that "all life is relationship," not just our relationship with people, but our relationship with the trees, the water, the plants and animals, and Mother Earth herself. Similarly to this idea was Einstein's idea that everything is energy, interconnecting energy. So indeed, all life is relationship. Relationships are the core of the Golden Rule, to treat others as you would treat yourself. Simply stated, if we don't treat

ourselves with respect, honesty, integrity and love, how could we possibly do the same for others.

A Strong Personal Value System

Values are abstract ideas that we hold with great importance. Though intangible by nature, values are often symbolized in material form. For example, money is a symbol of wealth, a diploma is a symbol of education, and Caller-ID is a symbol of privacy. Though many people may not be able to list their values off the top of their head, they can certainly tell you what's important to them. Values have a very subtle yet powerful way of directing our lives, for we tend to gravitate toward those things we associate as being important. Likewise, our world seems to fall apart when values conflict or shift in importance. Each theory of human spirituality speaks to the nature of values; love, compassion, honesty, respect, or faith, because values constitute how we conduct our relationships.

We each hold a values system comprised of about six core values, such as love, honesty, freedom, or leisure and another ten to twelve supporting values, which support the core values, such as creativity, wealth, education or friendship. From month to month, year to year, our value system changes. Our hierarchy of values shifts, much like the earth's tectonic plates, with various values coming in and out of position of importance. Some values hold great spiritual significance, others may not. Values and relationships often go hand in hand. Typically people tend to associate with others who share similar values, giving them common ground to walk on. One's value system is also tightly integrated with a meaningful purpose in life.

A Meaningful Purpose in Life

Perhaps the two most important questions you can ever ask yourself are: "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" These two questions, ubiquitous in every culture, are the catalysts for profound thought. The question, "Why am I here?" speaks to the heart of finding a meaningful purpose in life, and while it may appear that the answer changes over time, there is an underlying purpose to everything we do as well. As a teenager, it may seem like the purpose in life is to have fun. Later on it may be to raise a family or care for family members. While all of these are valid reasons for living, philosophers speak of greater meaning in life such as learning to love.

Viktor Frankl, in his classic book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, speaks of a purposeful meaning as being the most important aspect on the spiritual journey. It was Frankl's observation from his time spent in a Nazi concentration camp that people who had found meaning in their lives found a reason to live through the horrors of the holocaust, whereas those who had lost meaning succumbed to death. It was Frankl's opinion that suffering arises when meaning seems to evaporate, yet we can always find a new meaning in life (8). In the words of Carl Jung, "As far as we can discern, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being."(9)

Stress and Human Spirituality

While stress and human spirituality may seem mutually exclusive, they are quite literally partners in the dance of life. Stress is an opportunity for spiritual growth, when we choose to learn from each situation. Carl Jung once said, "Every crisis is a spiritual crisis." He could have easily said, every stressor is a spiritual stressor.

Stressors come in all shapes and sizes, yet, every stressor, big or small, deals with relationships, values and/or a meaningful purpose in life, sometimes all three. The small stressors we can sidestep with little effort. The larger stressors, those which seem to be insurmountable roadblocks and obstacles, we tend to avoid. Yet big or small, roadblocks are actually part of the human journey. Every roadblock represents an issue begging for resolution. Each roadblock is meant to be dismantled, circumvented or transcended, not avoided. Spiritually speaking, issues and concerns are referred to as roadblocks, and they can appear quite formidable. Undeniably, our first reaction is to do an about-face when encountering events, situations, and people we find stressful. However, avoidance only perpetuates the stress, and ultimately leads to stagnation on the spiritual path. Roadblocks may not seem like they constitute a necessary step on the spiritual path, but in truth, they are an essential, if not critical component of the soul growth process. Each obstruction is deeply rooted in unresolved issues of anger (fight) or fear (flight). The progression of spiritual well-being is punctuated with roadblocks. The issues they represent should not be avoided, ignored or obsessed about indefinitely.

The human path is filled with wonderful vistas and breathtaking scenery and we are often

encouraged to stop and smell the roses along the way. But the human path also has its share of distractions. The Judeo-Christian culture calls these temptations. They are known in the eastern philosophy as 'desires of the heart.' Distractions begin as attractions, that which lures us through curiosity and they pulls us off the path—sometimes indefinitely. They have become our biggest health concerns today contributing to what is commonly called 'spiritual dormancy.' Fairy tales are filled with examples of distractions. Similarly, today's newspapers are really no different. Drug abuse, alcohol addiction, excessive television viewing, even other people (codependency) prove to be prime examples of that which pulls us off the path. Only recently have therapists and counselors become aware of the spiritual connection to the addictive process.

MUSCLES OF THE SOUL

Throughout my professional career, I have had the good fortune to meet several people who have been through hellacious life experiences. These people are not victims of their circumstances. They are the victors. In learning how they overcame their adversity, their answers are almost always the same: A sense of patience, a sense of humor, a sense of faith, compassion, forgiveness, humbleness, imagination and creativity, optimism and love. These are not gifts for a chosen few. They are birthrights for everyone. These inner resources are what Jung referred to as spiritual cures. I call these muscles of the soul because, like the muscles of our arms and legs, they will never disappear. However, like our physical muscles, they can certainly atrophy with disuse, making them weak, and potentially vulnerable in times of need. Without a doubt, the time of need is when we encounter roadblocks and obstructions on the human journey. It is these spiritual muscles of the soul that enable us to dismantle, deflate, circumnavigate or transcend the roadblocks and quite literally, "get on with our lives." (10)

Muscles of the soul are those intangible assets that we use to help us cope with stress gracefully. In times of stress, no matter how intense, it is these remarkable qualities that either individually or collectively help us to dismantle, remove, circumscribe, or transcend the barriers which befall our steps on the path of life. These inner resources comprise the sinews of our spiritual muscles and they are within each of us.

We are called upon regularly to exercise these spiritual muscles, and whether it is a malignant cancerous tumor or a hour-long traffic jam, we must learn to exercise these muscles frequently. We each have the potential to be spiritually healthy, because within each of us resides these muscles of the soul. However, potential that is not used is wasted. I use the term spiritual potential to describe the inherent power of these resources. I call spiritual health to describe the utilization of these spiritual muscles on a regular and frequent basis. Our spiritual potential, as expressed through humor, compassion, faith, forgiveness, courage, creativity and intuition are there for the asking. Spiritual health, the good race, is flexing these muscles and feeling the strength they provide when needed.

Considering the magnitude of our inner resources, our spiritual potential is awesome. The following is a brief highlight of the more common muscles of the soul.

Humor: A mental perception that makes us giggle and laugh. Humor isn't a mood, but it can promote a positive mood of happiness. Between parody and irony, between double entendres and slapstick humor, there are literally hundreds of things to make our lips curl and faces laugh. Mark Twain once said that humor is mankind's greatest blessing. There are many people who insist that a sense of humor is what truly saved their lives in times of stress.

Forgiveness: The capacity to pardon those who we feel have violated us, as well as the capacity to forgive ourselves for our mistakes and foibles. Forgiveness is not letting someone off the hook when we feel violated or victimized. Forgiveness is gift of compassion we give ourselves so that we can move on. If someone else benefits, great, but forgiveness isn't done for someone else. It is done for ourselves.

Curiosity: In the effort to learn, the soul has a wide streak of curiosity. Some may call this inquiring minds, while others call it information seeking. Either way, seeking options, answers and ideas to learn, makes life's journey more interesting.

Persistence: A persistent person is someone who doesn't take "no" for an answer until he or she has exhausted every conceivable option. There are variations on this theme. Some people stretch the meaning of persistence to what is now called aggressive, in-your-face tactics. The spiritual approach is one of being pleasantly persistent (not aggressive), like flowing water that ever so slowly softens the hardest rock.

Courage: The word courage comes to the English language via two French words, meaning big heart. Courage often brings to mind the idea of bravery and this is certainly a hallmark of courage. Perhaps courage is thought to be the opposite of fear, for it is courage that allows one to go forward, whereas fear holds one back. Courage is a brave heart.

Patience: The ability to wait and wait and wait till some sign is acknowledged that it is time to move on. Just as there is strength in motion, there is power in stillness. The Western culture is big on immediate gratification, the antithesis of patience. Impatience often leads to intolerance and anger. Patience quells an angry heart.

Optimism: Optimism is an inherent quality of being positive. This is not to say that every stressor is meant to be a Pollyanna moment. Rather it is seeing the best in a bad situation. A great definition of an optimist is someone who looks at a pessimist and sees hope.

Faith: Faith is one part optimism, one part love and two parts mystery. Faith is more than a belief that things will work out OK, it is an innate certainty that all will end well. Faith is an inherent knowing that we are part of a much bigger whole and that the whole has a loving divine nature to it.

Intuition: This muscle of the soul may not help you win lottery tickets, but it is useful in sensing good from bad, right from wrong, and up from down. Research delving into the lateralization of left and right brain hemispheres suggests that intuition is a right brain function. Intuition is an inherent knowing about something before the ego jumps in to confuse things. Premonitions, sudden insights, intuitive thoughts, inspiration and pure enlightenment are examples of how this level of consciousness surfaces in everyday use.

Compassion: To love without reciprocation, to care for someone or something without recognition or reward, this is compassion. Compassion is the ability to feel and express love when fear is an easier choice. This is compassion. Mother Teresa was compassion personified. You don't have to be a saint to feel compassion. Love is the fabric of our soul.

Integrity: When you meet someone of integrity, the first thought that comes to mind is honesty. While this is certainly the cornerstone of integrity, there is more. Integrity is honesty over time. It is a code of conduct with a pledge to the highest ideals in the lowest of times. Integrity literally means the integration of many muscles of the soul.

Humbleness: The ego begs to go first. The soul is content going last. Humbleness is a trait that is called upon when we are reminded to serve others. Humbleness is manifested in acts of politeness, yet it never undermines self-esteem. Humbleness is based on the Golden Rule, where you treat others as you would have them treat you. In a fast-paced world where rudeness prevails, acts of humbleness are so greatly appreciated.

Creativity: Creativity is two parts imagination, one part organization, one part inspiration, and one part perspiration. Creativity is not a right brain function, it is an inner resource that requires both hemispheres of the brain. Creativity starts with imagination and then makes the ideas happen. Creativity is the synthesis of imagination and ingenuity.

Acceptance: The receptive ability to see things as they are rather than as we wish them to be, to live in the present moment, and grow without resentment or animosity from past issues, circumstances or concerns.

Unconditional Love: To extend love and compassion from your heart without conditions or expectations is the hallmark of this muscle of the soul. There are some who say that humans are not capable of unconditional love, but just ask any mother of a new born baby and you will learn quite quickly that indeed we possess this attribute. Unconditional love is egoless.

I have noticed repeatedly in talking to these everyday heroes, that rarely do they tend to use just one 'muscle' in the face of stress. More often than not, they combine several attributes in an allied force to deal with whatever challenge they find in front of them.

SEASONS OF THE SOUL

If you were to listen to the wisdom keepers of all cultures over the millennia of human existence you would come to learn there is no one recipe for spiritual growth. Nor is there a specific ritual for spiritual evolution. In fact, the paths of human spirituality are as varied as the people on them. But what you would find in searching the wisdom of the ages are four processes, like seasons of the earth, which nurture the health of the human spirit; *centering*: a time of solitude to quiet the mind, lower the ego walls and tune into the voice of the higher Self; *emptying*: a time following the centering process to cleanse the mind and body by releasing old thoughts, perceptions, attitudes, stressful toxins etc. that occupy or obstruct one's attention, thus becoming a roadblock to one's

highest human potential; *grounding*: a time following the emptying process in which to access and cultivate one's powers of intuition, imagination, and intellect; and *connecting*: the time dedicated to responsibly share the insight, creativity, and compassion to enrich the lives of all members of our collective community (11).

These four processes, like the planetary seasons they represent; centering (autumn), emptying (winter), grounding (spring), and connecting (summer), are equally subtle and dynamic, challenging and uplifting; all of which provide a sense of balance to the soul's growth process. If you take a moment to revisit the three pillars of spiritual well-being: relationships, values and a meaningful purpose in life, you will see that these aspects are interwoven through the passages of each season. Lets take a closer look at each one.

Figure 1. **Seasons of the Soul**

Autumn = Centering (soul-searching)

Winter = Emptying (cleansing)

Spring = Grounding (intuition)

Summer = Connecting (celebrating)

Figure 1. There are four seasons of the soul, which nicely correspond to the earth's seasons. The seasons of the soul also progress in a cyclical pattern.

The Centering Process

The centering process is a time where we sit still and quiet the mind. The word 'center' means 'to enter the heart.' In doing so, we explore the vast landscape of the soul. In the centering process one sits still and initiates what is known the world over as the soul-searching process. It begins by simply sitting calmly in quiet contemplation. Like the shorter days of autumn which gently usher us indoors at an earlier hour, the centering process invites us to tune into our inner self by unplugging from the external world. For just as there is a world to discover through our five senses, there is a world, if not a whole universe, to explore within the realms of the human mind. Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu wrote these words in his philosophical teachings of Taoism: "*Be still and discover your center of peace. Through nature, the ten thousand things move along, but each returns to it's source. Returning to center is peace. Find Tao by returning to source.*" Spiritual teacher, Paramahansa Yogananda, gave the same message in these words: "*Calm the*

mind, that without distortion, it may mirror Omnipresence." From Psalms (46:10) comes the wisdom: "*Be still, and know that I am God.*"

The Emptying Process

Once the mind is quiet, it is time to start cleaning your house of non-essentials, and that is what the emptying process is all about. This process goes by many names (e.g., cleansing, emptying detaching, letting go, and releasing) all of which mean the same thing. These non-essentials (sometimes referred to as 'baggage') may be recognized as thoughts, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, memories, and feelings, that once useful, no longer serve the soul's growth process. In theory, the emptying process occurs as a way to make room for new insights, ideas, intuitive thoughts, or enlightenment, yet these can only come when there is room for them—space we typically are reluctant to make.

Of the four seasons of the soul, it is the emptying process which is the most painful and difficult to go through. The emptying process, which parallels the winter season, goes by several names, most notably the dark night of the soul and the winter of discontent. But just like the planetary seasons, winter never lasts forever, and with night comes the promise of a new day. The emptying process holds the promise that whatever is released will always, without exception, be replaced by something of equal or greater importance. At these times we must remember that nature, of which we are a part, provides us with many wonderful examples of our growth and balance on the human path: Winter is always followed by spring, the new moon is always followed by a full moon, and darkness is always followed by light.

The Grounding Process

If the emptying process is like plowing the field, then the grounding process is like planting and harvesting a new crop. In this case, it's reaping new ideas, insights, and intuitive thoughts to help you get from point A to point B on the next leg of your human journey. The grounding process is a time of revelation and resolution with regard to relationships, values (and value conflicts), and perhaps most importantly, it's discovery of a meaningful purpose in your life. In every culture since the dawn of humanity, there is an accepted occasion to seek the council of one's higher self, whether it be moments of solitude, periods of seclusion, or an organized retreat. Insights happen during the most unpredictable times: while washing

dishes, taking a shower, walking the dog, or lying awake late at night. One must constantly be receptive. Receptivity to divine insight is groomed, not just through stillness of your mind, but also through the cultivation and refinement of your thoughts, perceptions, and attitudes. And although the flow of consciousness cannot be forced, it can be enticed. We climb the metaphorical mountain to gain a better view of the world. To glean an insight, to peek into the heavens and see the light is akin to kissing the face of God. But the journey never ends on the top of a mountain. Eventually we must descend from the peak, all the while savoring the taste of exhilaration.

The Connecting Process

The connecting process is all about relationships; cultivating, nurturing and sustaining relationships. In the Native American culture there is an expression that goes like this: "All life is relationship." Our interactions with family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and even strangers is a small fraction of the elaborate network of universal life. We are continually in relationship with everything and everybody, even when we are unaware of this profound association (not just people, but the earth, water, air, trees, and animals, as well). Just as our interdependence on all humanity cannot be denied, neither can our inherent relationship to the natural world be ignored. The spirit of life flows freely through all things. We must do our best to continually nurture the bonds of connectivity, rather than let them atrophy with fear, apathy, or indifference. Connectedness through our divinity holds the promise of our human potential.

As we revolve through the seasons of the soul, the connecting process invites us to reemerge from solitude, isolation, or retreat and return to the fold of humanity. Like Moses who came down the mountain (the second time), we too must be willing to share the message, insight, wisdom, and fruits of creativity with all who wish to take part in community. In the spirit of the connecting process, our mission is to build bridges, not walls; to offer a hand in guidance, rather than turn our backs with indifference. In the true sense of connection, what we do for each other helps to uplift the spirits of all people. In reality, the connection between all people already exists, and the only request we are given, as we complete the grounding process, is to acknowledge, sustain, and honor this connection. Someday we may even discover with great clarity that the web of life reaches well beyond

the planet Earth, far into the galactic universe, and with it, the true importance of connectedness.

CONCLUSIONS

A shift in paradigms can prove to be a very exciting time as people in all walks of life begin to see the bigger picture of the alchemy between humanity and divinity, specifically the recognition and inherent power of the human spirit. The implications of this recognition as depicted through ageless wisdom suggest a new consciousness of health and healing.

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