

ACT 3

NAMASTE: A SELF DISCOVERY

“It is not moral absolutism but theological relativism we would do well to explore if our real need is for a
God with whom we can engage our lives”¹

The evolution of self-actualization philosophy and psychology did not end with Jung and Maslow. In many ways, it is in their philosophy and psychology where human potential became limitless. In the mid-20th Century self-actualization was named, and in the 60's and 70's it became more than an end in itself. Psychologists and philosophers of the age were awed by the enormous potential they saw in the human spirit, and self-actualization became only the first major step on what could well become an eternal journey toward the fulfillment of human potential. Psychologies based on the belief in the innately resourceful, resilient and creative individual and their relative truth began to emerge in the mid-20th Century. Existential, humanist, client centered, narrative, analytical, contemplative, and transpersonal psychologies acknowledged the incredible capacity of the human spirit to 'heal', grow and author its 'Self'. For most of these evolving psychologies, the personal belief systems and values of their clients became the 'therapeutic' road map, and for most the search for self-authority took a decidedly 'inward arc'. Some began to acknowledge and examine the spiritual grounding of human nature and to facilitate the spiritual health of its clients. Others took note and began to integrate their client's 'self-relevant' spiritual belief system into treatment. This advance was precipitated by the co-evolution of our philosophy, psychology, religion and spirituality which culminated in the emergence of, or resulted in, the subjective, relative individualism of our postmodern age. In the 20th Century, while its scientists were discovering eternity and infinity in our Universe, the

¹ Mailer, 2005.

Western world turned its search for meaning inward where it also discovered eternity and infinity within the human soul.

Adam Blatner (1997) suggests the postmodern era began in the late 1960's as a challenge to the rationalist approach to truth and the scientific and spiritual authorities of the day (p. 477). These authorities, including religious and political, were increasingly questioned and resisted. With the arrival of the 'hippie' and rise of the baby boomer generation, the 60's and 70's were in fact quite revolutionary.

Hergenhahn (2001) clarifies that postmodernism did not arrive from out of nowhere. Its roots go all the way back to the ancient Greek philosophers. "What postmodernism shares with the sophists, sceptics, romantics, existentialists, and humanistic psychologists is the belief that "truth is always relative to cultural, group, or personal perspectives" (p. 579). He says that this "...theme of questioning the existence of universal truth that began in ancient philosophy was reborn in romantic and existential philosophy and has been perpetuated in contemporary philosophy by [...] humanistic psychology" (p. 579).

Blatner (1997) says postmodernism questions "...the objectivist view, offering instead a subjectivist and relativist perspective. Its roots lie in an observation over a hundred years ago by the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche that all knowledge is perspective" (p. 476). Although Nietzsche is a useful starting point, the postmodern era, in my mind, is an extension of the 'enlightenment' that began centuries ago with Immanuel Kant's challenge for us to use our own minds and trust in our own experiences and judgements. The seeds of postmodernism are obvious in Kant's 'Sapere Aude!', and in Søren Kierkegaard's 'truth is subjectivity'. In fact, since Kant, the history of postmodern and self-actualization philosophies are virtually synonymous. The postmodern era is perhaps the inevitable result of the enlightenment, which was a breaking free from external authority, and the turning toward the 'Self' as the ultimate authority.

We also find the seeds of postmodernism in the parallel history of our religion and spirituality, from fertile Egyptian, Greek and Roman polytheism and its countless isotopes (or ‘archetypes’) of individuality, through the Dark Ages of orthodox Christianity to the Protestant Reformation and the beginning of the fracturing of Christianity. Later, Kierkegaard encouraged us to find freedom in a personal relationship with God. Then Nietzsche encouraged us to let go of God altogether, to become god-like, higher humans capable of determining our own values. And with William James we saw the emergence of a subjective transcendent spirituality that bears little resemblance to the God of Abraham. Eventually, with Jung and analytical psychology, and some cross fertilization from Eastern philosophies, we began to look to an internal, transcendent source of inspiration and creativity. In this spiritual and self-actualizing history we see the inevitable turning inward of the search for meaning and/or god. It was in this inward search where we discovered the authority and significance of the ‘Self’.

This turning inward, or ‘inward arc’ as Frances Vaughan (1986) names it, began with Freud’s introspective psychology and ultimately evolved from the depth psychology of Carl Jung. It is in the combination of Jung’s psychology, philosophy, and ‘religion’ that we see the seeds of Abraham Maslow’s postmodern ‘trans-self’, or ‘higher-self’ actualization psychology and the Western world’s postmodern new age philosophy and spirituality.

It is no coincidence, in my mind, that psychology became a social science in its own right in the 20th Century. Otto Rank (1930/1998), a once loyal disciple of Freud, surmised that:

Psychoanalysis arrived to save the human soul in a materialistic era sick with self-consciousness and threatened by loss of belief in immortality and in its public expression, religion. Its greatness resides in having done this in the mind-set of our era, not simply symbolizing the soul esoterically or concretizing it socially as in the past, but attempting to demonstrate it scientifically.

Psychology and psychotherapy also required a 'self' to analyze, and it wasn't until the late 19th Century that this 'self' freed itself enough from the culture in which it was embedded and for which it was created. Self-actualization required the breaking free from traditional authority and this breaking free required the awareness of the source of demands upon us and the awareness of 'self' within these demands, and ultimately the discovery and development of this 'self' and the 'self' authority that comes with it.

Self-actualization requires personal freedom and the Western world did not begin in any meaningful way to question traditional religious, political and scientific authority, encouraged so vehemently by Kant and Nietzsche, until the mid-20th century. The environment that was required to foster self-actualization simply did not exist before then. Until then, self-actualization was experienced by the few who had the extraordinary strength and wisdom to identify and overcome their cultural programming.

Ira Progoff (1956/1973) explains that, after Freud, the study of the unconscious steadily deepened as the investigations of his disciples and former disciples "...led them to a realization of the fundamentally spiritual nature of man" (p. 261):

They were led to an experience of the spiritual core of man's being, to the seed of personality that unfolds psychologically in each person and yet is always more than psychological. They came, in other words, to the metaphysical foundation of life that underlies psychology; and since each one experienced it in a personal way, each gave it a different name. Freud spoke of it as the superego accepting the ego, a characteristically intellectual way to describe a basic cosmic experience. Adler called it "social feeling," and through it he gained a profound and intimate connection to life. Jung referred to it as the "individuation" of the "Self", an abstract phrase to describe his effort to experience the cosmos psychologically by means of symbols. And Rank studied it as "the will to immortality," which meant to him man's inherent need to live

in the light of eternity. Each of these terms involved a psychological experience, and each of them referred ultimately to a contact with a larger realm of reality in which man's psychological nature transcends itself. Individually, Freud, Adler, Jung, and Rank came to this culminating insight, and the totality of their experiences form the foundations of the new psychology. (p. 262)

At the foundation of this new depth psychology, as Proffoff named it, is the aim "...to carry out its psychological work on the unconscious levels of the personality in such a way as to open the dormant potentialities of the spirit and permit them to emerge and unfold" (pp. 264-265). Proffoff believes this new psychology "...holds the greatest promise of leading the modern man along the road of science to an experience of the meaning and the spiritual authenticity of his inner life" (p. 265).

It is apt that the leaping off point to the new age psychologies is an extension and expansion of Maslow's process of self-actualization. Third force humanistic-existential psychology, with its subjective 'self' focus arrived in the postmodern age, as did the internalization of god, and the birth of 'new-age' spirituality and philosophy. It is also at this time that we find the roots of western civilization's new-age psychology and spirituality entangled in the philosophy, spirituality and psychology of Carl Jung. It is in Carl Jung's depth psychology where we see the self-actualizing teleological 'higher self' transcend to a higher state of consciousness, and the 'Self', or 'ego' transcendence, becomes the highest order need, beyond self-actualization.

Carl Jung's 'higher self' is just one of a number of terms coined by other psychologists and philosophers to describe a higher order inner source of guidance. For Psychologist Ken Wilber, this self is the 'centaur', whose objective is to lead us toward the ultimate 'Atman' state of consciousness. To Francis Vaughan (1986) it is the 'transpersonal self', for DeCicco & Stroink (2007) it is the 'metapersonal self', for the new-age Christian it is the 'Christ-Self', for the Buddhist it is the 'the Buddha within', or the 'little Buddha', for the Coaches Training Institute it

is the 'Captain' or the 'Future Self', and for some of the more grounded of us, it is simply the 'Best Self'.

It is important first to understand the true significance of the teleology of the 'Self' in Jung's psychology, and its significant contribution to the birth of new-age self-actualization psychologies. For Jung, cultural symbols or myths trigger the 'energy of the processes of life' that surges over and ignites the innate archetypal templates. The culturally energized archetypes then direct us to our purpose and passion in life. Jung believes that the 'energy of the processes of life' supplies the energy for the unfoldment of the organism, while the archetypes channelize its growth and give it meaning" (Progoff, 1956/1973, p. 179). It is as if "...the course and purpose latent in the life of the species as a whole was present in the embryo of the individual at its inception..." (p. 173).

Before the archetypes are differentiated, however, Progoff explains that there exists a *proto-image* (p. 179). This *proto-image* is the 'Self', which is both the goal that draws human development forward and the "...ultimate achievement when the goal is reached" (p. 180). It is the 'Self' itself that draws itself forward toward its higher self. "The Self is thus both the raw material and the guiding purpose, the source and culmination of human life and of all psychological endeavour" (p. 181).

For Jung, a cultural symbol is absolutely essential to ignite this 'Self' attaining, individuation process. For Western civilization, a primary cultural symbol that ignited and guided us toward our 'higher self' was the Christ. Progoff clarifies that the symbol of Christ, and its various manifestations, expressed "...the many aspects of the basic messianic experience, the salvation of the personality" (1956/1973, p. 183). He then explains that "...as the traditional symbols lose their power in modern western civilization, it is difficult indeed to find a symbol that still succeeds in expressing the profundity and magnitude of the Self" (p. 184). We are hence "...thrown back on the Self itself as the foundational fact of our being" (p. 184). The

conception of 'Self' has thus become a replacement symbol for us. It is a channel through which we can experience our larger nature, "...and it is in this sense that Jung raises the possibility that the conception of the Self may turn out to be itself the symbol for the "new age" that western civilization is so earnestly awaiting' (p. 184). Jung's 'prophecy' of such a symbol did in fact transpire in the 'higher self' and it became one of the major roots of new age philosophies and psychologies.

For Jung, as "...a psychological term, the Self represents the infinite depth and magnitude of human personality" (Progoff, 1956/1973, p. 187). The Self is

...a symbol that represents the nature of man at the point where man is more than a merely psychological being, at the point where man touches the cosmos, or begins to perceive, at least, that such a transpersonal contact is possible. There are many archetypal symbols that reflect this cosmic sense of the human being, but the Self is the quintessence, the archetype, of all of these. (pp. 184-185)

The Christ symbol is of course not yet dead for all of us. However, as Jung and Nietzsche fear, a literal interpretation of Christianity will kill it as surely as the myths of Zeus and Aphrodite have faded with the Ancient Greeks. Jung was deeply concerned about the effects of the impending loss of Western civilization's Christian faith. In the materialistic, scientific, technological world of the early 20th Century, he clearly recognized the "...danger that a mythology understood too literally, and as taught by the Church, will suddenly be repudiated lock, stock and barrel..." (Jung, 1958, p. 38). To save this 'mythology', he implored that it for once be understood symbolically (p. 38). He was concerned that most literal interpretations of Christianity tend "...to rob it of its mysterious relation to the inner man" (Jung, in Storr, 1983, p. 258). Jung (1958) states that:

...unlike other religions, Christianity holds at its core a symbol which has for its content the individual way of life of a man, the Son of Man, and that it even regards

this individuation process as the incarnation and revelation of God himself. Hence the development of the self acquires a significance whose full implications have hardly begun to be appreciated, because too much attention to externals blocks the way to immediate inner experience. (pp. 47-48)

Jung (1958) believed that in order to maintain the flow of "...instinctive dynamism into our life...", or in other words, the 'energy of the processes of life', it was imperative that we remould our archetypal Christian forms "... into ideas which are adequate to the challenge of the present" (p. 70). For Jung, this was "...absolutely necessary for our existence..." (p. 70), and this required, in his mind, an internal representation of Christ.

Author Tom Harpur (2004) believes:

...that no literal, historical son of God was ever sent to earth to transfigure and transform each of us by some remote magic and thus save us from the evolutionary task of transfiguring ourselves. Human beings will never really be successfully oriented toward this task until they realize that within their own minds and bodies dwells the divine power that is to be raised up and glorified in us. (p. 187)

Philosopher Alvin Kuhn, in Harpur, says that within us "...there slumbers the unawakened energy of a divine nature." (p. 193). For Bishop and author John Shelby Spong (1992), "Jesus is the point in the human enterprise where [...] the divine and the human flow together perfectly" (p. 243). Jesus is a call to life, and provides courage to be ourselves—our best, deepest, and holiest self" (p. 243).

Elaine Pagels (1979) explains that "Realizing the essential self, the divine within, the gnostic laughed in joy at being released from external constraints to celebrate his identification with the divine being" (p. 144). In opposition to an external Christ, the Gnostics celebrated the greatness of human nature, because, "Humanity itself, in its primordial being, was disclosed to

be the “God over all.”” (p. 144). Unfortunately, this Gnostic early interpretation of Christianity did not hold sway and most of their writings were destroyed and were not included in the Bible.

A primary fundamentalist Christian ritual is the Baptism. Through this ritual a converted Christian is reborn. They receive the Holy Spirit, which, from that point forward, will provide guidance and strength to enable them to follow the Christian path. Although it is unfortunate that people need a ritual to convince themselves of the existence of something that is already there, it is clear that at the root of Christianity is the belief that God is within. One of its most important rituals is a symbolic internalization of God, and yet orthodox Christians stubbornly focus on an external, impersonal representation. It is odd that in the end it is quite likely true that we did invent our gods, for the simple reason that we could not love ourselves enough to recognize our own divinity.

Progoff says that man may seek transcendence in the heavens, “...but if he finds it, it is because a mystery of life has revealed itself to him out of the depths of the Self” (p. 186).

As new-age Christians recognized, or re-discovered the ‘Christ Self’ within, new-age philosophers and psychologists were engaged with the task of further developing Jung’s concept of the higher self and its transcendence.

Like the Buddhists, transpersonal psychologist Ken Wilber (1980) defines and labels certain levels of consciousness that we must evolve through, via a series of deaths and rebirths, before reaching the ultimate stage of unity and oneness. “From the outset, the soul intuitively this Atman-nature, and seeks, from the start, to *actualize* it as a reality and not just an enfolded potential” (Wilber, p. 100). This over-mind, which Wilber says many would consider ‘God’, “...is not God as an *ontological* other, set apart from the cosmos, from humans, and from creation at large. Rather it is God as an Archetypal summit of one’s own Consciousness” (p. 69).

A more modest level of self-actualization is Wilber’s ‘centaur’ which more closely resembles Jung’s higher self. Wilber defines his ‘centaur’ as “...the integrated and total self”,

which is the ‘existential level’ of human development (pp. 46-47). This new and higher self arrives at a certain stage in life, when “...all the egoic drives wind down and go flat in their appeal” (p. 146). Wilber says that at this stage “...the soul is naturally drawn into a reflection on life, on self, on being—and the problem of *meaning* and *self-actualization* tends inexorably to emerge” (pp. 146-147). This ‘self’ has an Eros that drives it toward self-actualization, but it also has a Thanatos that drives it “to reflect on and acknowledge death...” (p. 147). It is the “...first self-sense strong enough to openly face and confront death” (p. 147). The purpose of this ‘self’ “is to *create a self strong enough to die...*” (pp. 147-148), and thereby transcend itself up and through higher order selves, until it expands beyond ‘self’ into a sense of oneness, or wholeness, or ‘common-unity’ with all that is.

According to Frances Vaughan (1986) the “...transpersonal self, or Self [...] is a self-sense that transcends the egoic and existential identifications”(p. 39). Vaughan explains that the “...transpersonal Self is discovered by turning inward, sometimes in the practice of meditation or contemplation” (p. 40). Although Vaughan insists that transpersonal “...does not deny the validity or importance of individual uniqueness” (p. 39), the transpersonal Self can be “...described as holistic and ecological, recognizing the interrelatedness of all phenomena. As an integrated harmonious whole, it defends no boundaries and sees no separate parts” (p. 42).

DeCicco & Stroink (2007) have developed the term ‘metapersonal self construal’ to describe the type of person that “...construes the information about a relationship between the self and others as one that includes all things, all life, all of creation...” (p. 84). These individuals refer to “...an essence beyond the individual and others to a universal focus (e.g., I am connected to all of humankind, I am part of a natural order)” (p. 84). Elaborating further, DeCicco and Stroink say the “...metapersonal self-construal is a self reference that focuses on the universal and not on a deity or a religious doctrine” (p. 94). If metapersonal individuals, did “...hold a notion of God, this God would be encompassed within them and not outside of the self” (p. 96).

Reiterating Maslow, Paul Cunningham (2007) says that the transpersonal ‘orientation’ supports the self-actualizing assertion that “every being comes into existence with inner ideals and values that seek fulfillment and with impulses to fulfil or actualize these ideals” (p. 42). Cunningham clarifies that this “inner directedness toward ultimate or ideal states of health, self-expression, and value-fulfillment is considered to be “instinctoid”—innate, natural, and biologically necessary in order to achieve physical health and growth and psychological vitality, peace, and joy” (p. 42).

It is obvious that some of the roots of new age philosophies and psychologies are grounded in Eastern philosophy. Lama Surya Das (2001) believes basic goodness is our true nature and this Buddha-nature is “...our highest, wisest self” (p. 1). Das says the “Buddhist heart is alive and well in all of us is” (p. 1). Much like Jung’s higher self and process of individuation, Das explains that this highest, wisest self, or little Buddha, is a radiant innate jewel that:

...represents what we aspire toward as well as who we truly *are*. These two aspects—a developmental, growth-oriented, “higher educational” side and the innate, timeless, immanent side—are like two sides of a single hand. It is a helping hand as well as a hand that is complete in itself. (p. 1)

I believe that at first this ‘immanent self’ drives us to ‘self’ identify. Self-identification, separate from our mother, is a necessary pre-requisite for entering and surviving in the human ‘social’ world. Assisted and fed mostly by the culture we are born into, we first build a self-separate ‘ego’. In our early formative years we become our ‘selves’ unconsciously. But as we approach our teens, we start to create our ‘selves’ more deliberately and consciously. We try on different personality traits, different gender identities (some lists on the non-binary scale include as many as 70 different terms to describe gender identity), we go shopping, we try things on, and over time we build and wear a stable and unique personality. This creative process can continue throughout our lives, but our culture also places significant value on ‘self’ confidence and individuality, so once we’ve created an acceptable and sufficiently unique personality, many of

us tend to remain somewhat fixed. Once developed, this self-confident unique identity is almost impossible to let go. Social forces are so strong, in fact, that the survival of the ego becomes synonymous with the survival of the person wearing the 'ego'. If anyone has seen the reaction a woman has when she shows up to a party wearing the same dress as a good friend, you would understand what I mean by the compulsive almost irrational modern drive to become and be acknowledged as a unique individual. Interestingly, the expansion of gender is quickly becoming a major mode through which we can be seen as unique – and the proliferation of 'gender identity' beyond the traditional binary scale, is a natural result of this modern drive. What it means to be 'male' or 'female' and 'masculine' or 'feminine' will soon become undefinable. People in fact love to 'identify' themselves. They look to the traits of their astrological signs, they take personality tests like the Myers Briggs Personality Profile, the Essential Enneagram, and Gallup's StrengthsFinder and they search for identity in the archetypes of Caroline Myss' Anatomy of the Spirit. And when their identity is revealed, they react in glee: "That's me!" A confirmation that seems almost desperate, and clinging, like they're holding onto a life jacket, in opposition to some overwhelming fear of non-existence.

Nevertheless, life has a tendency to throw things at us that challenge our beliefs and identity. Through the living of life, suffering and loss, and with assistance from our immanent 'self', we die and we grow. We acquire compassion and empathy for others, and our 'self' sense expands to include others. Falling in love, for instance, can be seen as both a death of self and an expansion of it. For some, this expansion grows to include a reverence for all life, and for the more enlightened, 'self' awareness and connection expands to universal significance – toward a common-unity that was always already there. Contemplative practices may facilitate this process, but I believe it is a natural human tendency.

Transpersonal psychology emerged in a humanistic age where all external authority was questioned and where truth became relative to the individual. The search for authority naturally turned inward and philosophical and/or spiritual belief systems became 'self-authored'.

However, the religion of science also emerged at the same time and because of its enormous value to capitalist economies, it rose to authoritative prominence. Under its sway, if something could not be measured in a laboratory by the five ‘recognized’ senses, it did not exist. Anecdotal ‘self’ reports, the foundation of depth psychology, became suspect, and in an environment where the domain of psychology is both science and art, the ‘scientist’ began to dominate. Once declared the ‘fourth force’, transpersonal psychology was almost excommunicated from the profession. Nevertheless, outside of the therapist’s office, new age philosophies and spiritualities began to thrive. And although the religions of science and capitalism have emerged as major threats to ‘self-authority’, ‘personal freedom’ remains a fundamental tenet in the search for meaning (in opposition to consumerism and science).

Although transpersonal psychology has not yet taken hold in mainstream psychology, it still hovers around the edges and its tendrils can be seen in many of the tools used in current therapies. The psychological profession was stretched, almost beyond its breaking point, but it snapped back with some positive residual effects. Most modern psychologies acknowledge the self-relevant spiritual belief systems of their clients, and integrate these beliefs into therapeutic solutions. Some psychologies integrated mindfulness as a therapeutic tool. Behaviour Therapy, for example, once thought of as the anathema to depth psychology, has evolved quite significantly since the days of B.F. Skinner, and one of the evolutions led to Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT). In Corsini & Wedding, G. Terrence Wilson says that mindfulness training is a “distinctive and seminal therapeutic strategy” in DBT (p. 226). DBT was at first developed for treating borderline personality disorder. Acceptance and mindfulness “are now being applied to the treatment of a wide range of clinical problems, including anxiety disorders, depression, and eating disorders” (p. 227).

For the modern psychologist, self-actualization for their clients remains a primary goal. They acknowledge the incredible potential residing within each of us. For some, self-actualization may mean transcending to the ‘Atman’ state of consciousness or ‘common-unity’,

but for most others, aspirations are more grounded. Self-actualization means believing and trusting in our 'selves', defining our values, discovering our purpose and our passion, acting consistently with our values and becoming our authentic best 'Self'.

Many modern psychologists and therapists encourage their clients to explore mindfulness based therapy outside of the therapist's office. These include, among others, meditation, yoga, and mindfulness based art and cognitive therapy. The most researched practices are "yogic transcendental meditation and Buddhist mindfulness or *vipassana* ("clear seeing") meditation, also known as insight meditation" (Corsini & Wedding, p. 438). Walsh says, "Originally practiced as primarily for attaining religious and spiritual goals, they are now increasingly used in secular settings for their psychological and psychosomatic benefits" (p. 438).

Through contemplative practices, according to Walsh, "we can train and develop the mind and thereby enhance well-being and psychological capacities significantly" (p. 438). Some of these exceptional capacities include "heightened concentration, compassion, insight and joy" (p. 439). He further elaborates that this "...mental training allows us to recognize that we suffer from a case of mistaken identity. We recognize that the self-image, self-concept, or "ego" that we usually assume to be our "self" is an image or concept only, and that our real nature is something deeper and far more remarkable" (p. 439). "The self-concept and its boundaries are then increasingly recognized as constructed rather than given, fluid rather than rigid, and capable of considerable expansion"(p. 449).

Contemplative practices "enable us to recognize the 'self's' "inherent interconnection with others and with all life, and thereby finds inherent meaning and purpose in this larger identity" (Walsh, in Corsini & Wedding, p. 444). Different contemplative traditions label this larger identify "as Mind, original Mind, Spirit, Self, Atman, Buddha nature, and Tao mind" (p. 450). Other terms one might use include 'the Sacred', 'the 'Divine, 'Gaia', 'the Mystery', 'the Universe', a 'common-unity', and/or the universe as "the complete spatio-temporal logic of the self".

Many are beginning to take note of the higher capacities that can be developed from contemplative practices. These include the maturation of love “to become unconditional, unwavering, and all-encompassing”, and the expansion of cognitive function to “vision logic” or “network logic,” which sees interconnections between groups of ideas simultaneously” (p. 452). Other capacities include the “ability to detect fleeting facial expressions of emotion (ever more effectively than the previous top scorers, CIA agents)” (p. 468), and an increase in the empathic capacity to respond with compassion in the presence of suffering. “Motivation becomes directed to selfless service, and wisdom is “developed through sustained reflection on existential issues such as death and the causes of happiness and suffering” (p. 452).

Although contemplative practices are useful tools to use on one’s path to ‘higher-self-actualization’, I believe the ‘immanent’ self helps us find the ‘best’ path and remain upon it. In my personal experience, and with the benefit of hindsight, when a path forked before me, the choice I made was most certainly influenced by my immanent self (in the past I perceived this to be an external God). In my earlier years I was not necessarily conscious of the influence, but as I aged the subtle nudges and insights became more obvious. And, at a few key turning points, the subtle nudges became outright screams. Sometimes, when we choose not to listen, our immanent self will let us walk down a path where we get clobbered over the head by a sledge hammer; and sufficiently chastised, we move back to the path we should have chosen in the first place. If we listen, the immanent self will guide us down the path that we need to follow in order to become our highest achievable self. For most of us, this is not an easy path to follow. Sometimes we move forward on this path when space is created for us through the personal experience of suffering, loss and death. Life is the great teacher. And sometimes we move forward when we open our minds to new knowledge, other points of view, and the wisdom of our natural world.

Although I have facilitated my personal growth through several contemplative practices, meditation was not one of them. It never interested me. Nevertheless, meditation is considered to be a primary contemplative practice. For most of us in the Western world, however, achieving

the ultimate state of Nirvana or Atman is an impractical and meaningless pipe dream. If anyone actually reaches this state, they aren't sitting next to us in our offices or working alongside us in a factory. I acknowledge that there are practical therapeutic benefits to meditation, and for many it is their path to enlightenment and/or 'higher-self-actualization'. But meditation is only one method. I also have to admit that I am uncomfortable using the term 'transpersonal'. It implies a 'transcendence' that I believe is not possible or practical (except perhaps for fleeting moments between meals) for the vast majority of us who are grounded in this reality. I prefer to use 'higher-self-actualization' as the term to describe the process whereby we become our highest achievable self, while we still eat, sleep, work and live in this world. Discovering and acknowledging that we are 'one' with the universe and becoming 'one' with the universe are altogether separate things. Separate 'self' identity is necessary to live.

With the benefit of hindsight, I can see that I have naturally been drawn to several contemplative practices that have assisted me on my life's journey. These include: prayer, listening to dreams, writing, visualization, doodling, perception shifting through the use of metaphor and analogy, writing to one's self, walking and or running in the woods, canoeing down a river, gardening, sitting on a bench in a park, or gazing up at the night sky, usually while pondering life's mysteries.

For me, one of the more powerful self-actualizing contemplative practices is the act of writing. I learned this first through reading and working through Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way* and the *Right to Write*. In similar fashion, depth psychologist Ira Progoff created a journal workshop, through which he taught participants to use writing "...to access the power of the unconscious and evoke creative ability" (cover). Progoff explains that as "...an individual works in the continuity of the *Intensive Journal* process, the past experiences of his life gradually fit into place—times of exultation and times of despair, moments of hope and anger, crises and crossroads, partial failures and successes". Over a period of time, the events and relationships of our life begin "to show us what they were *for*, what their purpose was in our lives, and what they

wish to tell us for the future. Thus we gradually discover that our life has been going somewhere, however blind we have been to its direction and however unhelpful to it we ourselves may have been. [...] It is the inner continuity of our lives” (p. 14).

The spiritual autobiography is a similar and useful tool that helps individuals look at their lives from a ‘larger’ perspective, and to see it in light of its whole, rather than its parts, and to also re-write your story from differing, more meaningful perspectives. Seeing your life as a series of stepping stones on a journey that appears to be going somewhere can be quite ‘enlightening’; the realization that your life has been unfolding as if by design is profoundly comforting. A narrative that demonstrates how one fits into the bigger picture and how you can impact this larger story can have meaningful benefits. It demonstrates how we are all part of something much larger than ourselves and gives us a sense of continuity, wholeness and immortality.

Narrative therapies acknowledge and confirm the therapeutic benefits that derive from telling and/or writing our own stories:

We use stories constantly – to inform, to connect with others, to share our feelings and experiences, and even to sort out our own thoughts and feelings. Stories are used to organize our thoughts, find meaning and purpose, and establish our sense of identity in this confusing and sometimes lonely world. Narrative therapy capitalizes on our storytelling tendencies to provide us with opportunities for growth and development, ways to find meaning, and a pathway to a better understanding of ourselves. (Positive Psychology Program, 2017).

Visualization is also a very effective tool to help us access the wisdom within. The Coaches Training Institute, for example, uses visualization techniques to help clients identify their life purpose and their inner source of wisdom, which they happen to label the ‘Captain’, or ‘Future Self’. Once you’ve identified your Captain, it becomes a simple matter of asking them for direction, and listening for their answer. Before I discovered this practice sometimes, as I

prepared to begin writing poetry, I had learned to deliberately visualize (or invoke) a scene with me and 'the young man with old man eyes' (who first appeared to me in a dream) floating down a river in a canoe.

Perception shifting is another tool I learned to use through the Coaches Training Institute. It's a rather simple technique, whereby you deliberately change your focus or perception by introducing a random image, object or thought, and then thinking about your 'problem' from that new perspective. For example, asking a simple, somewhat non-sensical, random question, like: "What does that mean to you from the colour blue?" can result in amazingly creative solutions. I suspect that Tarot and its colourful and creative symbols and images similarly invokes a creative connection via metaphor and analogy.

Contemplation while immersing one's self in nature also has profound effects. Perhaps the synchronizing of personal and natural energies is the major catalyst here, but I also think the suppression of ego in light of the greater cosmos might also play a major role.

Perhaps a bit worrisome for today's psychologists and psychotherapists, self-development and self-actualization is no longer held within the confines of their offices. From out of the mists of Freud, Jung, Adler and Rank have emerged community based twelve step programs (including Alcoholics Anonymous), mindfulness based cognitive and art therapies and workshops, yoga and meditation classes, training in Chi Gong and Tai Chi, and energetic healing practices such as Reiki. Personal Best seminars and coach training programs designed to awaken the participants to their own power and authenticity have also emerged, directly competing with professional counselling in the business of facilitating an individual's search for meaning.

It is perhaps dangerous to tread in the areas where identity is formed and/or constructed, unconsciously at first, and then reformed and reconstructed by a more authentic higher 'self', without professional support and guidance, but this is a new reality that must be recognized. The discovery of the higher self within, is where god and self-actualization have merged. The power

within is where it's at, and the expression of this power is as unique as the individual from which it springs.

In today's world of comic books, science fiction, fantasy, and fairy tale, the Apollo and Dionysus, the Persephone and Aphrodite, the Zeus and the Poseidon, the Ra and the Horus, the Christ and the Holy Mary, and the Holy Trinity have transformed into Cinderella and her Fairy Godmother, Rapunzel and Rumpelstiltskin, the magical Mary Poppins, Thor, the Incredible Hulk, Wonder Woman and Superman, Spiderman and Wolverine, Yoda and the 'Force', Spock and the 'mind meld', Dead Pool and Black Panther, Phoenix and Magneto, Raven and Rogue, the indestructible "Cheerleader" and the time travelling Hiro, Batman and Aqua-man, and Daredevil, Luke Cage, Jessica Jones, and the Iron Fist. These are the new archetypes for a postmodern age; every day heroes with their own values, and their own 'power'; vigilantes who fight for justice that transcends the authority of corporations, governments, mafia, and a hegemonic culture that is protected by its police. Today, our young are not going to Church. They are finding meaning and 'self' authority in television shows and movies such as Heroes, Game of Thrones, the Avengers, Justice League and the Defenders. Marvel and DC Comics come to life for them in 3D blockbuster movies. The gods who were once all powerful, external and infinite are dead and we have become our own 'self' authored gods; the independent human vigilante superheroes, complete with our own foibles and flaws, desires and drives, and as unique as the DNA from which we evolve. And some of us are beginning to realize this is not simply our imagination.

I believe each of us has our own path to our higher selves. Otto Rank believed that the individual "has personal creative powers" (p. 148). And, as is everything in the postmodern era, higher-self-actualizing and personal 'super human' experiences are subjective and relative. My experience of the higher-self-actualizing process is as unique as I am. As I mentioned before, mediation never interested me, and I therefore considered self-transcendence as something for others with infinitely more patience than I to experience. I would rather watch endless repeats of

‘Grey’s Anatomy’, and to be honest, I don’t know what I would do with my ‘Self’ if I ever reached the Atman state contemplated by Wilber. Confirming my suspicions and exacerbating my unease about meditation, Tibetan lamas, according to Das, say that when we practice the sitting around trying not to think, “mind-wiping” kind of meditation, “...we run the risk of being reborn as cows...” (p. 13).

Paul Cunningham (2007), someone I would label a postmodern trans-personalist, and to whom I am quite sympathetic, says:

Setting up unnecessary and arbitrary divisions between portions of the self, we are told to get rid of the egotistically-oriented portions of our personality with all of the impulses and desires that direct our behavior in the world in favor of some idealized, detached, disinterested, desireless, egoless state of being located at the top of some remote and practically unreachable rung in the Great Chain of Being. (p. 50)

Although this is a very pragmatic perspective, I do believe there is an ‘awareness’ that exists beyond EGO. Deep meditative, contemplative practices will confirm this. This awareness may not be the higher self – the higher self could simply be a chip off the old block, so to speak. Or, like a desk top computer or a lap top, we are a separate entity that is connected to this larger ‘awareness’ through some sort of wifi like network. This connection is quite nebulous and it takes a lot of training to plug into it at will, and when we do it is usually a fleeting connection that phases in and out, much like a bad wifi connection. Nevertheless, access is possible, and the best connection we can find may be via the higher self. This awareness speaks to us more clearly when we enter the egoless ‘void’, as most meditation practitioners will confirm. But its primary tool of communication is our intuition and inspiration – mostly emerging from our ‘sub-conscious’, but more deliberately and consciously through practice and development of this inner ‘sense’. Although this perspective has a spiritual flavouring to it, it may no longer be beyond the reach of science. In a bio-centric paradigm, this awareness that exists beyond ego may be the ‘one who observes’.

True to our postmodern age, Stanislav Groff (2008), says, “Spirituality involves a special kind of relationship between the individual and the cosmos and is, in its essence, a personal and private affair” (p. 50).

Although in the 19th Century, Kierkegaard surmised that ‘truth is subjectivity’, the Gnostics knew this many centuries before our postmodern age. The solitude of the gnostics, says Pagels, derives from their “...insistence on the primacy of immediate experience. No one else can tell another which way to go, what to do, how to act. The gnostic could not accept on faith what others said, except as a provisional measure, until one found one’s own path”, and discovered “...their own immediate relationship with “the truth itself.”” (p. 145).

Psychological and spiritual growth is an extremely personal experience, and each of us has a unique path toward it. My personal and spiritual growth occurred through the practice of writing and through nurturing a connection with nature. I have two minds, when it comes to acknowledging the higher-self-development of human potential. One is rational and cognitive, and the other is feeling and sensing. Kant’s rational path to enlightenment and Kierkegaard’s ‘feeling’ for truth come to mind here. I used to think that through development of my capacity to reason, I could determine what right action was. I still believe this is partially possible, but now I lean towards the development of my capacity to ‘feel’ or ‘sense’ to determine what right action is.

On the cognitive side, although I am not absolutely certain, I think there exists a meta-cognitive ability (Blatner, 1997) that enables one to integrate large amounts of information—something akin to the ‘absent professor’ state of mind Einstein was known to exist in for very long periods of time. I like to think, and it is through thinking and writing where I find what I call the ‘Zone’ most often. It is when I read much on a subject and then put pen to paper that I have what I consider to be most of my epiphanies.

I feel closest to ‘god’, whatever he, she or it is, and most energized when I write deeply, in either a cognitive or a poetic sense. I like to write poetry and this is when insights and ideas

appear as if by magic on the page in front of me, without much thinking involved. Sometimes the insights appear to be random, but not always. In many ways it is as if my unconscious mind is trying to get my attention. This source of unconscious 'intelligence' amazes me, and it could very well be my 'higher self'. Writing to your 'self', I have discovered, is a very useful tool for accessing the wisdom within. This invoking of what might very well be the 'higher self' can be quite invigorating, and 'awe' inspiring.

Over the last twelve years, and perhaps a bit more dramatically in the last few, I have become more aware in an intuitive sense. I am more conscious of how I 'feel' the world. When I gaze at the stars on a crisp summer night, for example, I feel a connection. Just as I feel a connection when I am camping and canoeing. I believe this could be related to Carl Jung's synchronicity, and the interconnection between the internal and external forms of the 'energy of the processes of life'. More strongly of late, I feel the connection when a bug's life is extinguished on my windshield; although resisting the urge to cry seems to get easier as time goes by. Letting mosquitoes feed rather than swatting them is another strange behaviour I have adopted. My Dad has accused me of being a Hindu. My friends and family think I'm loony. Perhaps I am. I didn't always have this reverence for life, and it surprises me, but I do know it started when I first connected with nature and started writing. It is when I began writing that I became passionate about life, and it is also when I began to feel a passion for all forms of life.

It is through the 'energetic' effects of deep writing, I believe, that I acquired a profound, sometimes overwhelming empathy for all life. Bringing new meaning to Kant's categorical imperative, I would say that the empathic transpersonal, meta-personal self is enchained by his or her own compassion. 'Do unto others' is no longer a law, but a reality that exists within our inborn 'higher selves'. True empathy means we cannot hurt others, for we feel it as surely as if we had hurt ourselves. Transpersonal philosophy, for me, verifies the innateness of Kant's categorical imperative, although likely not in the way he envisioned.

While putting the finishing touches on this opus, I re-read Walsh's assertion that contemplative practices can result in the development of an "ability to detect fleeting facial expressions of emotion (ever more effectively than the previous top scorers, CIA agents)". This rattled around in my head for quite some time. I had a deaf brother. Unfortunately, my siblings and I did not learn sign language. We learned to communicate with our brother through facial expressions and exaggerated body language – and some 'signs' that he managed to teach us. He was three years older than me, and he was also quite violent. Sometimes, when we played together, something in him would snap, and a friendly wrestling match would turn into a fight for my survival. Reading his facial expressions and anticipating his behaviour became a necessary skill. I became very good at it. So good in fact that it became unconscious. I have only recently acknowledged the significant advantage this skill has given me in my career. What comes out of people's mouths is not always what they are thinking, and when it is what they are thinking, it is rarely what they mean. I easily detect when something coming out of a person's mouth is not consistent with their thoughts. This creates quite a bit of confusion. Sometimes, I will inadvertently initiate an argument (fight) because of what I think someone meant, rather than what they said. This happened often with my partner. Eventually, I would explain my anger by saying "You said....", and he will inevitably say "I did not say...." Then I will say, "I read it all over your face", and then I would lose the argument, because what he did say was completely innocuous.

Psychoanalysts and philosophers Jacques Laçan and Julia Kristeva might suggest that I found my higher self in the gaps between words. As I learned in an Athabasca University course on gender and sexuality, according to Laçan, when we learn language we enter the symbolic order (culture), and once we arrive, the way back to the 'Real' is forever blocked to us, except through insanity or death. Laçan and Kristeva believe the *jouissance* of the 'Real', perhaps a bit like Jung's 'energy of the processes of life', can leak out through the gaps between poetic words or ambiguous language.

Julia Kristeva also suggests that the safe space created between the analyst and analysand during the process of psychoanalysis might also be a natural space of creative self-development. Kristeva defines it as the place of transference, a place of love where self-transformation occurs. Kristeva, in Moi (1986), sees “...psychoanalytical discourse as a discourse of love (as opposed to desire), one that situates itself in the space previously filled by religion” (p. 238). It is in this imaginary space of love that the self begins the process of construction. It is also the place to which psychoanalysts take their clients to find themselves, and rebuild themselves anew. Within this space of safety, like Wilber’s ‘centaur’, we are strong enough to face our death and rebirth. It is in this space I believe, where we can get closest to the source of energy that feeds this highly creative process—whether we name it our Dionysian Spirit, the libido, *élan vital*, the energy of the processes of life, or *jouissance*.

Perhaps this is the same ‘self-creative’ space that we all have access to, although via a number of unique pathways, be it meditation, writing, meta-cognition, yoga, music, art, Qi Gong, Tai Chi, psychoanalysis or any other creative method available to us. What else would this ‘God spot’ be but a space of safety and love where we are first created and then if we find our way back, where we can be re-created and transformed.

Cunningham (2007) believes that:

Individuals can choose among courses of action precisely because they are uniquely suited to sense what course of action will lead to their own probable development and fulfillment. In the creative field of probable actions and events, there is always more than one way to discover the vital reality of one’s impulses toward ideal states and become acquainted with those deeply creative aspects of one’s own being. (p. 43)

I believe that the key to becoming acquainted with the ‘deeply creative aspects of one’s own being’ is through the discovery and pursuit of one’s ‘passion’. When we emerge ourselves in our greatest passion we ignite the core of our being and it is the creative energy at this core that feeds the ‘higher-self-actualization’ process. It connects us to our ‘higher-self’ and its wisdom, and it

significantly enhances our creative capacity. Those who follow their passion are immersed in a creative energy that fosters the development of remarkable creative talent. The development of 'trans-personal' capacity and development of creative talent are almost synonymous. The highest achievable 'self' is attained by following your passion. This highest achievable 'self' may be the greatest pianist in the world, or he may be the best yo-yo player imaginable. She may be the writer who can put hugely complex ideas together in her head and write them down in some logical and understandable fashion. She may be a mentally disadvantaged middle-aged woman who makes people smile because she inherently knows that that is why she is here. He is the boy who speaks backwards, who will one day be the greatest comic book writer in history. She is the scientist who can think very very deeply and discover the answer to unanswerable questions. He becomes one of the greatest theoretical physicists in the world while living with [amyotrophic lateral sclerosis](#) for 56 years. He is the greatest cook in the world who shares his gift with his family. She is the fastest swimmer in the world, until next year. Then that other girl will be the fastest swimmer until the year after that, and so on, and so on, and so on. He is the horse whisperer. She is that amazing writer who shares her wisdom through workshops and helps us discover 'the artist's way'. He is the artist that finds unique ways to paint pieces of people together. She is the world's greatest accountant who understands international accounting standards like no other. He is the 'dragon ball king'. And he may just be the best daddy ever.

For many of us, especially those with a passion of the contemplative sort, immersion in this creative space has noteworthy side-effects. We acquire a sense of connection to something greater than ourselves, we acquire a reverence and compassion for all life, and our intuitive capacity amplifies.

Trans-personal 'ability' is not some magical mystical ability that only some of us can achieve. We all have this ability – it is inherent. Transpersonal experiences and behaviour, says Cunningham, may simply be the expansion and extension of normal creativity (2007, p. 45).

Each of us has our own path to 'higher-self-actualization'. That path is yours and you are on it when you are following your passion.

I have learned that the social science of psychology can provide credibility to a new age faith that gives hope and purpose to many in the Western world. Through 20th Century psychology an essential new-age spirituality was born. We find new-age psychology, philosophy and spirituality in Gary Zukav's *Seat of the Soul*, Caroline Myss' *Sacred Contracts*, James Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy*, Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way*, Joseph Campbell's *Myths to Live By*, and in Eckhart Tolle's *A New Earth*. Although sometimes fad-like, these new-age authors, and many others, provide us with an opportunity to find the 'shoe that fits', to find the faith and the path that is true to our highest self. Through this new-age psychology, philosophy and spirituality, we may have actually avoided the 'profound sense of dislocation' that Nietzsche feared with the death of our orthodox Christian God.

This new-age spirituality was born in Kierkegaard's freedom in a personal relationship with God, Nietzsche's perspectivism and James' transcendental pragmatism. Nietzsche helped us re-discover our 'Dionysian Spirit', then Jung transformed this 'spirit' into the 'energy of the processes of life' and Lacan into the 'jouissance' of the 'Real'. Nietzsche saw relevance in a god for everyone, and Jung saw god in everyone. Many of the prominent modern day psychologists recognise the innate, instinctual self-actualizing drive that resides at the core of our being. We can label this drive whatever we want, depending on our 'Weltanschauung', but Jung believes that anybody can at least draw close to the source of 'religious', transpersonal experiences, regardless of whether they believe in god or not. It doesn't matter what we call it, this innate drive or power exists within each and every one of us.

Many modern psychologies and philosophies acknowledge "the mind's innate drive toward growth" (Walsh, in Corsini & Wedding, p. 442). Walsh explains that both contemplative and existential psychologies "urge us to recognize rather than deny our existential condition and then to face it as fearlessly and defenselessly as we can. Only in this way can we escape the

conventional slumber of our herd mentality, go beyond unthinking conformity, and live more fully and authentically” (p. 443).

It is within the depths of self where I found meaning. Perhaps, like me, we in the West needed to face the death of the orthodox Christian God first, before we could accept the god within. It is the teachings of our philosophers and psychologists that have added credence to my belief in a teleological force that resides within the depths of our hearts. I found god in the Real of Lacan, the void, his ‘jouissance’ and petite objet ‘a’. I found god in Freud’s personal father of individual pre-history and Kristeva’s ‘imaginary father’, and the holding space of transference. I found god in Kristeva’s semiotic and the gaps between words. I found god in death and rebirth, in Wilber’s Thanatos and Eros. I found god in Jung and the archetypes, the ‘energy of the processes of life’, synchronicity and the teleological Self. I found god in Kierkegaard’s personal freedom, Freud’s libido, Bergson’s élan vital, Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’, and Rank’s ‘will to immortality’. I found god in the self-actualization of Maslow, and in transpersonal Buddhism. And, I re-discovered God in Christianity. As a result of wrestling with our gods through the last 2800 years, give or take, I believe we have stepped ever closer to a conscious awakening of the ‘god’ within.

Through my self-actualizing search for god, I found my passion, my purpose, and my ‘self’. Postmodern relativism, subjectivism and individualism is an incredible creative force, and with postmodern and trans-personal philosophies we learn that the only real authority is one’s authority within and over ‘self’. Akin to Nietzsche, postmodern philosopher Michel Foucault, in Richters (1988), “...wants us to create ourselves as a work of art...” (p. 627). If we discover our passion, if we plug ourselves in, we can become all that we can be. When we ‘plug in’ the energy and our innately immanent self drives us toward self-actualization. When we ‘plug in’ to our ‘higher self’ we become who we are. The power within is where it’s at.

The possibilities of the creative expression of our individual will are limitless. Our potential is limitless. And, if the universe is as big as we think it is, and if we are as big as the mystics say we are, or as big as bio-centrism implies, we are limitless.

Over the last several years I have regularly attended Southminster-Steinhauer United Church in south Edmonton. Although it falls under the Christian umbrella, it is an affirming congregation that accepts all persons, regardless of gender identity, sexual preference, and religious or spiritual belief. It also accepts the agnostic and atheist. By accepting all, this 'centre' of community nullifies the debates that might occur between 'opposing' individual beliefs, and focusses on our common humanity. Through acceptance and a decidedly humanistic approach to life, this 'centre' and its 'ministers' have successfully united a diverse community under common values: the sanctity of nature, justice, compassion and acceptance. In this 'centre', god has become 'the sacred', 'the divine' and or 'the great mystery'. Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and atheist humanism are welcomed with open arms. Literal interpretations of our myths are transformed into symbolic meaning for living in today's world. This 'centre' invokes a sense of awe and wonder in all of creation. It is not a place of answers, it is a safe space for questions. They support an individual search for meaning, but also encourage active engagement in community in the interest of justice and compassion.

A few years ago I became a Certified Professional Co-active Coach. The Coaches Training Institute teaches its coaches that its clients are "naturally creative resourceful and whole". Although coaching is not counselling, this method of coaching is most certainly founded on the belief that the individual has the authority, strength and ability to become their best selves. It is humanistic, while also accepting the mysterious knowing that leaks out of their clients through intuitive insight; a 'leaking' that is encouraged by the identification of life purpose, 'third level awareness', a higher self, and the 'magical' use of analogy and metaphor.

It is through centres such as Southminster-Steinhauer United Church, and the Coaches Training Institute that the rubber hits the road. Their purpose is to help us discover our own

meaning and purpose and to act passionately, consciously and compassionately to transform the world.

There is a much grander purpose to the advent of contemplative, narrative, new-age and higher-self philosophies, practices and psychologies, than the simple evolution of a relevant belief system within which each of us can become. It is the discovery of meaning. It is the acknowledgement of our innate 'common-unity' and divinity, that we are our in fact our own gods. It confirms that there is something truly magical at the core of our being. And it is the discovery of this core that confirms the universal significance of the singularity of self.

Whoever deeply searches out the truth
And will not be deceived by paths untrue,
Shall turn unto himself his inward gaze,
Shall bring his wandering thoughts in circle home
And teach his heart that what it seeks abroad
It holds in its own treasure chests within. (Boethius, 524/2001, p. 113)

Purpose

Whether you're an idealist, realist, rationalist, pragmatist, humanist, existentialist, creationist, atheist, agnostic or some sort of odd combination of any and all of these, our purpose – the reason for our existence – is to become our best possible selves. To become our best selves we need to discover our creative purpose – a purpose or **THE** purpose that ignites our passion, gives us meaning, and drives us through life. Blossoming from this is the conviction that we have the ability to create the future. It is a belief that all is not destined to be, but that all is waiting for us to imagine and decide what it will be.

At the foundation of my belief system is the personal conviction that all life has a creative purpose. We are here to create. It is through creativity that we live in the light of eternity. When we create our hearts zing, our toes tingle, our loins fill with blood, and our minds explode with possibility.

My greatest hope is that *The Awe of Being* will ignite this light within you, and that you will cherish the knowing that you are an innately creative being – a magical radiant jewel – and within you lays an incredible immensity of creative potential. Joseph Campbell (Morong, 1994) says, “Attaining the joy of being a creative, spiritually fulfilled person is probably the best thing we can do for ourselves” (p. 6).

Through creative writing I have learned there is much to life that cannot be explained and there is much I have yet to learn. In the end, my search for knowledge and truth has not led me to the God I was looking for. However, with the ‘energy of the processes of life’ and the energetic synchronization of consciousness and reality, I have discovered something just as intriguing, perhaps even more so and potentially more relevant in an infinite and eternal universe.

I am who I am, and so I will continue to explore strange and awe fueled ideas. As physicists and astrophysicists wrestle with the whacky progeny of quantum theory, like entanglement, string theory, dark energy and biocentrism, I will think deeply about their ideas, then I’ll put pen to page and I’ll see what happens.

The expression of our purpose has profound and infinite possibilities. I believe we actually have the power to create the universe in which we choose to live. I am amazed at the amount of consensus philosophers have achieved on this point:

- Famous French philosopher Michel Foucault, believes we can create ourselves.

Annemiek Richters says “Foucault’s modernity ‘does not “liberate man in his being”; it compels him to face the task of producing himself” (p. 617).

- Das, from a discussion on Karma, says Buddhism “teaches that no matter when Karma is created it can be changed, worked with, expiated, purified, and transformed. That means our destiny is in our own hands” (p. 18).
- William James believes that “Our judgments at any rate change the character of *future* reality by the acts to which they lead.”(p. 223) He also says that pragmatism favours the idea “that the world’s salvation is possible and that we should endeavour to secure it” (p. xxi).
- Appelbaum and Thompson say that Nietzsche believed “that one should be able to say ‘yes’ to life, just as it is, and to accept it, even if it were to repeat itself over indefinitely. [...] In all this, Nietzsche challenged humankind to go beyond itself, to always be looking to achieve something more. [...] Nietzsche’s philosophy is presented as a challenge to follow one’s highest aspirations, to go beyond what has been done before, to move from man to ‘over-man, to a higher form of humanity” (p. 93).
- Philosopher Henry Margenau quotes sociologist-historians O.W. Markley and Willis W. Hartman *Changing Images of Man*: “Human potentiality is limitless. All knowledge, power and awareness are ultimately accessible to one’s consciousness” (p. 135).

Creating a universe may seem insurmountable, but we have an eternity to do so. Eternity is a very long time. All it will take is simple, purposeful action, each and every day, one day at a time. Astronomers estimate that five billion years from now we’ll be meeting up with the Andromeda Galaxy. Just imagine all of the things we could do then.

When I was very young, perhaps about four years old, I looked out at the evening sky and noticed the moon for the first time. I ran to my mother and asked, “What is that?” “It’s the moon”, she responded. I followed up, “Why is it there?” She smiled and said, “Because why.” It became a familiar response to many of my questions. I later learned at church that the moon was there because God put it there. Nonetheless, I later learned that the moon was there because, a

few billion years ago, a Mars sized planet crashed into Earth, melting the earth's crust and throwing a good portion of the crust and remnants of the Mars sized planet into orbit around the Earth. That was a good answer. Later still I learned about the Earth, the tilt of its axis and its climates. Then I recently learned that the revolutions of the moon around the earth are at such an angle that it maintains the earth's tilt at the 23.5 or so degrees to its axis. AHA! I said to myself. The moon is why we have seasons. The 'accident' of the moon may in fact be responsible for our existence. My answer to the question, "Why is the moon there?" then became "So we can be here to ask the question."

Twenty three point five degrees

no grander magic
than

the grey moon
rounding

our green earth
keeping

her dark white
winters

I now also understand that the 'because why' answer isn't quite as silly as I once thought. In Aristotle's world, for example, every effect has a cause and every cause an effect, infinitely forward and backward (although some adjust this to include the idea of a first cause). Without free will, however, this cause and effect paradigm makes everything inevitable. Everybody can explain everything they do by either claiming they were born that way, the effects of their environment gave them no other choice, or the 'first cause' made it so. "I am not responsible for me and therefore I am not responsible for my actions."

In my world, however, in a world of free will, everything and anything is possible, and therefore nothing is inevitable. I have come to realize that everything I do affects everybody

else. This as an unbelievably empowering reality. Imagine a world where every act, every decision you made affected everybody else. Now imagine this reality to be true.

Is there an absolute truth? I don't think it matters. We do have choice, and with an appropriate amount of will we have the power to define and create an ultimate truth. We have the power to create the future. Are we nature's tragic accident, or its ultimate achievement, a wayward failure, or noble creation? What do we want the answer to be?

Here we are

Sometimes I'm afraid. Afraid this might be real. Most times I'm sure it's just a dream. A harsh dream overflowing with the walking dead. Where autistic, evanescent souls bleed through self inflicted wounds of false beliefs. An illusory reality where we cling to a cage of relentless desperate isolation. For fear of opening our hearts, perchance the essence of our souls will leak through the fingers of those we trust.

We are lost, in this dream of severance. In this dream we have no memory. We forgot how to nurture our hearts. To touch life. A touching that transcends this dream into an eternal sun that bleeds its love freely. A love to rouse us from our dreary sleep of death and vanity. Awaken us to a world where all that's living dies and lives again. An everlasting gift that surges and pulses like the semen from our loins, the blood in our veins, and the noble truth in our hearts.

We can come home. Where we don't need dreams to be happy. Where the exuberant universe ignites us, and the living Earth embraces us, and holds our dead. We are of this power, this life. This amazing, magnetic, dynamic, living wonder. We are its ultimate conduit. Our hearts resonate with this truth. This blessed, living, loving force that is us. That is God.

Here we are, lying on the ground, gazing up at the moon. Tonight there's a comet swinging by. And there's Saturn, and Mars, and Jupiter too. Look at the stars. And the galaxies pretending to be stars. Can you see the Milky Way stretching across the sky? Can you imagine its size? Whirling and swirling God knows where. And there's Andromeda, billions upon billions of miles away, sharing the dawn of a billion suns. A dawn lighting our eyes at the zenith of a journey that began over two million years ago. Can you see? Can you feel?

Here we are, lying on the Earth, looking up at the moon, all of us whirling around the sun, floating and swirling in a galaxy dancing to eternity. Grounded on our Earth, with only our hearts to reach out and beyond, to wonder and to love, and to bind each and every one of us to all that is. This dazzling beacon of life and love that echoes throughout the universe. An echo born in our amazing hearts where living energy is transformed into a loving, radiant miracle.

Here I am, looking in awe and wonder and amazement at the stars in the sky and at the miracle in your eyes. Seeing eternity in your eyes. Feeling eternity in the

hug of the ground and knowing eternity in your love. All the energy in the universe converging in this moment to say, we are one. You are just right for me. The universe is just right for us. And that is why we are here.

Here we are, my noble friends, standing on this floating, spinning, astonishing Earth, soaring through the universe, holding each other's hearts, reaching out to the stars...

It's hard to be the forest as a tree.