

I'll put
3 Chips
on god



just in case
there is one

by Preeti
Gupta

AN AGNOSTIC ANALYSIS OF SPIRITUALITY

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3 Chips
on god



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Published by
CopperPages Inc.
Wilmington, DE

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ISBN: 978-0-9853139-0-6

Printed in the United States of America
Cover, Illustrations, and Design by Yury Rumyantsev

To my Mom

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*In any Battle,
Knowledge is the first half,
and Action is the other half.*

—Anonymous—

THE BATTLE

Introduction



PART

1

Chapter I

The ROI of Spirituality



I was never one of those philosophical college students who pondered and debated the secrets of the Universe with fellow students late at night. If I was at any of these gatherings, I was probably the one in the corner too lazy to voice an opinion and more fascinated by the pizza.

Where do we come from? What are we doing here? What is the meaning of life?

Is this the last slice of pepperoni?

In all other respects, I was a nice, thoughtful person. Got good grades. Didn't get into trouble. Was making progress on the approved path of a solid education, prestigious job, timely marriage, suburban house, 2.5 kids, and the requisite yearly vacation to some exotic destination. I had yet to accomplish all of these goals, but I was well on my way.

Then midlife hit. And like any adult at that stage, I had gone through a variety of experiences by then. I had achieved many of the milestones that society expected of me. I wasn't completely satisfied with everything but I had stability and cable TV on my comfortable, predictable path. As my ever-practical parents would say, what more could one want?

Well . . . something . . . anything . . . I don't know . . . I mean, was this as good as it gets? Where do I head to next?

Like many people from the newer generations, I had always thought of myself as *spiritual* but not deeply *religious*. If anyone ever asked me, I would say—feel free to chime in—“I don't follow any one Religion, but I am spiritual and I believe in being a good person.”

Sound familiar?

Now what does this mean, exactly? What is Spirituality vs. Religion? Do any of us know? Given that one out of every three adults calls themselves spiritual, you would think there would be a standard definition by now.

I've heard people say that it means you are free to live as you please as long as you don't harm others. Some go further by adding that it means helping people out and doing good deeds and contributing to society. Others say that they believe there is a God, and perhaps a Heaven and Hell, but they are not sure that any particular Religion is the correct one to follow.

“Spirituality is feeling happy every day, no matter what you have. Enjoying the small things in life, enjoying the journey.”

“Spirituality is experienced in your own being. Being spiritual means

standing on a cliff feeling the rushing wind . . . and understanding the beauty of nature.”

“Spirituality means freedom from life while living life.”

“Little children are spiritual. They are innocent, they are free from society's expectations and brainwashing. I am trying to be more like I was when I was five, free and uninhibited, that would mean achieving true Spirituality.”

Um . . . What? Eh? Huh?

I was still confused.

I didn't know the answer either. My own definition of *Spirituality* is something I began to wonder about.

I headed to the bookstore and started reading books by brilliant authors who I could see had a commanding and confident understanding of what Spirituality means. Deepak Chopra, the Dalai Lama, Eckhart Tolle

All of their teachings seemed to ring so true. It is hard to disagree with “enjoy every moment, be in the moment” or “love everyone, everyone is you” or “hear yourself breathe and know that you are alive”.

But while I felt inspired and ready to glide through life anew, the gliding seemed to sputter once I walked out the doors and made my way home. Wait, I forgot, what was I supposed to do? I wished there was a spiritual person who was, say . . . a cross between the Dalai Lama and Donald Trump . . . or Deepak Chopra and Britney Spears. Or just an everyday person, stuck in the rat race, feeling the pressure, but not wanting to get out because the goal of a nice house, car, or vacation prevents any crazy detours off the proven path. Yet that person still

managing to enjoy *every moment* of their 80 hour workweek, *feel intense love* for their annoying coworker, or magically bring about a promotion and *inner peace* even while having to get up every morning at 5 AM to achieve it.

Was it really, truly possible to enjoy every moment of every day, no matter what, and still live normally and pursue the usual goals? Or did it ultimately mean letting go of material wealth—or at least scaling down—and taking a lot of time out to meditate, or go to church, or possibly even staying single with no attachments so one could wake up every day with the ability to engage in the real world only when in the mood?

And before getting to all of that, how can one be sure of what is genuinely the “truth” and whether these teachings are correct? Was there any way to be more sure of what spiritual path to follow before taking precious time out of a busy, productive schedule?

For those of you familiar with the work of consultants, one of their main tasks is to help clients measure the ROI, or *return on investment*, of their resources to the benefits they receive. For example, how much time will workers save if the company invests in this new machine? On a more personal level, how much more can I sell my house for if I put in a new kitchen? 20 percent return—not worth it. 95 percent return—now we're talking!

And how guaranteed is the 95 percent return? What if all that time or money is invested and there is also a possibility that there will be a 0 percent return?

Well, my feeling is that many of us spiritual, but busy professionals, subconsciously assign a low ROI to being spiritual. All of us intend to

think about it eventually, when we are not so busy and have more time . . . when it's later in life and we are old and wrinkled anyway with not much else to do. But for now, it's not high on our priority list.

Being more spiritual is not going to get me the career advancement I am pursuing. It's not going to get me more money for my retirement. It's not going to get me more time to spend with my family.

Time and money—these are tangible, immediate, valuable resources and goals. Giving more thought to one's Spirituality might not take money, but it would require some time. It's better saved as a worry for old age, when we are closer to dying and have more time and wisdom to question the purpose of it all. When we want to secure our ticket to Heaven, if there is one. Or maybe, even then, we will feel no need to ponder any of it, since we'll be comfortably ensconced in our paid-up, upgraded homes with solid nest eggs and exciting travel plans and plenty of distracting hobbies. Regardless of whether we will or won't think about it later in life, Spirituality certainly doesn't have much to do with our current life, the here and now.

If we knew for sure that there was a God or a Heaven, if there was a guarantee, would we invest the time to reach them? Of course! Most of us are not selfish. We are decent people. We want to help others and know that there is a point to all of this. We want to secure our place in Heaven. It is scary to think that there is no one up there, or no other meaning to life, that we are completely on our own. If we could just be shown a sign, some proof of God's existence or which Religion to follow—a real, indisputable miracle that didn't happen centuries ago but instead would take place right before our very own eyes—then we

would be eager to spend time on the subject and think about it more deeply. Personally, I don't need something grand. If I were able to choose a miracle to witness, it would involve me being able to eat tubloads of chocolate and getting thinner the more I eat it. But I suppose any old miracle would do, just something to show me—us—that God or Heaven really exists.

However, since we don't know what path to follow and whether Spirituality is going to bring any benefit, it is easy to dust it off into a corner and plan to address it “later”.

That is how most of us think from what I have observed. I am no different.

I'll admit, I've thought the same way. What if there actually isn't anything beyond this life? What if this life is just a freak of nature, like the Big Bang? What if the atheists are right, there is no God, and our bodies are just physical matter or particles that will *transmogrify* into some other type of matter or particle after we're gone? What if the “afterlife” consists of being an ion instead of a neutron? I mean, imagine spending all this time writing and reading and thinking about God, and changing our behavior to be nice to other people, and we find out later, once we're dead, that the joke is on us? It was just the one life we had to live, and that was it, BABY! Ha ha!?

Well it's possible, of course. There seems to be no guarantee. That's the biggest reason we are able to shove the issue to the back of our Minds. Yet . . . like the annoying relative who keeps sending emails and demanding that we stay in touch, the idea of there being a higher purpose pops up regularly enough that it can't be swatted entirely away.

First of all, how does one explain the discrepancies in this world? Rich, young celebrities that seem to have everything they want, and poor, struggling slum dwellers whose luxury aspirations include clean water. An innocent young kid getting cancer, and an eighty-year-old chain smoker still going strong. Countries with plenty of freedom and opportunities, and countries where going out to buy bread could mean death. I could go into a string of examples, but I'm sure you already know what I am talking about.

What about unsolved mysteries like ESP and ghosts and twins living continents apart yet still wearing the exact same color of shoelace, and all that jazz? Where did all that come from?

And the biggest reason for hoping, *wanting*, to believe in something—surely there is more to life than just the here and now? Surely there is more out there for me than my gnarly old boss and twitchy bitchy customers and nice but boring routine? The increasing breakdown of my body parts as I get older and have to add a new patch-up every month— dye the hair, get facials, buy wrinkle cream, bathe myself in sunscreen, consume my calcium, eat my vitamins. I'm fighting nightly visions of morphing into the decrepit Goldie Hawn from *Death Becomes Her*.

Please, *please*, let there be more! And better!

Mostly life is good, good enough, or even really good, and I conveniently ignore the desire to want more because I'll have to *work* for more. Rumor has it that it takes a lot of effort and it is not easy pickings. From what I know you have to EARN your way into Heaven or Nirvana.

Yawn . . . I'll just hit the snooze button on my Spirituality Clock

for a little while longer . . . just five more minutes, years, decades, whatever . . . and I promise I'll wake up and jump out of bed and get on with it, just let me sleep for five more minutes. Please?

What's this? Someone just dumped a bucket of cold water on my bed? A job loss? A disease? A tragedy? A tsunami? Hey, that's no fun! It's uncomfortable in here now! Fine, I'm getting up already, sheeeesh . . .

Hi God. How are you. Sorry I'm late, I overslept a bit. Hey, something awful just happened to me, so I have a favor to ask you . . .

Maybe there is nothing out there and the atheists are right.

Or maybe there IS something out there . . .

Maybe.

And maybe not.

The big question is, how many chips do you want to put on the MAYBE square and how many chips do you want to put on the MAYBE NOT square? Do you want to put *all* your chips on one or the other? Or would you prefer splitting them up, say 3 chips go on Maybe, and 7 on Maybe Not? Do you want to completely ignore the issue of Religion or Spirituality or a higher power for the rest of your life? Or do you want to invest at least a little time in it? How confident are you, that you will win your bet when the dice are rolled?

And how many of you are rolling your eyes at my cheesy gambling analogy?

I don't know about you, but *just in case* . . . just in case there is an eensy-weensy tiny-winy miniscularian chance of Heaven, Hell, or getting to be reborn again in a rocking celebrity body . . . I'm going to spend at least some time thinking about it. Now. Today. Not a lot of

time, I've got a busy life to lead. But I don't want all my chips stacked on only one square. I'd like to diversify my portfolio. Hedge my bets. *Put 3 chips on God.* Just in case the dice get rolled earlier than I thought, and it's my time to go. Or in case something happens in this life itself and I need God and good Karma on my side.

With that, let's set up a few ground rules here for explaining how to get through the rest of this book without losing your Mind or feeling that you are on a drug-induced hallucination trip.

Commandment 1

Thou shalt not take things literally.

Let me explain that I am just like you. I am not some wise, all-knowing, enlightened guru who has studied various scriptures for the past 29 years and . . . um . . . 120 months of my life. I'm a rather lazy person with a short attention span. I could have spent hours or even years researching my material in order to bring you a tightly written, solidly factual, intellectual book. But I conveniently and truly decided that defeated the purpose. I'm trying to write for people like you—me—*us*. Someone in India once spent a patient afternoon explaining to me the meanings of different prayers, which ones to apply where, the types of devotion, and various meditation positions, and I sincerely enjoyed hearing his teachings and inhaled his every word and then promptly forgot it all by breakfast the next morning.

Some may argue that I should know all the different types of prayers or rituals or beliefs if I am going to be writing a book like this, but I

think not. To me what is important is whether the general concept of Karma or Heaven makes sense, and what I need to do in my everyday life to apply it. Details and Religion, to me, are man-made attempts to understand the overall truth. I think what is more important is feeling your way around a common teaching or belief and seeing if it becomes a natural part of your Soul as you go through the experiences of life. I think I first learned about Karma and the three types (or was it five?) as a child, when I was dragged to some religious lecture against my will. I didn't give it much thought right afterwards, but the concept of Karma stewed and simmered in my Mind, over the years, without my realizing, until slowly and unexpectedly I began to feel there might be some truth to it. Not truth to there being three types of Karma, necessarily, but truth to the idea in general.

So I might make references to existing concepts—the Soul, Karma, Dharma, Reincarnation, Chakras, Meditation, and Detachment. I might be influenced by the fact that I was born into a Hindu family and these were the types of words used to describe these concepts. But remember, I don't consider myself from any one Religion in particular, I consider myself *spiritual*. If I use the word *Karma*, you might substitute the word “sin” or “blessing”. As in, “She sinned”, instead of “Her actions resulted in bad Karma”. Or “She was blessed”, instead of “Her good Karma kicked in”. Don't go by the literal word I use, and don't get annoyed when I butcher details and facts and names of various scriptures and doctrines (and I will, I promise you, despite my best efforts not to). Just go with the flow of the concept, or simply humor me and suspend your own thoughts for a time as you open your Mind to mine.

Thou shalt not hold me to my current beliefs.

First of all, I don't really have "beliefs". I know OF beliefs and teachings and have squeezed and poked and pulled at them in my attempt to see if they make sense. If I feel that one particular teaching or idea does seem to explain life and the world, I do find myself following it and imbibing it as part of my daily practices. But I am a female, and I am from generation X, and I'm entitled to change my Mind at any time. If the stranger across the street offers me a more tantalizing ice-cream cone, I'll drop the one I'm having and promptly switch. I like logic, and I like concepts that are applicable to the whole world and all of life's mysteries. I'm never going to be one of those people who devoutly follow one path because of *faith*. Instead I'm like the kid who keeps asking "but why?" every time you answer his question.

In fact, as I chat with you in the following chapters, I am also going to be like one of those entertainers who plays a dual role while acting or singing a song. You know, the ones that put on a fake mustache and a hat when they are singing the male's part of the song, then run over to the other side of the stage and hold a frilly parasol while they skip around to the female's voice. I am going to constantly switch sides and dissect issues from both points of view. That's what we skeptical agnostics do. Agnostics are those who neither believe nor disbelieve in the existence of God—they are open to either possibility being true.

I am an agnostic, and I am not partial to any one side. What I talk about in this book is where I am at the moment, in terms of which

concepts or theories I feel make the most sense. If tomorrow someone were to show me a better way, or an indisputable, miracle-backed proof that *their* way is the *correct* way and I will go to Hell if I don't squat on one foot chanting 3.5 times a week, I will happily abandon my favorite chocolate cone for strawberry. In addition, I welcome your criticisms and disagreements. If you can back what you say with clear, sound reasoning, I will be open to it and respect you all the more for it.

Commandment 3

Thou shalt not make too much fun of my analogies.

In order to try and explain the Alice-in-Wonderland mess going on in my head from the years of observations and experiences I've had, I'm going to use a lot of hokey and far-fetched analogies, metaphors, and examples. It's much more convenient for me to describe my thoughts in terms of televisions, socket plugs, and teacups, than to try and read up on physics and electromagnetic fields. I am sure there will be times when you are reading and pause to say to yourself "What the ?!##!!" But I'm relying on the morbid fascination we all have for slowing down and gawking at accidents, to compel you to finish the rest of this book.

With those rules in place, on we go to the next chapter. Where I will now invoke visions of Vacuums, Sailboats, Cavemen, Bombs, Cocktails, War, Science, Mathematics, Singing, and Dancing.

?!##!!

Yes, *really*. Read on and see for yourself

You may call me an agnostic, but I do not share the crusading spirit of the professional atheist whose fervor is mostly due to a painful act of liberation from the fetters of religious indoctrination received in youth. I prefer an attitude of humility corresponding to the weakness of our intellectual understanding of nature and of our own being.

—Albert Einstein

KNOWLEDGE IS THE FIRST HALF

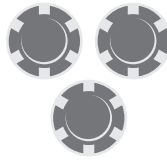
the Driving
force of
energy

PART
2



Chapter II

Soul Energy



OK, now, in order for you to keep up with me on our psychedelic journey into Spirituality, it is important that you *pay attention!* in this chapter. Because the premise of this chapter and the entire book is based on our mutual agreement and understanding of *energy*.

Soul Energy, Karmic Energy, Heat Energy, Positive Energy, Negative Energy, Chemical Energy, Feeling Energy, Living Energy, Evil Energy, Evolving Energy, Wind Energy, Magnetic Energy, Discovering Energy.

So you see, if you don't see the possibilities of all that energy being . . . possible . . . then the rest of the book will make no sense.

What is *energy*? According to the dictionary, energy is defined as:

A fundamental *force* of nature that is transferred between parts of a *system* resulting in some physical change to the system and usually regarded as the *capacity for doing work*. Energy can take a *wide variety of forms*. The units of energy are joules or ergs.

Erg? What's an *erg*?

I was not a great student in science, so I promise not to make all this too technical or complicated. Not only for your benefit, I also don't have the ability to get into a lot of detail without my eyes glazing over. Let's look at some simple examples of energy using easy words:

Physical System	Force	Work
Microwave	Heat (Thermal) Energy	Warm things up
Vacuum	Motion (Kinetic) Energy	Clean things up
Rocket	Chemical Energy	Send things up
Bomb	Nuclear Energy	Blow things up
Television	Electrical Energy	Liven things up
Sailboat	Wind Energy	Speed things up

These examples of energy seem pretty straightforward, don't they? They clearly show some type of system, doing some type of task, using some type of energy. Now, let's take a look at the *Human Body*, another type of physical system. The Human Body runs on energy, as well. Not just because we happen to use that term, as in "I don't have a lot of energy today" or "This energy bar will give you lots of energy", but

because there is scientifically proven energy in our bodies. We do absorb energy from sources like light and heat, but mainly we use *chemical energy*, which is generated from the food, water, and oxygen we ingest. These three substances combine with others in our body to form certain chemicals or reactions that cause our blood to flow, our cells to metabolize glucose, and other fun biological occurrences which we all should have learned in the fifth grade. Not that we remember any of it.

Accordingly, the equation for the Human Body might be written as follows:

Physical System	Force	Work
Human Body	Chemical Energy	Talk, Move, Breathe, Think, Feel, Write Brilliant Book

Now some people would add another type of energy that they think is fueling or powering the Human Body. They call it our *Life Force* or *Vitalism* or the *Soul*. While it's mostly people with religious or spiritual inclinations that would say this type of energy exists, there are scientists who have also put forth the idea that there is some indescribable component of living beings that is separate from the mechanical interplay of the atoms and inorganic substances that comprise them. However they use more secular terms to describe that component, or *spark*, and many think that it will eventually be discovered and understood by science.

Let's examine that concept—the idea of another type of energy that flows through our body. For agreement's sake, if you don't mind, I'd like to refer to it as *Soul Energy*. Just me, just for this book. After reading

this book, please feel free to call it whatever *you* like. So I will say *Soul Energy*. An Atheist might say *Vitalism*. A Chinese person might say *Qi*. A Hindu person might say *Atman*. A Science person might say *Life Force*. A Weird person might say *Erg*.

I don't think it matters what we call it. But if we were to go with the idea that there may be an undiscovered type of energy also driving the Human Body, we would rewrite the equation as follows:

Physical System	Force	Work
Human Body	Soul Energy Chemical Energy	Talk, Move, Breathe, Think, Feel, Write Brilliant Book

Some would not agree with this. I will call them The People Who Do Not Agree. The People Who Do Not Agree would say that we have no proof of anything but chemical energy, or other known energies, being present in the body. Soul Energy has not been proven, therefore they would say that it does not exist.

But what is interesting to note is that there have been times in history, as recently as a few decades ago, when we did not know about *many* common forms of energy, such as kinetic or sound or wind. All types of energy already exist in the world, because according to science, “Energy can neither be created nor destroyed.” But we first have to *discover* a new form of energy before we know it exists. Ben Franklin has to get a light bulb idea over his head created by Thomas Edison that makes him go totter outside in a thunderstorm with a kite, and then we go from not knowing about electrical energy to knowing about it the next day, ta-daa!

It surprised me to learn that we didn't know about certain types of energy until very recently. Nuclear energy was one of the latest forms of energy to be discovered, in 1938. Solar energy was discovered in 1838. Electrical energy was discovered sometime in the 1700s.

Even the most basic type of energy—heat energy—had to first be discovered. It happened eons ago when . . . uh . . . a caveman needed something else to warm him besides his fur toga and accidentally tripped while holding his wooden club, which struck another piece of wood on the ground, and voila! Fire was born!

Or something like that. I might have a few of the details wrong here, but overall we know that there was a point in history where they discovered fire and heat energy—one day they didn't know about it and the next day they did. Heat energy always EXISTED of course, it's not like the caveman created it himself. He just had to realize that it existed. And heat energy was not exclusively present in one form—fire—it also came from the sun. So heat energy was there, and it was even available from different sources, but until the caveman found out about it in a way that made sense to him and enabled him to use it to improve his life, it was not yet a reality.

Therefore . . . what if there IS such a thing as *Soul Energy*? But we haven't *discovered* it yet? Just because we don't know about it now, doesn't mean we won't be able to prove it exists in the future—perhaps even a few decades from now. It's possible, we are discovering new forms of energy all the time.

How do we *discover* a new form of energy? How do we prove that a certain type of energy exists? There are two criteria that must be met in

order to establish the existence of energy:

- 1) Show a force that does *work* to cause change in a physical system.
- 2) Show that the force can be converted *to* and *from* other forms of energy.

The first criterion is the one we've already started exploring, i.e. energy must be shown capable of changing certain properties of a physical system, or doing work, such as creating heat or movement. In other words, if Soul Energy exists, it must be shown to cause our Human Bodies to do work, such as hop, skip, or jump.

The second criterion is that if energy exists, it can be shown to convert *to* and *from* other types of energy. In other words, if there is such a thing as Soul Energy, it came from some type of energy and can later convert to another type.

Let's continue our look at the first criterion. How do we know that all of the functions of the Human Body are being directed or run entirely by chemical energy, derived from food, water, and oxygen? It may be easy to show that chemical energy is a driving force behind getting the heart to pump blood, having the arms and legs move, and enabling a person to breathe. But how do we know if chemical energy is behind intangible, complex functions such as *thinking* or *feeling*? Are we sure that chemical energy is responsible for the way our *Mind* functions? Chemical energy is responsible for the fact that the *brain* is alive. The brain is an organ and it obviously needs oxygen to survive, otherwise it can be damaged or dead within as little as three minutes. It needs glucose to survive, which is why

we can experience dizziness when standing up too quickly and the blood flow to our brain stops. The brain cannot keep going without the processes fueled by chemical energy.

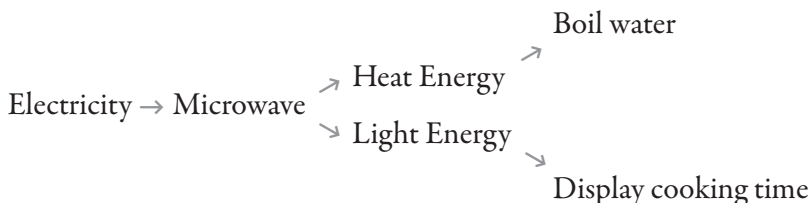
However, just because chemical energy is responsible for certain functions in the body—keeping us physically alive—it doesn't mean that it is responsible for ALL of our internal processes. Just because it is the only energy we know that enters our bodies, it doesn't mean that it is the only energy that continues to circulate within. There are many examples of systems where one type of energy is input but several types of energy can be output.

For example, a vacuum converts the electricity running through it into kinetic energy in order to move over floors.

Electricity → Vacuum → Kinetic Energy → Clean floors

Even though electricity is put into the system (the vacuum), it converts to another type of energy in order to perform its task.

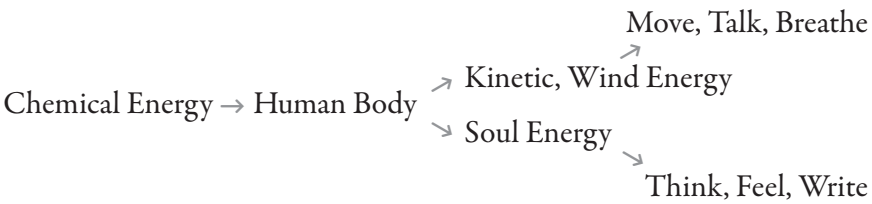
Similarly, a microwave needs electricity first, and then it can carry out its function of converting that electricity to heat energy, and performing work such as boiling water. The electricity is also used to light up a display, which has a clock and cooking times.



In this case, there are two types of output, with different functions. The engineers that coded the circuit board and chips in the microwave designed them in such a way as to convert incoming electricity to other types of energy.

In the same way, perhaps our DNA (our microchip) is coded to convert incoming energy—chemical energy—into other types of energy to perform various tasks. Sometimes our DNA may take chemical energy and convert it to kinetic, sound, or wind energy, which allows the body to perform work such as moving, talking, or breathing. Other times the DNA may instruct the body to convert chemical energy to Soul Energy, which allows the *Mind* to perform work such as thinking and feeling. Just as there are several types of energy involved in appliances we Humans have designed, perhaps there are several types of energy involved in Humans themselves. We know about a few of them, but that doesn't mean others don't exist.

What if we were to rewrite the equation for the Human Body as follows:



As mentioned, The People Who Do Not Agree would dispute this because we haven't proven it yet. I am not saying that Soul Energy exists either, all I am saying is how do we know that it doesn't? Unlike The

People Who Do Not Agree, I am open to the idea. That is why I am an agnostic, not an atheist. Because how do we know what we don't know? You know?

Let's step back and think about the microchip for the Human Body—DNA. Who designed it? Did Humans design it? No, we did not. Did we design other living beings, such as Animals and Plants? No, we did not. We can reproduce Humans by having babies, because we have the mechanics given to us by the body itself. Or we can clone Animals and Plants using DNA and other genetic material that already exist, which we can harvest. And of course, we are the inventors of vacuums and microwaves and televisions and other such systems that use energy sources known to us.

But we did not design living beings from scratch. DNA appears to contain the blueprint that controls how a living being, even a cloned one, is created. Thus far, we have not successfully synthesized artificial DNA that has resulted in living creatures of the complexity and depth of the Humans, Animals, and Plants already in existence. DNA came to us, already created, from someone or somewhere. Perhaps the blueprint embedded in our DNA was designed to use different types of energy, and it has the secret for which parts of our system do what types of work, using these different types of energy. Until we can completely replicate DNA and understand it, how do we really know what is coded in it?

Since we have had no hand in creating Humans or other living beings, how do we know, for sure, 100 percent, without a doubt, that there is no other type of energy powering the Human Body? If microwaves and vacuums can convert incoming energy into other types, isn't

it possible that we take our incoming chemical energy and convert it to various types as well? Or that we might have two types of incoming energy, one derived from food, water, and oxygen, and one infused within us at the moment of conception in the womb?

How do we know that there isn't some type of Soul Energy which is responsible for functions such as thinking or feeling or other intangible processes in the body?

Why are we associating the Soul, or Soul Energy, with thinking and feeling, rather than breathing or walking? Because there are some unexplained phenomena that seem to stem from something other than people's biological processes and chemical makeup, that hint most strongly at some type of undiscovered Soul Energy.

Take the example of *child prodigies*. If we look at the chemical processes within their bodies and compare them to that of regular children, it is hard to find differences. At times, science has been able to pinpoint a difference in genes, or sizes in brains, or the number of neuron connections to explain the superior talent of one child vs. another. But none of these theories provide a consistent explanation. In other words, science is not able to perform an MRI or X-ray or DNA test and correctly identify which children are considered *prodigies* and which are not, simply based on chemistry and biology.

How can one child—like a young Mozart—use only chemical and kinetic energy to write and perform music, while another child can barely tie his own shoes? Wouldn't we see an immediate difference in the biology of such a standout prodigy?

Child prodigies have unusual, unexplainable talents in music, art,

math, science, writing, and other fields which do not seem to have been acquired the traditional way. Some child prodigies have publicly debuted their skills at ages as young as two. Perhaps *mathematical* prodigies can be explained away as having a superior or unusual configuration of cells and neurons in their brains, enabling them to better perform complex mechanical calculations. But how does one explain the mystifying abilities of Mozart, who was already skilled on the violin and keyboard, and was composing and performing before royalty at the age of five? There are some talents such as music and art and poetry which can only be marginally attributed to mechanics and brain configurations. Some of these skills also build on life experiences which child prodigies have not had at that young age.

The People Who Do Not Agree would attempt to explain artistic child prodigies as having been exposed to these areas at an early stage by family members. Many point to the fact that Mozart's father was a composer himself, and simply began teaching his young son all that he knew as soon as he could. They would attribute the gifts of *child prodigies* to their environment.

They would also attribute the evidence of different personalities in babies to the same explanations—influences in the mother's womb and a unique, random configuration of inorganic substances that comprise their DNA and brains. This same explanation would be further extended to different interests and aptitudes of adults, such as a talent for languages or painting.

I, on the other hand, think that personality and aptitude differences may also be due to the existence of a Soul, which has carried with it the

knowledge or imprint from a previous birth to the current one. And I believe in the possibility of there being various degrees or forms of Soul Energy which might be powering our Minds, with some of us operating on a different wave or frequency level.

Demon possession and *exorcism* might be another hint at the existence of Soul Energy, and its influence on how we think or feel. In fact, it's a hint at the existence of evil Soul Energy, one that joins or replaces another Soul Energy in a living Human Body. From what I understand of demon possession, the dilemma is that the original Soul Energy may be trapped with the new, evil Energy in one body. And like two siblings fighting for space in the back seat, they scream and shout and shove until the Exorcist parent tells them to STOP FIGHTING, RIGHT NOW, DON'T MAKE ME COME BACK THERE! Whatever the explanation, it seems a *force* (evil Soul Energy) is making the *physical system* (Human Body) do *work* (hiss at people, rotate head 360 degrees). That force is energy—Soul Energy.

The People Who Do Not Agree might say that demon possession is simply the vivid imagination of an insane person. Or the imagination of a horror fiction writer, like Steven King, who comes up with the strangest of scenarios which make you wonder what goes on in his head. Insane people and insane fiction writers are also aided by hysterical, gullible people who see a bird in the sky or lint floating in the air and then swear that they saw UFOs and ghosts. All preposterous stories due to Human error and imagination. Those sillies!

But what about the testimony of doctors? Doctors are some of the most science-based people in the world. Yet quite a few have affirmed

their belief in the possibility of Soul Energy or some kind of force present in the body besides matter and chemical energy. There is a book called *The Scalpel and The Soul*, by Dr. Allan Hamilton, based on his thirty years of practice as a Harvard-educated brain surgeon. It is a fascinating read on his observations of supernatural phenomena within the operating room. In it, he relates many stories of *near-death* and *out-of-body* experiences and other occurrences which he can't explain within the realms of medicine and science. There has been wider acceptance in the medical world of such possibilities, with documented testimony by patients who can recite word-for-word, what a surgeon was saying during an operation, despite the anesthesia machines showing them to be unconscious, or the monitor having flatlined for some time. A dead or unconscious brain should not be registering the dialogue of others. Certain chemical energy processes have been suppressed or are no longer in evidence. Yet how is it that the ability to hear and see can still be there? Perhaps there is more than just chemical energy flowing through our bodies.

The People Who Do Not Agree would not agree. They would not attribute out-of-body and near-death experiences to a mysterious "Soul Energy". They might say that even if a brain or heart flatlines on a monitor, it does not mean the person is dead and can no longer think, feel, or hear. Perhaps our bodies would still be functioning in a way that simply cannot be detected by our current technology. Perhaps these types of experiences are not evidence of a Soul Energy, but rather evidence that our brains and hearts can be complex and operate on levels that might not be trackable by our current methods of science. We THINK that

we are unconscious due to anesthetics. We THINK that we have died due to brain or heart failure. But our machines may not be designed to capture another level of activity that is still going on and attributable to our chemical energy. That is what The People Who Do Not Agree might say to explain the existence of these supposed phenomena.

I can understand the argument on both sides. A part of me—the skeptic side of me—could toss the frilly parasol, tack on a mustache, and agree with The People Who Do Not Agree. I think they have valid counterpoints, and I don't discount them completely. However, I mostly lean the other way. I suspect that what we are seeing here is a case for Soul Energy that is getting stronger over time due to a growing amount of circumstantial evidence. Circumstantial evidence is defined as indirect evidence which individually may not prove a fact. But collectively, when there are enough clues pointing in one direction, the odds increase to where the indirect evidence supports a conclusion beyond a reasonable doubt. Court sentences can be decided by an overwhelming number of corroborating stories, clues, and witnesses even without irrefutable proof of a crime. However, many times it is hard to convict someone on this type of evidence, despite there being bucketloads of it. OJ Simpson and Casey Anthony were not convicted despite an overwhelming amount of circumstantial evidence. These are good examples of cases where people could be on both sides of the fence, with each feeling they have valid arguments for their stand.

In the same way, we might not have the smoking gun showing irrefutable proof of Soul Energy, but we sure have a heck of a lot of circumstantial evidence that has been adding up over the centuries,

around the world, by crazies and fiction writers and gullible people and doctors and scientists and skeptics alike. Even if many of those stories and people are fake, they can't ALL be wrong, can they?

Before we add up all the evidence and pronounce a verdict, let's see if Soul Energy meets the second criterion for proving the existence of energy. The first criterion was that energy must be shown to do work within a physical system, i.e. Soul Energy causes a person to be a genius at age two, rotate its head 360 degrees if it is evil, or continue to keep the body thinking and sensing even when machines show the body to be comatose or dead. Soul Energy is likely responsible for the cognitive and emotional functions in our body.

For the second criterion to be met, we need to show that Soul Energy can be converted *to* and *from* another type of energy. Perhaps it converts from Soul Energy in one person to Soul Energy in another, or to and from other types of energy such as chemical, kinetic, wind, or heat.

Let's start with the conversion of Soul Energy while we are alive and kicking. How might we see indirect evidence of Soul Energy becoming another type of energy? Perhaps Soul Energy is responsible for the psychokinetic talents of a mentalist like Uri Gellar, or his more recent contemporary, Lior Suchard. Psychokinesis refers to the ability to move or distort an object with one's Mind. Mostly considered debunked, but also seemingly validated by CIA and other investigative reports into his powers, Uri Gellar was famous for supposedly bending spoons while he was many feet, or even miles away. His crowned successor, Lior Suchard, has not only bent spoons but also flipped a pair of eyeglasses—that too on national television! (Side note: look Mr. Suchard up and find him

on YouTube and experience the mind boggle for yourself if you don't believe me. I'm normally a skeptic but it's seriously spooky what he can do, a spectrum of major celebrities have been unnerved by his talents. However unlike Uri, he doesn't try to claim that his powers are authentic or supernatural, which I suspect may be due to the fear that he will get the same public flogging.)

It's hard to separate fact from fiction but if supernaturally endowed mentalists truly exist, then perhaps part of their Soul Energy can convert to kinetic energy and actually affect eyeglasses and spoons, even though their bodies are nowhere near the objects in question.

Perhaps there really is such a thing as *levitation*, even though most of us scoff at the idea and attribute it to hocus-pocus performed by magicians. But if there are stories from people who claim to have witnessed true levitation, perhaps the rare individual does have the ability to convert Soul Energy to kinetic energy and lift a body into the air.

Perhaps Soul Energy can convert to brainwaves—similar to radio-waves—that travel through the air from one person to the other. Brainwaves are thought to be a possible explanation for ESP.

Soul Energy conversions may also be responsible for other phenomena such as *curses*, *miracles*, and *absent healing* (hallelujah!), which all involve the Mind, or possibly Soul Energy, doing things outside of the body to other people or objects. Perhaps chemical energy is confined wholly to internal processes, while Soul Energy can be credited for internal *and* external occurrences.

These phenomena all relate to Soul Energy conversion when we are *alive*. There is even more circumstantial evidence that Soul Energy

converts to another type of energy after we *die*.

Our body's chemical energy is known to be released into the air when we die and our bodies decompose. Once our chemical energy mixes into the atmosphere, it will eventually convert to wind energy, kinetic energy, heat energy, or whatever else *air* converts to.

In the case of Soul Energy, it may not simply melt into the atmosphere upon our death. Instead, it may convert to other types of Soul Energy, like "Ghost Soul Energy". Perhaps Soul Energy is the explanation for phenomena such as *poltergeists*, *haunted houses*, *séances*, *ouija boards*, *déjà vu*, memories of *past lives*, and other situations which involve the presence of some type of Soul Energy outside the Human Body.

These paranormal concepts have not been proven scientifically, yet they do not seem to be entirely delusional. The idea of *haunted houses* and *ghosts* freaks me out because there are way too many stories surrounding them. It seems plausible that there are forces or Souls that are interacting with our world, yet not of our world. At times they seem to have Human characteristics, like the ability to whisper words or appear as apparitions in Human form. Perhaps Human Soul Energy can turn into Ghost Soul Energy after death, and then be converted to sound energy (words) and light energy (apparitions) in order for ghosts to connect with living beings. It is no surprise that we use EMF devices to detect the presence of ghosts. EMF devices are also used to detect energy emissions from microwaves and high tension wires. If there is such a thing as *ghosts*, it appears they are made of some type of energy, most likely Soul Energy.

Poltergeists, a specific type of ghost, cause inanimate objects like pens and chairs to move on their "own". While a mentalist might bend

spoons while he is alive, poltergeists may bend spoons after death.

Séances involve contact from the dead, as do *ouija boards*, more circumstantial evidence that there may be Soul Energy around us once the body passes on.

Déjà vu involves a brief flash of familiarity and recognition, which may involve memories from a previous incarnation. Perhaps this is evidence of Soul Energy carrying an imprint of its experiences and converting from one body's Soul Energy to another.

There have been stories of people who remember their past lives entirely, and have supposedly proven it by reciting incidents or pointing out landmarks that they knew from their prior life. Shirley MacLaine was the poster child for this phenomenon for many years, though many (including myself) dismissed her as being a new-age kook. She made far-fetched claims, such as being the lover of an Emperor many centuries ago. She had also claimed that extraterrestrials had landed on the front porch of her beach home in Malibu. She still seems like a crazy person to me, but others who have been more sober and sincere about their experiences have also insisted that there is something to the concept of *past lives* and of Soul Energy being transferred from one body to another.

In most of these paranormal cases, a type of energy seems to be involved. However The People Who Do Not Agree would come up with other explanations for all this post-death foolishness. They might attribute flying objects to a gust of wind rather than to Poltergeist Soul Energy. Or they might dismiss these stories altogether because they haven't been captured, measured, documented, repeated, and proven under laboratory conditions. In fact, James Randi, considered

a leader in the skeptic community, has offered a one million dollar prize to anyone who can prove a paranormal claim scientifically. To this day, nobody has won the money. James Randi is a magician himself and has been debunking supernatural claims for most of his life by exposing the frauds that make up the paranormal and psychic communities. He has even made multiple appearances on shows with David Letterman and Jay Leno and challenged famous psychics on television.

Part of me does feel that people like James Randi have presented compelling reasons to conclude that these stories are all untrue, and that the people who tell them are simply fraudsters looking for fame and wealth. On the other hand, maybe the explanation for the fact that no one has claimed his prize is that supernatural experiences and connections with the spiritual world cannot always be summoned at will. Perhaps psychics do have some ability to connect with Soul Energy. But they go one step forward and claim to be able to do it at will, in order to make a living from it. This is the part that might be fake. Maybe Uri Gellar, who many thought to be a fraud, actually *could* bend spoons at times. (Despite his public discrediting, he has continued to fervently claim that he can do so.) But then he got greedy and tried to make a living off of it and do it consistently, and this is where he had to fake things and eventually got caught. Or maybe Uri Gellar and Shirley MacLaine are completely lying, but there are other, less attention-seeking people in the world, who actually do have these types of gifts and are simply uninterested in having to prove it to anyone. Perhaps it is their very real abilities that has given others the idea to capitalize on all the mystery and unfortunately invite doubts on the entire subject altogether.

Just as a dog can hear high-pitched sounds that we can't, perhaps there are a few genuine people who *can* connect with energies that exist at higher, unknown frequencies. Maybe some psychics are not so crazy and I should stop rolling my eyes every time one of them hands me a card. They may have antennas attuned to energy types that we don't.

In the end, I think it comes down to whether you believe there is enough circumstantial evidence to prove the existence of Soul Energy or not. Individually, each piece of evidence does not seem to stand on its own and can have counterpoints given against it. And not all of the paranormal stories or concepts may be true. I have no idea which ones are or aren't, but tales of zombies, vampires, alchemy, and the occult seem more farfetched than the idea of Ghost Energy.

But collectively, with so many stories told by so many people over so many centuries—even with some of them possibly being fake—there is a broad spectrum of evidence that points in the same direction. Circumstantial evidence seems to show that Soul Energy exists.

Like the recent discovery of nuclear energy in the 1930s, or solar energy in the 1830s, we may one day “discover” what has been in front of our noses all along. We may finally crack the entire code on our microchip—our DNA—and discover the secret to Soul Energy. Or maybe we never will, because it's not meant for us Humans to discover.

Until then, while I have my doubts, I lean more towards the possibility that Soul Energy exists. So, let's say, after all that back and forth, we take a leap of faith and go with the assumption that it does. Now what? What is the purpose of Soul Energy and what do we do with it? Good question! One that I will try to answer in the next chapter.

Chapter III
Why are we here?
Creationists *vs.* Evolutionists



If we take a leap of faith, and are open to the existence of Soul Energy, does that imply that we are not on this planet as random freaks of nature? Can we conclude that we are planned freaks, by some intelligent architect who designed us?

If so, then who is that designer? Where is he or she or it? Why did they put us here on this Earth? What is our ultimate purpose?

Well... hmmm hem haw

This is the classic debate between those who we call *Creationists* and *Evolutionists*. Creationists insist that there is a purpose. That our Soul Energy, our lives, and this Universe did not come about by some coincidental Big Bang. Creationists feel that we were *created* by someone. Evolutionists madly disagree. They can get impatient with

faith and its followers. They promise to come up with an alternate, verifiable explanation as to how we got here. I know this because I saw them both debate the topic on TV the other day.

Moderator: Hello ladies and gentlemen, welcome to our show.

We have an exciting time planned for you tonight! On my right, we have our most famous and profound artist, Creationism. And here on my left is Evolutionism, distinguished and handsome as always!

Creationism and Evolutionism: Thank you Moderator. It's nice to be here.

Moderator: Well it's nice to have you here. I'd like to start the debate with a question we all seem to have had for . . . oh . . . a few centuries now Where do you think we come from? If there is such a thing as Soul Energy, what is its source or purpose?

Creationism (excitedly): Well, Mr. Moderator, I think the Source of Soul Energy is not on this Earth. It comes from somewhere, up there, and all you have to have is *faith* that it exists. And our purpose is to *reach* that somewhere. Up there. We have these wonderful books for you to read if you'd like to know more about it! They teach you how to pray to it, and how to make sure you become buddies with

it, so that once you leave here, you get invited to its house. I heard it knows how to throw CRAZY parties, with bright lights and singing and harps and wings and thrones and white gates and everything. There is already a huge guest list, although I think there is also a waiting line at the white gates, and some bouncer named Peter. But once you're in, you get to hang with these very pretty, very nice girls—seventy-two of them I've heard—and eat lots of grapes and dates and meet Peace and Love and *oh . . . it's so glorious!* Just *trust* me!

Evolutionism (irritated): I disagree. The Source of Soul Energy or any type of energy is *NOT* just “up there”. And what's all this smickity-smackety about disco lights and such?! Do you have a picture of it? Can you *prove* it? *We* think . . . we're not completely sure yet . . . that the Source of all energy is here, on this Earth, and in the Milky Way galaxy, or possibly in the cocoa beyond. That remains to be seen. But you don't have to accept it through faith, we're going to *prove* it to you. We're very close to conquering that Source and planting our flag on it and capturing it so that we can build some nice, useful something with it. Did you hear about our last big victory, with the Atom Bomb? We finally managed to grab on to nuclear energy and pin it down and prove it out and stuff it into a Bomb and . . . well . . . Bomb a country that needed to be Bombed. It was . . . awesome! The bomb, really!

Moderator (confused): I see. Let me try to recap this for our audience. Creationism, are you saying that you don't exactly, completely, and most assuredly know where the Source of Soul Energy is and its purpose in putting us here?

Creationism: slowly nods

Moderator: And Evolutionism, are you saying that you *think* you'll have an exact, complete, assured, indisputable, provable, measurable, capturable, manipulatable, monetizable, photographicable, Nobel Prize winnable answer to where we come from and why? But you don't have it now?

Evolutionism: reluctantly nods

Moderator: Neither of you has an answer?

more nods

Moderator (still confused): I see. Well thank you very much for your time. It's been a pleasure having you.

After the show, Creationism and Evolutionism were hanging out at a small cocktail party the nice TV station had organized for its honored guests. As usual, they were at opposite sides of the room, trying to pretend that the other didn't exist.

The Moderator, now that he was off the air, was in a mood to try and have them be friends. So he pulled reluctant Evolutionism to Creationism's corner of the room and said:

*“You both should be friends. Do you not understand?
You are one and the same. Like twins with two names.
Where one Science Song ends—the Devotion Dance begins.
The same birth, of the earth, sketched in two different ways.
One dances a while longer, to the end of the play.
And one will only sing lyrics that it knows of today.”*

Huh?

The two looked at each other, both feeling VERY confused.

What the ?@#&! was the Moderator trying to say?

Creationism, being the sensitive one, decided to take the first step at reconciliation—“Look, I know I seem a little . . . well . . . zippity-zappity to you at times. It's just that I'm uncomfortable not knowing things that your science hasn't explained. Who created your science anyway? Isn't there a Force or a Source behind that science? That's all we're trying to do, give that Source a name. Or at least appreciate that Source by offering it milk and gold and squatting on one leg and chanting 3.5 times a week.

If you do get to a point one day where you can prove everything in the Universe, maybe we'll stop with our zip-zap. Until then, we need some explanation for what we don't know. I've always

admired your work, Evolutionism. You've done a great job of progressing this far. It's helped us greatly during our time on Earth. Why can't we both agree that there is some unknown, and that unknown is cradling our world and our science in its hands. You continue to explain what's in the hands, and we'll continue to explain whose hands are the hands. We cool?"

Evolutionism started to feel better. He appreciated the fact that Creationism valued his science. He agreed that the science might have a Source. And the Source might have a Source. And that Source might have a Source. And on and on through many Milky cocoa Ways. In the end, Evolutionism had a respected place on Earth, where its Science Song could soothe a lot of people, healing them, heating them, feeding them, bombing them. And what science can't explain, religion tries to try. As long as both ways inspire people to be good, kind, and selfless, they could both be friends.

They were starting to smile at each other, and reached for a hug. But Creationism tripped on his shoelace and bent down to tie it. Evolutionism bent down to help him, and noticed with a shock and a gasp—"GASP! SHOCK! We have the same color shoelace! Even when living continents apart!?! We really ARE twins!"

And they both hugged and kissed and cried and then continued to sip their cocktails.

CUT!

There are two major schools of thought that we can fall under—Creationism and Evolutionism. Creationism talks about there being an intelligent design behind the Universe. It implies a Soul or a facet of ourselves that may exist after our Human Bodies die. It implies the ability to use one's endeavors in this lifetime to reach a better (or sometimes worse) place—Heaven or Hell.

Evolutionists are part of the group of The People Who Do Not Agree. They say that the Universe, our life, and this world are all random occurrences. Possibly starting with the Big Bang, some strings, and a Hags Bosom. There is no intelligent architect. Our efforts don't have any consequences beyond this lifetime. Their motto is go steal from your neighbor if you can get away with it, it doesn't matter in the long run!

Just kidding. They don't actually say that. Evolutionists can be as moral, if not more so, than the Creationists. Especially since they are not wedded to a particular faith and may be more open-minded than those who are. But their philosophy implies that this life may be it, and one should enjoy it as much as possible.

Their thought is that once we die, we simply decompose and become part of the Earth and its atmosphere. Even if there is another type of energy within us, whether it's called Soul Energy or Vitalism or our Life Force, it will dissipate into the air once we die, just like any chemical energy which is also released from our bodies. Just like the heat that dissipates into the air from a rapidly cooling cup of tea.

We would have no influence or say in where any of our energy would go next, it would be random and part of nature's normal processes. Just like the teacup couldn't be a good teacup and say its prayers in order to be accepted to Chinaware Heaven. Or a Nuclear Bomb wouldn't go to Bombs-hell once it releases its poisonous gasses.

Evolutionists would not agree that we can influence our Souls to go to an alternate place like Heaven or Hell. They would not agree that we can pray, or meditate, or fast, or baptize ourselves, or confess our sins, or click together our ruby slippers and influence our Souls to go to where we want them to go. There is no bad Air or good Air destination to which we should aspire, like the stinky air near a pack of skunks or the fragrant air wafting above a flowery garden.

Creationists shake their heads sadly at Evolutionists, who are obviously not going to be invited to the happening party in the sky. But though they believe in God, we know that the Creationists are not a peaceful people. They tend to have a lot of wars amongst themselves in terms of how to describe the source and destination of the Soul. Some call it Jesus. Some call it Allah. Some call it Yahweh. Some call it Brahma.

Allah! Vishnu! Jesus! Buddha!

Elohim! Zeus! Jehova! Erg!

Kapow! Bang! Boom! Zap!

Whamm! Thunk! Cr-a-a-ack! Splat!

Ugh! Oof! Erg! Oww!

Sock! Smack! Whack! Dishum-dishum!

So . . . we see that the Creationist tribes are not very nice to each other at times. Even though they disagree with the Evolutionists, they can't seem to agree on much amongst themselves either. These disagreements have been the source for much of the world's atrocities. Wars. Terrorist attacks. Witch hunts. Stake burnings. Excommunications and ostracism. Forbidden marriages.

But Creationists all have one thing in common—they try to explain the unknown. That which science can't explain. That's what we are trying to do as well, isn't it? By exploring Spirituality and what it means to us? The big question we all have is—what is the meaning of life? Why are we here? What is our purpose?

Ummm . . . you might want to sit down for this . . . I have some unfortunate news I am afraid. Just as the Creationists and Evolutionists don't seem to have a solid answer to that, I don't either. Despite everything I write in this book.

My brain tries to process the neverending formula of cocoa ways within cocoa ways within black holes within galaxies within milky black cocoa galaxy ways and

— Your session has timed out. Please retry again later. —

I'm sorry to disappoint you. Especially after that tiring trip we just took involving shoelaces, twins, and cocktails.

I wanted to let you know this early on, in case you are standing in the bookstore reading this book, and can still put it back and leave without having to buy it.

I don't have any idea of what, where, or who the Source of all Sources is. Or as to why we were put on this planet. I don't have the answer to the question we posed at the beginning of this chapter—why does Soul Energy exist? I do think there is a test we are being given, and our purpose is to pass that test and reach a better place. But as to why we have that test in the first place, why there is even a need for all the suffering we experience and why we couldn't already just BE where we are supposed to be . . . that I don't know. Why did God give Adam and Eve the choice of eating apples from a tree? Why didn't he just *not* give them free will, and then they wouldn't have fallen? Why do we need free will if we are already in Heaven or with God? Why did he kick us out of the nest? Why was Soul Energy even created in the first place?

I don't know. I don't have the answers to that in this book. But once we accept the fact that we are here, for whatever reason, I do have a few thoughts as to how we might get to a better place, both in this life and after we pass on. I do fall into the Creationism camp, because while I have my doubts, I lean more towards the idea that there *is* a reason we are here, and that we *can* influence our Soul Energy as to where it goes next. Where are those places and what do they look like? I explain my thoughts on that in the next chapter.

Chapter IV

Waiting Rooms *and* Reincarnation



If there is such a thing as *Soul Energy*, we naturally want to know where it might go after we die. What is the most happening spot, and where do the losers hang out?

Let's start with the opinion of those who believe in the least number of places for Soul Energy to visit. At the top we've got the Atheists, Agnostics, Evolutionists, Scientists, and The People Who Do Not Agree. From what we discussed earlier, they may not dispute that there is such a thing as Soul Energy or a Life Force or Vitalism or something that drives the Human Body and evaporates upon death. But they don't like calling the next stop Heaven or Hell or Purgatory or God. So for simplicity's sake, we'll call it *Air*. There is no bad Air (Hell) or good Air (Heaven). It's just *Air*. In other words, when the Human Body is no

more, our Soul Energy is released into the Air, where it mingles with the heat energy from the now cold teacup. Where it may further convert to wind energy or chemical energy or other types of normal, earthly, proven energy.

Even though I tend to fall into the Creationism camp, I don't dispute the fact that it's a possibility. Accordingly, we'll add that first to the list of places we can go: Air

Drilling down: According to various Religions, Soul Energy has many other places it can go. The most famous two being Heaven and Hell. We'll add them to the list.

- Air • Heaven • Hell

Note that the Creationists have different words for some of these concepts. For example, some refer to Heaven as Nirvana or Paradise. But for simplicity's sake, I've used the word *Heaven*, as an all-encompassing representative of our ultimate desired destination.

At the next level, we've got a whole smorgasbord of choices. This is where the Creationist tribes truly start squabbling. Some think there are only the two choices, Heaven and Hell. Some say there are other, intermediate places the Soul can visit, like Purgatory or Ghost-town or Reincarnation-ville. I vaguely recall there being one tribe that believes in Judgment Day, and I'm presuming that Soul Energy goes to a "Judgment Day Waiting Room" until then. Kind of like electricity, which just hangs out in a wall socket when it's on the bench without a project to rack up its billable hours. So now we can add to the list:

- Air • Heaven • Hell • Purgatory • Ghost • Reincarnation
- Judgment Day Waiting Room

I am including all of these Soul Energy destinations in one category, although according to the various Religions, they are not at the same level. But I am not sure about the correct sequence of steps or levels in a Soul's journey. Does Purgatory fall on the same level as Heaven or Hell or Air? In other words, is it a final resting spot for Soul Energy, with no other place it can go? Or is Purgatory just a stepping stone to Heaven or Hell?

Does Soul Energy first go through Plant forms, Animal forms, and then the Human form on its Reincarnation path? Or can it skip a species altogether?

Where do *Ghosts* fit in? Are they like runaway teenagers that leave home and end up in a seedy part of town because they have nowhere else to go, even though they had first hoped to go somewhere swankier? Are Ghosts comprised of Soul Energies that escaped from Hell, and ran away to a shady place called Ghost Town? On what rung of the ladder are they?

What if there are different types of Ghosts that a restless Soul Energy can turn into? Ghosts with unfinished Human business . . . Poltergeists . . . villainous Ghosts that possess another Human . . . virtuous Ghosts that try to help others . . . friendly Ghosts that go by the name Casper . . .

Who knows, really? Some people use Religion to come up with an answer. Some people throw their hands up and say they have no idea and until science can prove anything, they'd like to be agnostic or atheist, thank you very much.

I compare myself to Goldilocks. Religion is toooooo faith-based. Science is toooooo man-based. Spirituality is juuuuust right.

My Spirituality uses logic and some science to form a foundation for my beliefs, then allows for flexibility and open-mindedness to acknowledge that there may be possibilities beyond. Here is what I believe—at this moment. Besides the potential existence of Soul Energy, my ice-cream cone includes two more ingredients:

- Reincarnation
- Heaven

Reincarnation makes sense to me. Not because I was born into a Hindu family, I promise you that. I am just as dismissive of parts of Hinduism as I am of other Religions. Though I respect all Religions and their beautiful intentions, and I take bits and pieces from each, I am not a follower of any one. And not very knowledgeable about any particular one either.

From what I do recall, Reincarnation as described in Hinduism involves somewhere around 84,000 Plant and Animal lives. One must go through some, or all 84,000 cycles before reaching the exalted Human form where it is our sole window to achieving “Self-Actualization” and reuniting with Nirvana, or That, or something something . . . If you do not accomplish this, you can be sent back to the end of the line and forced to repeat the whole cycle. Where you will hear a voice that says, “Your mission, should you choose to accept it . . .”

Sounds almost impossible, doesn't it?

I am not sure if Reincarnation is described the same way within Hinduism and Buddhism or whichever other Religions incorporate that concept. I have no idea of the specifics. Nor am I very motivated to find out. If someone tells me, I am pleased to learn more. But it is not my priority to go out and research what I consider man-made details. How can we definitively know that there are 84,000 lives instead of 9? I am more concerned with the overall grain of truth which seems to be present.

All I know is that from the many theories behind Heaven, Hell, and the Afterlife, and from the explanations I've heard for the discrepancies in the world, the *general idea* behind Reincarnation makes the most sense. Here are a few reasons why:

- 1) Circumstantial evidence—As I mentioned in Chapter 2, the phenomena of child prodigies and past life remembrance seem to hint at the possibility of Soul Energy flowing from one life form to another. Child prodigies may be carrying over talents they acquired in a previous life. And it is said that those who claim to remember past incarnations have sometimes proven it by providing details that no one else could know except the person in question.

- 2) Evidence of Soul Energy in Plants and Animals—From chimpanzees who can do math, to faithful dogs capable of great joy and affection, to Plants who clearly thrive under warm light, being spoken to, and listening to classical music, I think there is too much evidence of Soul Energy in all living forms to limit its

existence to just the Human form. The Soul Energy in Plants and Animals seems similar to that of Humans in many ways, and it seems plausible that Soul Energy cycles through different incarnations.

- 3) There is no separate Hell—Reincarnation is based on the premise that a Soul is attempting to release one's self from the cycle of rebirth. There is no separate Hell, with devils and pitchforks and fire. There is only Heaven, which is wherever our Souls go when we liberate ourselves from the physical body. We will look at the concepts of Heaven and Hell more closely in the next chapter, but I lean towards the view that Reincarnation, or the cycle of rebirth, *is* the Hell from which we are trying to escape. It is a credible explanation for the terrible suffering that we witness.

- 4) Explanation for discrepancies in the world—Reincarnation seems to offer a reason as to why some seem to suffer more than others. Reincarnation is based on the premise that over many lifetimes, the suffering experienced by each of us evens out.

Let's examine this last point in more detail. It is thought by some Religions that Soul Energy caught up in the Reincarnation cycle may have started out at the lowest life form, perhaps as a Plant. The Plant can be subject to the pain of not being watered, being eaten by insects, or whatever suffering is possible for that particular life form. The Plant can also enjoy beauty and love. It might be blessed with a green thumb

owner who lovingly sings to it and puts it in a pretty pot and maybe takes it to Plant Shows or whatever fun things happen to a Plant in its Plant life. It sounds like I am making fun, but I am serious. I don't know the details, but I've heard that each life form—Fungus, Fern, Shrub, Tree, Bug, Bird, Dog, Monkey, and finally Human—has its share of pain and beauty that it can experience. The pain or beauty can manifest itself in many ways and vary in when and how long it is experienced in each life.

Let me tell you the story of an unfortunate Plant that suffered greatly in its leafy lifetime. I am not known to have a green thumb. I am also not known to be a killer. But I can't seem to keep a Plant alive. Many years ago, my roommate was getting fed up with trying to decorate our home with gorgeous, oxygen-giving, healthy Plants and then finding them brown and withered after coming back from a long trip away. Apparently I kept forgetting to water them.

So one day she brought home a cute miniature Cactus from a conference she attended in Scottsdale, Arizona. Scottsdale is known for these little Cactus Plants—the length of a finger, not more than a few inches. They come in these clay saucer dishes, and they are popular tourist gifts.

I thought it was absolutely adorable. I am usually indifferent as to whether Plants grace my home or not. But I cooed at this prickly little Cactus, and gave it a place of honor in my very own room.

I was even more ecstatic upon learning that the reason my roommate gifted me this Plant was because I didn't have to water it often. Whereas the other Plants required watering at least once, or twice a week, this cute little cuddly prickly Cactus needed watering only *once a month!* With *one teaspoon!* Cactuses require the least water of any

known Plant form, that's why they can survive in the desert.

No more having to lug around an annoying watering can that required repeated refilling. All I had to do was give this low maintenance Cactus a few drops of water, once a month. A task I could even accomplish with my water bottle from the gym as I passed it by every day. Green thumb training wheels, how could I go wrong?!

I could. And I did. In my defense, I had the very best-est of intentions. Really, I did. But it turns out, I watered the Cactus even less than the other Plants, because it was so low maintenance and undemanding that I was able to forget about it completely. And because it was in my room, and not subject to my roommate's scrutiny, I . . . well . . . I . . .

I killed it. *Sob!* The other Plants had merely suffered in my care, eventually coming back to life grudgingly when I would attempt to pour bucketfuls of water on them an hour before my roommate was supposed to return and I suddenly remembered my responsibilities. But the Cactus . . . OH GOD . . . OH GOD, OH GOD . . . please forgive me . . . I LOVE YOU MY FORMERLY CUTE CUDDLY PRICKLY LITTLE CACTUS . . . I AM SO, SO SORRY! I HOPE WHEREVER YOU ARE, AS A BIRD, MY FUTURE IRS AUDITOR, OR AS A SELF-ACTUALIZED CACTUS IN NIRVANA—YOU ARE HAPPY! REST IN PEACE, MY FRIEND.

I killed a Cactus! I killed a Cactus! I can't believe I killed a *Cactus!?!*

Now what does this have to do with Reincarnation and the cycle of rebirth and suffering? Well, here is one example where a Plant enjoyed lots of beauty and Happiness in the first part of its life—thriving and hanging out in the Arizona sun with its fellow Cactus friends—and

then suffering greatly while sitting lonely and dehydrated on my dusty bookshelf.

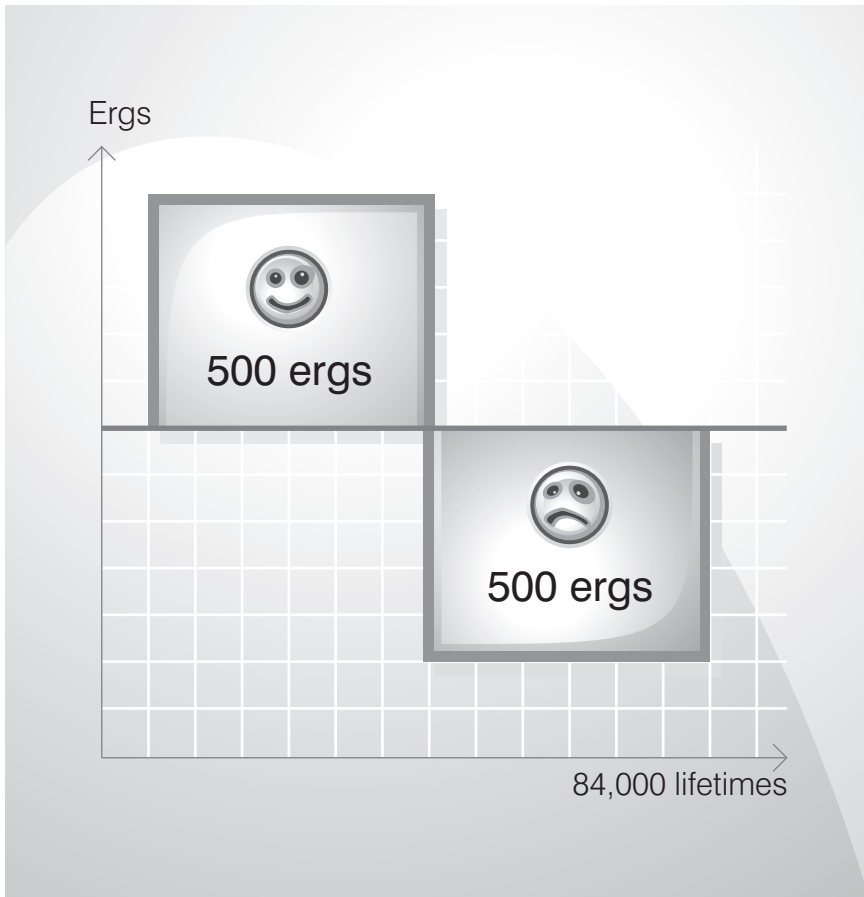
Compare that with, let's say, a Begonia that has the opposite experience. Perhaps the Begonia Plant spent its childhood in a garden, where it enjoyed the sun (good) but mostly got chewed on by insects and peed on by dogs (not so good). As an adult it was placed in a loving home that watered it every day, and sang to it, and read to it, and bought it expensive, organic, gourmet Plant food.

Both Plants experienced pain and joy, but at different times in their life, in different forms, for different lengths of time. The Cactus had a better first half, was miserable in the second part of its life, and died young, while the Begonia had an average first half, an amazing second half, and lived to a ripe old age.

Once they were released from this species—and went on to serve their time as Tumbleweed, Seaweed, and other Plantkind—they would then advance to the Animal kingdom (supposedly the next step)—suffering and enjoying life as Dogs, Cats, Spiders, and Koala Bears. After going through all 84,000 life forms, perhaps skipping some of them due to commendable behavior (this is supposed to be true!), the Soul Energies of the two Plants would finally arrive at the Human form. Where they could try to gain entry to Heaven.

To me, the notion that every Soul Energy has to go through the same tests—from basic to difficult—over time—is a logical explanation for why we see discrepancies in the world. Remember, these tests or contrasting phases in life don't span just one lifetime, they may extend over millions of years and thousands of life forms. Let us say each of us

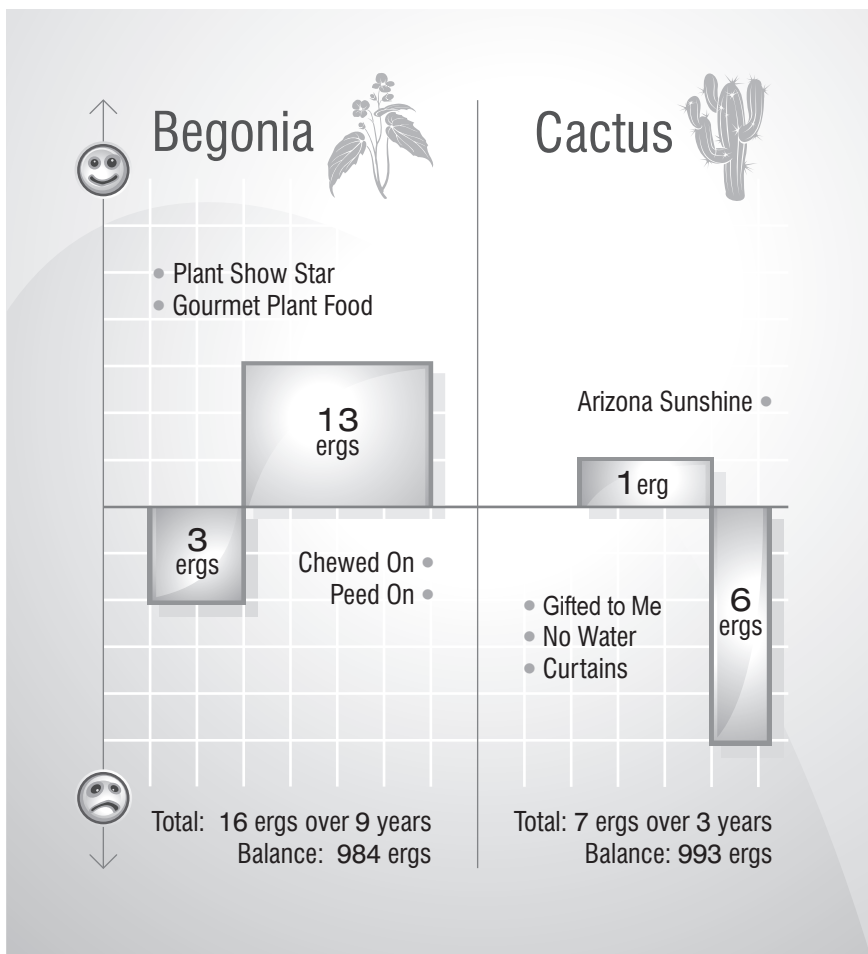
is subject to 500 *ergs* 😊 of Happiness and 500 *ergs* ☹️ of UnHappiness during our entire Reincarnation cycle.



Each Soul Energy might have to go through a 1000 erg cycle, which may be experienced differently. Some of us might have more sorrow front-loaded into the first half of our Human or Animal or Plant life, while others have it evenly spaced throughout, whereas someone else might have almost no sorrow in their current life, having already paid

their erg☹️ dues in a previous incarnation.

Maybe some of us are even-keeled emotionally and experience fewer ergs in a year—happy or sad—while others are more prone to ups and downs and go through their ergs faster in that same one year. Maybe the Universe gives someone going through a major rough patch a small sprinkling of happy ergs☺️ during that time so that their spirits are kept up and they never hit rock bottom.



In a future incarnation, the poor Cactus might be reborn as Happy Dwarf, who will lead an amazing life. Perhaps he gets married to Brad Pitt, and is considered quite beautiful, has lots of great rainbow kids, and is filthy rich. People might think he has the best life ever, and be obsessed about his every move and what he wears every day. In that incarnation he is never thirsty (though maybe hungry) and lives 75 mostly happy years.

The Begonia, on the other hand, might be reborn as Grumpy Dwarf, and die young at 23. He doesn't have a great life, having been born in the projects, and having suffered in various ways.

Child celebrities are an example of people who might have a heavy dose of good periods in certain parts of their life, and then the complete opposite for the rest of it. They experience mass amounts of fame and adoration early on, and may later feel abandoned or depressed when that success fades in their adulthood.

On the other side of the spectrum, someone like Susan Boyle had her dreams come true later in life. Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote her famous books at 65. Colonel Sanders founded KFC after 70. These may be examples of people who experienced more ergs☺ of Happiness later in life. Of course, it's hard to gauge someone's periods of Happiness or UnHappiness from afar, we don't know what is going on internally. Drug-addicted celebrities constantly worried about losing their looks and unable to love anyone but themselves are not my idea of people that are happy.

There are so many other contrasts in the world. Repressed women in backwards societies . . . children losing limbs to landmines . . . families

living in crushing poverty . . . random victims of violent crimes . . .

. . . compared to those who seem endlessly blessed, playing an unusually lucky hand that appears dealt from an unshuffled deck of cards.

Yet in the end, it is said that the *ergs* we experience will most likely equalize over our many incarnations. Each of our fragmented Soul Energies—yours, mine, the pet hamster's—each of us WILL go through 500 ergs☺ of Happiness and 500 ergs☹ of UnHappiness. And if we don't achieve Nirvana within those 1000 ergs, we have to restart the whole Reincarnation cycle again with a new set of 1000 ergs. Like an arcade game. Or something like that.

Some might argue that we Humans DO have the same test in one lifetime, and therefore reincarnation is not necessary or true. They would say that we experience the same amount of sorrow and joy in this *one* life form, although it may not seem so from the surface. They might say that the sorrow or joy we experience is up to us, based off the deeds that we commit, and the mindset that we carry.

I could go along with the idea of there being only one lifetime for each of us, it is not out of the question. Maybe, maybe not. But I have a hard time understanding how infants or children who die young can have the same “test” or experience as someone who lives a long life. It just doesn't seem fair, though I could be wrong.

However, what seems a little *more* reasonable is the idea of *several* lifetimes enabling us to reach the goal of Heaven. With so much disparity in the world and the repeated stories about past lives and other such phenomena, it seems more likely that we have the same complexity of tests over a *span* of lifetimes.

I know all of this may sound confusing if you are hearing it for the first time. But to summarize in a simple way:

There are several lifetimes and forms our Soul Energy can travel through—Plant, Animal, Human, and perhaps others we don't know about. "Hell" is the cycle of rebirth itself, where one experiences joy, keeping the Soul tied to the physical form, but also great suffering, which manifests itself in different ways. The goal is to release one's self from this cycle of rebirth and reach a final destination termed "Heaven".

For the rest of the details on Reincarnation—which order, how long, are we able to skip life forms—I cannot even venture a guess. Is it:

Human → Ghost → Plant?

or

Plant → Animal → Human → Human → Nirvana?

or

Human → Judgment Day Waiting Room → Staff Angel →
→ Senior Angel → Managing Angel → Partner Angel →
→ Guardian Angel?

(Shrug)

But just because I don't know the exact details and I cannot *prove*

the theory of Reincarnation, does not mean I cannot have a little faith that it might exist. I neither look at the world through the lens of a Scientist, nor the contacts of a Religionist, but through both, using my own clear vision and Mind. By looking at the clues around us, I think Reincarnation is logical and probable. However, tomorrow may bring me that indisputable, miracle-backed proof to make me think otherwise.

So now that we've analyzed and dissected the frog of Reincarnation, let's talk next about how we can find our prince—the most coveted of prizes—Heaven.

See you there

Chapter V

Heaven, Hell, *and our* Happy Graph



This chapter is a long one. And it gets a bit difficult to swallow when thinking of how we would actually apply these concepts.

So let's add a fourth Commandment here before we begin: *Thou shalt not think too deeply about incorporating any of these philosophies into your life until we get to the end of the book.*

Don't worry, be happy! And speaking of “happy”

THE HAPPY GRAPH

. . . . let's start with the idea of *Heaven*. As discussed in the last few chapters, the definition of energy says that it should have the ability to transform to other types of energy. We explored the idea of Soul

Energy in a Human converting to Soul Energy in a cactus or Soul Energy in a pet. Heaven may be the ultimate type of existence to which Soul Energy aspires. So what would Heaven feel like, be like, look like?

Well, if I relate *my* vision of Heaven in earthly terms, it would consist of chocolate, good books, chocolate, good movies, chocolate, good friends, chocolate, free massages, chocolate, no work, chocolate. I will pass on the 72 virgins, thank you very much, but I appreciate the kind offer . . . ?!

That's how *I* envision Heaven. You can assemble *your* vision the way *you* like. Whatever "floats your boat" is what I say.

Indeed, some sacred books have most generously undertaken the burden for us, etching in cosmic stone the idea of what Heaven looks like and what it takes to get there. Feel free to borrow from one of *those* beautiful portraits, there is certainly nothing wrong with any of them.

However, we may be trying to describe a plane or level of Soul Energy existence that is not explainable in man-made terms.

Let's take a step back and look at this goal at a more macro level.

What are we all trying to achieve? What is the driving force behind cans of Red Bull at exams, kissing up to the boss, hauling ourselves to the gym, two tiny weeks of vacation, worrying about retirement, cleaning the baby's bottom, and other never-ending tasks in our never-ending rat race?

We all know what drives us—feel free to chime in again—"Happiness".

Money = Happiness

Good Body = Happiness

Vacation = Happiness

Comfortable Retirement = Happiness

Baby, *sans* dirty bottom = Happiness

Isn't that what we are all striving for? That perfect, complete, never-changing, never-ending, never-amending, glorious, restful, graspable, undeniable, and permanent state of Happiness where we can finally plop down on comfortable cushions, put our feet up, and exhale with a big sigh of Happy relief?

Now some people will say there is a *reason* we don't have that perfect, unrippled, steady line of Happiness. They would say that we need to go through a few storms in order to be appreciative when the sun comes out. They would argue that contrasting types of emotions are *necessary* in order to recognize Happiness.

Yes, within a man-made paradigm, perhaps. I suppose I would not have appreciated, as much, the current positives in my life had I always had them from the beginning . . . or at least known someone *else* who did not have those positives so I could contrast my experience with theirs.

For example, suppose I have a nice car—but I didn't when I was younger—I can appreciate it now. Or, perhaps I have a nice car—but my neighbor doesn't—so that's how I know *mine* is *nice*. “It's all relative” everyone says.

Yes, I agree. It is all relative. Here on *Earth*.

However, if you could appreciate or experience Happiness *without* having to go through the contrasting or not-so-happy experiences, wouldn't that be better? Wouldn't you prefer having a nice car and knowing it and being happy because of it, without having to go through years of climbing the corporate ladder and stingy saving in order to finally buy it? If it was possible to be equally delighted with something *without* having to do the work, rather than *after* all that effort, theoretically, wouldn't that be ideal?

Yes, here on Earth, adversity can have its place. Those who have gone through a lot of pain can usually relate to other people better. Until you have gone to a deep, dark, depressing place yourself, sometimes it is hard to be sympathetic to those who appear more dramatic than down. And sometimes, having struggled for what you earned keeps you humble when better times finally do come.

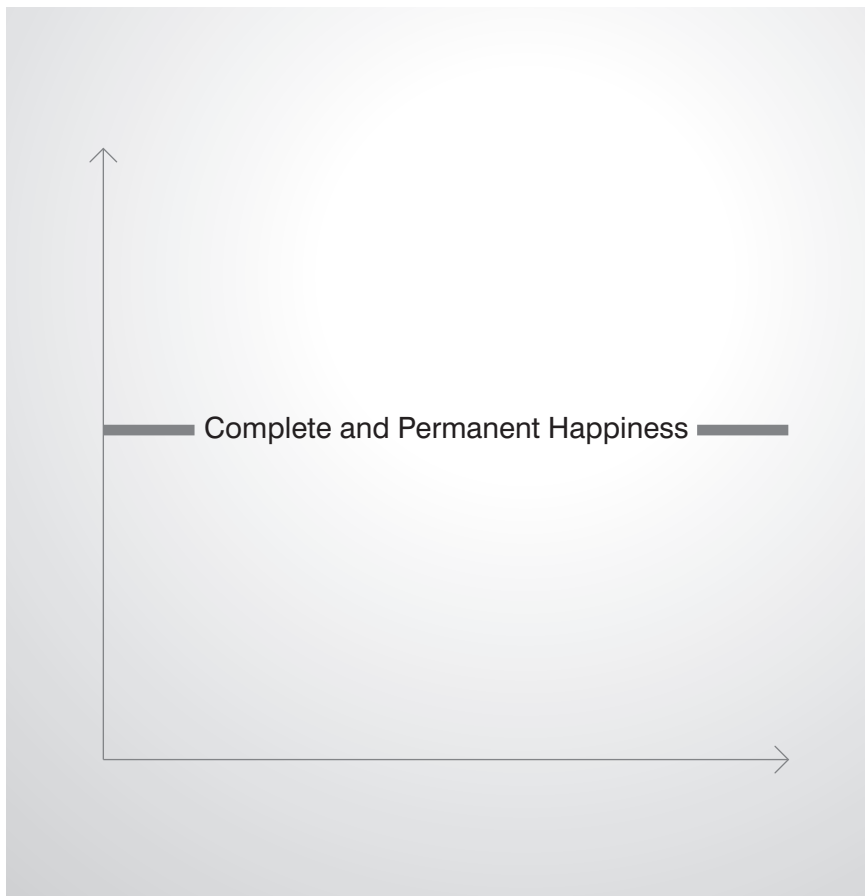
Even so, if you could be in a place where you would already be in harmony with other Souls, where you wouldn't have to struggle to achieve bliss, wouldn't that be "Heavenly"?

I am assuming most of us would say YES. Despite everything, if you *still feel* you prefer the ups and downs of life, then I have some whips to sell you.

Therefore, if Happiness is what we are all striving for, it seems logical to conclude that Heaven consists of pure, complete, permanent Happiness. For eternity.

Whew! How do we achieve that? *Can* we achieve that? Is there something we Humans can do, in our current incarnation, to speed up and increase the likelihood of us reaching Heaven?

Let's take a look at what constitutes Happiness. To make this easier to visualize, let's plot the desired state of continuous, steady Happiness on a *Happy Graph*. A Happy Graph measures our levels of Happiness or UnHappiness at different points in time.



Now, let's ask ourselves what kinds of things would affect that steady Happy Graph line. I'll start with my own example. What is one of my most favorite things? You should know that by now! Chocolate makes

me happy. Because I don't want to alienate any guys with too many girly examples, let's add *Beer* as well. (No, I will not plot *Getting Laid* on the Happy Graph! Too many reasons why!)

On a scale of 1–10, how happy does Chocolate and Beer make us? I'd say a +3.

Now, what could make us *unhappy*? Gaining weight from that Chocolate or Beer. We'll plot *ChocoBeer Gut* as a -5.



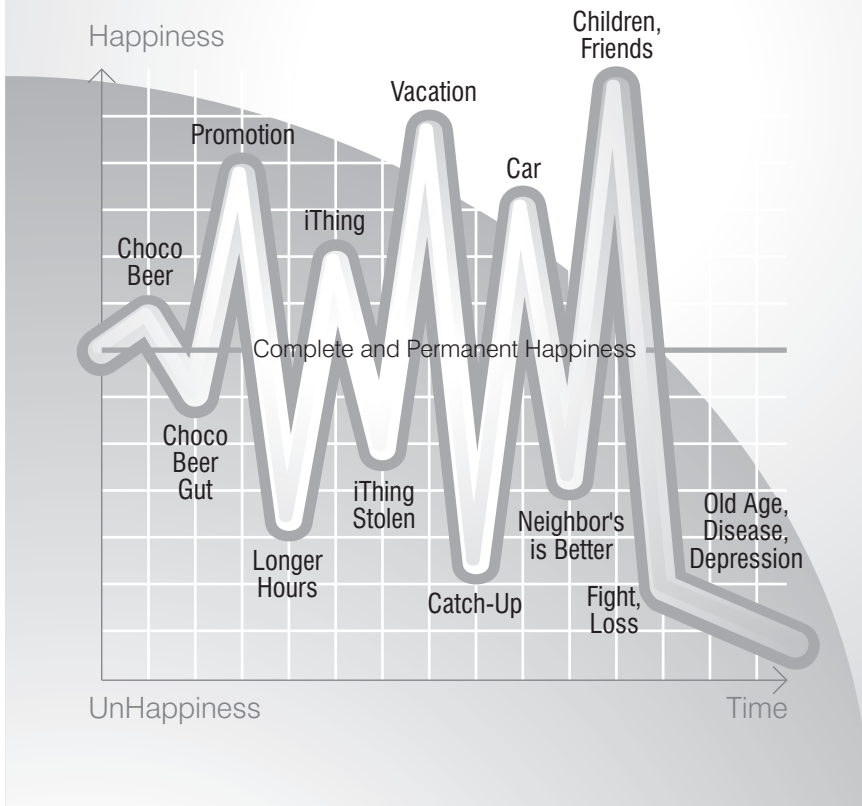
Other things that make us happy—Promotions, iThings, Vacations, Cars, Friends—to name a few. I will plot them on the graph (next page). Meanwhile, please obey Commandment #1 and *Do Not Take Me Literally* in terms of how high or low the data points are on the Graph. This is for *illustrative purposes only*. We are *not* measuring the value of a Promotion vs. good Friends. *Do not* send me angry letters telling me I am shallow. I already know that. I also know that the sources and levels of each person's Happiness can be different.

What makes us unhappy? Surprisingly, the same things that make us happy can also make us *unhappy*. For example, a Promotion is a great achievement, but it may also come with more work and longer hours. That could make us unhappy. A shiny, new, state-of-the-art iThing would certainly make many of us happy. But having it stolen a few months later would certainly *not* make us happy. Vacations are what many of us live for, but having to later catch-up at work can erase any good the Vacation just did. A new Car is great, until a neighbor gets a better Car. Then we might become envious, or dissatisfied with ours. Family and Friends can make us very happy, but fighting with them occasionally can make us unhappy. Losing a loved one who passes away (God Forbid!) can make us very, VERY unhappy.

A few other unhappy occurrences in life I'd like to add to the graph: Old Age, Disease, Depression.

Actually, this unhappy train of thought may start to depress *me*, and possibly *you*, but there is a point to all this which may lead us to permanent Happiness. So let's push through.

Happy Graph



This varied set of points gives us a visual of how our Happy Graph might look over the years. As you will notice, there are many peaks and valleys, with some higher or lower than others.

What does this tell us? Notice how everything on this graph, happy or unhappy, is related to an *external* factor: an *Object* or *Place* or *Time* or *Person* or *Sense* or the *Body* or *Mind*. Cars and iThings are external

Objects, as is the money that a Promotion can bring. The Promotion can also be considered a *Mind* pleasure, i.e. the feeling of satisfaction and pride one feels in the achievement. A Vacation and the Workplace can be thought of as *Places*, involving wide-ranging emotions. Old Age comes with *Time* and is usually not greeted warmly by anyone. Chocolate could be considered a *Body* or *Sense* pleasure, since it pleases our Sense of Taste.

Many of the world's greatest Religions teach that when our Happiness is attached to external factors such as Objects or Places or Time, it is guaranteed to be temporary and incomplete. Only Happiness that is *internal*, and Detached from all of the external, can be a complete and permanent Happiness.

Capiche? OK? Got it? Ready to take a pop quiz?

I thought not. Don't worry, the first time I heard something like this, in a nice, sober lecture hall years ago, sitting amongst hundreds of placid and peaceful devotees reverently drinking in every drop of knowledge—I was CONFUSED, annoyed, and TWITCHING! WHAT?!! What IS all this?!! ERG! THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ME! ALL OF YOU CRAZY FANATIC HIPPIES CAN TAKE A HIKE! I'M GOING BACK TO MY OWN, REAL, PRACTICAL, NORMAL WORLD! dang *nabbit!* stupid *rabbit!* or some irritated muttering like that

Now that I finally understand this esoteric ideology, I will do my best to grace you with my infinite wisdom in plain, easy English. Let's start with a list of all the . . . *external factors* . . . we're supposedly not supposed to be attached to.

- 1) Objects
- 2) Places
- 3) Time
- 4) People
- 5) Human Body and Five Senses
- 6) Results
- 7) Mind (which actually includes *everything* on the list above, but we'll talk about it separately)

From what I've been told, we're not supposed to be attached to the seven external factors on this list. Which pretty much encompasses everything and anything in life, as far as I can see. Seems a bit *twilight-zone*, no?

Let's explore all of this slooowly and go one by one. We'll start with the easiest one first.

THE SEVEN EXTERNAL FACTORS OF ATTACHMENT

I. OBJECTS

As we saw from the Happy Graph, when we attach our Happiness to *Objects*, what can follow is a Happiness that waves up and down. This can happen in two ways:

- 1) Physical change—The Object itself has a change in its physical properties. Your Car can get dinged, get coffee stains, need repairs, and in general be damaged or physically altered in many ways. Having it stolen is another physical change, in that one day

the Car is in your possession, and the next day it is not. Or, your Happiness might increase when you install a new stereo system, but last only until the next change comes along.

When you attach some of your Happiness to an external Object, you are attaching it to something that is in a *temporary state of being*. If something is in a *temporary state of being* and your Happiness is attached to it, isn't it logical that your Happiness will also be *temporary*? That your Happiness will change when the Object will inevitably change?

The point is that a Car or another Object is never going to remain exactly the same, so some part of your Happiness is guaranteed to change along with it.

- 2) Perception change—The second way your Happiness can be affected is by your Mind and its perceptions.

You may simply grow bored with your Car after a while, and start wishing for a Motorcycle. Or, as we noted from the Happy Graph, when your neighbor gets a better Car, perhaps a higher model, you may feel envious and no longer view your own Car with as much joy. What was previously a source of Happiness, a short while ago, has suddenly become a source of *UnHappiness*, or at least *less* Happiness. Imagine that! Who would think that an Object with absolutely no physical change can go from a +5 to a -5 on the Happiness scale in just a matter of minutes?

Yet at 9:00 AM on a Saturday morning, you come out to devotedly wash and admire your car in the warm sun, and upon

glancing down the street and seeing a more upgraded model parked in another driveway, the line on your Happy Graph instantly plummets. It is now 9:05 AM and you no longer like your car.

More than physical properties, the volatile nature of our perceptions has tremendous ability to cause shifts in our Happiness.

II. PLACE

Your Happy Graph line can also change when you attach your Happiness to Places. This can happen in the same two ways, through physical or perception change. Your *Country* could be devastated by a war or hurricane and no longer be the beautiful Place it once was (physical change). You think of your *Home* fondly as a nice, cozy Place to return to, but unfortunately you divorce your partner a year later and now associate the Home with sad memories (perception change).

Similarly, you may dread pulling up to the parking lot at *Work*. But that day there is a holiday party and you actually enjoy yourself. Nevertheless, the entire time that you are there, you have a little black cloud following you, even though it's a fun party, because . . . well . . . it's at *Work!*

Sometimes it is hard to live in the actual moment because your Mind has pre-associated levels of Happiness or UnHappiness with a Place. So much so that you are not able to enjoy it fully.

Even though the party itself might normally rate a $+4$ on your Happy Graph, it might drop to a $+1$ because the unhappy feeling of being at *Work* dilutes the level of your Happiness.

Instead, Detaching from *Places* simply requires you to bring an unbiased attitude to wherever you go. It teaches you to let go of pre-associated emotions and enjoy the current moment, wherever you may be. Remember that whenever you next visit the dentist's office or the IRS. Keep your Mind open, and maybe that root canal or audit will be fun! And if it is, congratulations, you are way ahead of me on the path to Enlightenment . . . !! But I'm working on it.

III. TIME

Youth = Happy | Old Age = Not so Happy
Summer = Happy | Winter = Not so Happy
Weekend = Happy | Weekdays = Not so Happy
Happy Hour = Happy

Need I say more?

In case I do, let me explain that the passage of *Time* is inevitable, as you know. I am not going to always be the age I am today, although lying about it does help. The exquisite moments you may experience on your wedding day cannot be frozen and savored in the exact same way forever, no matter how nice your photos might be. You might, in fact, experience *better* moments—at your tenth anniversary party, or, perhaps, during a root canal at the dentist (with your newly opened Mind).

Regardless of what they are, ALL moments, pleasant or unpleasant, are going to pass. Every moment is temporary, as is your Happiness if it is attached to Time.

IV. PEOPLE

Oh boy. Here is where this starts to get dicey. How can we *not* attach our Happiness to *People*? Are we supposed to be cold, indifferent, robotic saints going through life smiling benevolently at one and all with a dignified nod and a wise, all-knowing blessing along the lines of "*Go well, my child . . . May the force be with you . . .*" Are we supposed to be *Yoda*?

Emulating Yoda might not be such bad advice, unless you're emulating the drunk Yoda on YouTube . . . but no, that is not it exactly. And don't confuse attachment with *love*. You are always going to love your family and friends. But you can love them and still try to keep them from drastically affecting your Happy Graph.

This is one of the hardest points to understand, and some of you will now shut this book in a huff, right here, and say "That is so ridiculous! How can I not be affected by those I care about? I can only be happy if THEY are happy!"

That is a gorgeous and noble sentiment. I'm sure most of us think like that. But I am not going to lie here, I am not going to add a spoonful of sugar to make the medicine go down. The ultimate path to Heaven or Enlightenment *does* seem to entail Detachment from family and friends. However most of us are not aiming for complete Detachment, at least not in this lifetime. Yet there *is* a way to incorporate this philosophy in our current, material lives that can greatly benefit us.

Recognizing that the People in your life are not in your control is what is important to remember with this principle. Your loved ones will get sick, they will have their share of problems, they will hurt or

disappoint you. They will go through pain that you sometimes can't help alleviate, no matter how hard you try, and which you must silently stand by and watch. The key to remember, however, is that *it is beyond your control*. They say that the correct spiritual path for those of us still very much connected to the material world, is to do as much as possible to help those you love, and then accept when you can do no more.

Parents who have done everything for a wayward child will always feel anguish, but they can be sucked into that grief and be demolished, or they can continue loving and supporting their child while living their own lives as best they can. Spouses should be each other's best friend and be ready to do anything for the other (or perhaps I have watched one too many movies). Yet spouses should also develop separate identities, and realize that vesting every fiber of their Happiness in one person is a tenuous way to live.

In addition, Detachment from People doesn't suggest that you stop loving your family and friends. It just asks you to love everyone else as well, and not focus on your family to the exclusion of other Souls. Instead of having, say, three categories of People in your life—

- 1) People you Love
- 2) People you Like
- 3) People who are Lucky Assault is a Crime

—complete Enlightenment involves one category. *People you Love*. This would include strangers, enemies, friends, family, the gnarly old boss, *everyone*.

As I said, this is a tough and sticky concept to digest, but it will become clearer as you go through the rest of this book. Meanwhile, the takeaway for now is that People are not in your control, just like Objects, Places, and Time.

V. THE HUMAN BODY AND ITS FIVE SENSES

Our struggles and desires are driven by our five Senses—Taste, Touch, Smell, Sight, and Sound.

We like to *Taste* good food. In order to get good food, we may work harder or cook longer to reap the rewards of a nice, well-made meal or fine dining. If we weren't attached to the Taste of good food, we might be content to laze around and eat raw turnips from the ground. (Which is what my cooking tastes like, according to my brothers. I still have psychological scars from their cruelty. So I would love to be able to afford the services of a personal chef. I'm not spoiled for wanting a cook, and I'm not attached to my Sense of *Taste!* I'm just *traumatized!*)

But *some* people . . . *other* people . . . can get attached to the Sense of *Taste*.

Our Sense of *Touch* might drive us to covet higher quality blankets or pashmina scarves.

Our Sense of *Smell* might dictate the expensive perfume we buy, and the fact that we like to buy perfume at all.

Sight influences the desire to own beautiful artwork or a big screen TV. *Sound* requires that we add the hi-fi stereo system to go with the TV.

The five Senses are there for the convenience of the *Human Body* and its interaction with the external world. And they can be demanding.

How terribly sad when a person loses one of their five Senses! Not being able to see, or hear, can be a source of deep UnHappiness for someone, though there are those who conquer the challenge and don't let it affect their Happiness at all.

Nevertheless, our Body parts and Senses are susceptible to disease, accidents, birth defects, old age, botched plastic surgeries (physical changes), as well as societal standards of beauty and even one's own poor Body image (perception changes). The Human Body is like a machine—it runs well for a while, but eventually its parts break down. We spend billions of dollars trying to avoid the inevitable. In fact, as we all know, the battle for youth and beauty has become an affliction in almost all segments of society. People are so attached to their Bodies that they spend a lifetime in pursuit of its permanent perfection, which can never be achieved. And neither can permanent Happiness, when it is attached to the Body and its five Senses.

Therefore, I think I will give myself permission to go ahead and get that hot fudge sundae I have been thinking about for the past few hours . . . as well as skip my planned trip to the gym tonight. See how *fun* Spirituality can be?!

VI. RESULTS

There is a term in Hinduism called *dharma*. It is defined as conformity to religious law, custom, duty, or one's own quality or character. In plain English, it means fulfilling your job or responsibilities and not attaching yourself to the Results. For example, do your best to advance in your career, and do your work well, but don't get too

attached to whether the desired outcome of a promotion or raise will actually happen.

Besides Detachment from People, I find this to be the hardest to understand. How can I motivate myself to get up early every day and make it to work, 5 days a week, 50 weeks a year, and not hope to be rewarded for the efforts I am putting in? Why would I be doing all this if I wasn't hoping to go somewhere with it? I might as well become a hermit and go live on a mountain if it is going to get me the same Results either way! Right?!!

While it may be tough to undertake a task without any expectations, what I think the philosophy teaches is that the Results of your endeavors may or may not come about in the way that you intended. You cannot control what happens, you can only control yourself and your actions. By not attaching yourself to a specific path in life, by understanding that certain dreams may take longer, or that unexpected detours may occur, you are able to smooth your Happy Graph line in the face of life's unpredictability. And remain happy.

VII. THE MIND

Now. . . after going through that brilliant dissertation on the six other factors you should not attach your Happiness to, you can ignore everything I just said.

Sort of.

What I really mean to say is that the seventh factor we are about to discuss encompasses all the other six on the list. Because all the other external factors are a source of attachment only if your Mind allows it.

As we're beginning to see, ultimately, everything in life boils down to your *Mind* and its *perceptions*. Your Happiness changes if your Mind experiences a change. Even the first type of change—physical change—wouldn't be a factor if your Mind decided it *liked* dented, coffee stained, run down old cars. We see that it is not a mere cliché—Happiness really *is* in the Mind. Attachment to the six other factors occurs because your Mind attaches you to them.

In the past, I would have thought that the Mind and the Soul are one and the same. I wouldn't have understood why they weren't.

But according to some ideologies, and what I have come to realize, the Mind *can be* different from your Soul Energy. And it *can be* an external factor.

I am going to use a tech analogy here. I don't know how many of you are familiar with a *compiler*? In technobabble, a compiler is the middle layer between *source code* and output. Here is a description:

A compiler is a computer program that transforms source code written in a high-level programming language into a lower-level computer language, called the output. The most common reason for wanting to transform source code is to create an executable program. In addition, compilers bridge source code, or software, with the underlying hardware.

Soul Energy is like source code or a software program. It is high-level, but basic, because it has one simple instruction or desire—complete and permanent Happiness. That is what your Soul Energy wants.

The Mind is the compiler. It gets that request—*I want Happiness*. So the Mind says, “OK, well, from what I know, Happiness is derived from good food, a good job, good friends, and a good house. So I’m going to tell the Human Body which steps to take to obtain that.” The Human Body then gets instructions from the Mind to get its butt out of bed at 5 AM and get dressed to go to work, because the Soul wants Happiness, the Mind translates that to money and a job, and the Body receives instructions to show up to work. That is the output.

In other words, the Mind created an executable program giving instructions to the underlying hardware as to how to operate. It translated high-level language into low-level language. It acted as a bridge between the Soul and the Body.

Different ways to slice and dice this:

Source Code	→	Compiler	→	Output
Instructions	→	Translator	→	Action
High Level Language	→	Lower Level Language	→	Executable Program
Source Program	→	Bridge	→	Hardware
Soul Energy	→	Mind	→	Human Body
Happiness	→	Earn Money	→	Goes to Job
		Get a good Body	→	Goes to Gym
		Marry a good Body	→	Dates
		Have brilliant Kids	→	Procreates

In this way we see that the Mind can be an *external factor* that can

alter the true image of our Soul Energy. If it is *focused externally*. The Mind can be influenced by education and its environment. If external ideas are put into one's head—learn math, get a job, get married—the Mind starts issuing commands based on the external.

It is now easier to understand that if the Mind relies on the five Senses and the Human Body, or other external factors like Objects, People, Places, and Time—instead of listening to its internal Soul Energy—there will be a disconnect between the goal of *permanent* Happiness and the actual outcome of *temporary* Happiness.

For most of us, the Mind is focused on taking care of our Body, air-conditioning it, massaging it, clothing it in designer wear, giving it vacations, feeding it gourmet food.

For most of us, the Mind is focused *externally*. On the *Body*.

In the case of ascetics like monks, nuns, priests, and swamis, their Mind is focused *internally*. On the *Soul*. When their Soul Energy's source code asks for pure and complete Happiness, their Mind recognizes that instruction as one that can solely be fulfilled by internal factors, not external ones. Their Mind is filtering the code and the world through an internal perspective, not an external one.

When a truly self-actualized or enlightened person gets the instruction for Happiness that is hard-wired into his Soul, he reads it differently than the rest of us. His Mind does not translate it into Money, or Objects, or anything affecting the Body. His Mind realizes that permanent Happiness is not obtainable outside, in the world, but can only be achieved through the permanent Soul Energy within.

Some enlightened people completely withdraw from the world and

go meditate on a mountain. They Detach from the world physically as well as mentally.

Some may stay in the world to serve and teach others. So physically, they still take part in the material life, but mentally they remain Detached from it all. They are only indulging in physical matters in the pursuit of serving and teaching others. Not for the benefit of themselves. Some of what they strive to give others is *temporary* Happiness, and some of what they give are the tools and knowledge to reach *permanent* Happiness.

When they are feeding the poor at a soup kitchen, they are giving others temporary Happiness, i.e. food. When they are teaching others their faith, they are attempting to impart permanent Happiness. Either way, there is no attachment to tangible comforts for themselves, it is all done for the sake of giving others Happiness. They, themselves, are already happy at any moment, in any condition. It is pure *Soul Energy* that is driving their Body and actions, and not their *external focused Mind*.

This is what so many of the great spiritual masters have been saying for centuries—“Happiness is all in the Mind”. This is what we sort of, somewhat, kinda knew made sense, but mostly sounded too flowery and mysterious to understand completely before. However, I think it is a rather convincing philosophy once broken down into the basics we just discussed.

SCIENCE AND THE MIND

In addition, what I find Mind-boggling (pun intended . . . I crack myself up!) is that Quantum Physics seems to be confirming the same philosophy. In fact, Quantum Physics takes the importance of the Mind one step further. We just discussed how the Mind can change its

perception *emotionally* or *mentally*, in terms of how it interprets and attaches to external factors. But Quantum Physics says that the Mind can also change its perception *visually* or *physically*!

In other words, like the guy in the movie *Shallow Hal*, not only can the Mind decide it doesn't like a fat chick because it relates the concept of beauty to a thin figure (emotions), but it may even be capable of viewing that fat chick as one who is skinny instead (visuals).

What I am referring to is the research regarding *wave-particle duality*. Waves refer to energy that is *invisible*, whereas particles refer to physical matter that is *visible*. The idea is that all matter has both wave and particle properties, or two sides to it.

Albert Einstein and others discovered this possibility in the early 1900s, with the confusion over the properties of light energy prompting the investigation. Some thought light energy was of a wave nature, and others thought it had a particle nature. The wave-particle duality theory showed that light energy and other matter can possess *both* properties.

Recent experiments in Quantum Physics have come up with a conclusion that is even more startling. Apparently there was good reason that scientists were contradicting each other on the wave vs. particle debate. At times, only one of those sides is apparent to the Human Mind. In other words, an electron possesses both properties, wave and particle, but when observed by Humans, it seems to *ONLY* show particle-like properties. This phenomenon is referred to as one-sided dominance—in this case *particle dominance*. In other situations there may be *wave dominance*.

An experiment was conducted involving electrons. When an electron was *unobserved* by a Human, the electron behaved like a wave. Scientists

knew that was so based on measurements and other aspects documented through machines and lab equipment, when no one was looking. Perhaps while everyone was home asleep, in their beds, and the lab was humming away with activity overnight.

But the next day, when it was being *observed* by someone, the electron behaved like a particle. In other words, it looked and acted and measured like a visible particle, and not like an invisible wave, even when put through the exact same experiments as the night before.

When the scientists went away again, the electron went back to partying and doing the wave. When the scientists returned, the electron sobered up and became a steady, responsible particle.

Particle. Wave. Wave. Particle.

Peek-a-Boo! Goes the scientist. *I see you!* Says the Mind.

Imagine standing behind a camera and clicking a zebra, which comes out as pure black in the photo. Imagine checking its gender and finding it to be male. (Don't try this at home.) Then imagine setting up a hidden camera to tape the zebra when everyone has left, and finding it pure white and giving birth as a female in the footage the next day. Imagine never being able to see and measure and prove the white female side of the zebra as long as you were in the lab, personally conducting the experiment.

The idea of waves turning into particles and vice-versa is not completely new. The Big Bang was thought to have turned *energy* (waves) into *matter* (particles), such as stars, planets, and Humans. But the Big Bang posits that energy and matter had only ONE form at a time, i.e. a white zebra might have banged into a wall and turned into a black (and blue)

zebra. The Big Bang did not turn the zebra into black and white all at the SAME time.

In the case of wave-particle duality, the zebra *is* black and white at the same time, but you are not able to photograph both colors of the zebra together.

This paradox has been consistently demonstrated through repeated experiments, creating a buzz within the field of Quantum Physics. Still, what puzzles scientists is how mere observation, how the *Mind* can change the way matter looks and behaves. Unlike a chameleon, which actually does change its colors when it is aware of someone in its presence, the matter in these experiments does not seem to be changing. Instead, the speculation is that the electrons or matter remains as it is, and our *Mind* is the one that is doing the changing.

You may recall the optical illusion involving the appearance of an old woman when viewed one way, and a young woman when viewed another way. It is *both*, a drawing of an old woman, and a drawing of a young woman, simultaneously. Everything is there, at all times, and some people are able to see both sides to the illusion, if they try hard enough. But for most of us, we can only see one side.

Or, as in the case of color blindness, there may be many colors that exist in a painting, but not all of them can be seen by everyone.

In the same way, scientists wonder if the electron has both properties present—wave and particle—but the Mind can only see the particle side.

Now here is where I find this research exciting . . . if the Mind can change its view of a microscopic electron in this way, scientists have begun to wonder if the same thing can happen on a larger scale. For

example, what if a rock is actually energy when we are not looking, and only when we put our peepers on it, does it turn into a solid mass of *physical matter*? What if that “energy bar” is really just a swirl of invisible energy when we are not looking, but it turns into a bar when we look at it, because our Mind decides it wants a visual to chomp into?

And what if . . . drumroll what if we are actually Soul Energy when the Mind is not looking, but we turn into Physical Beings when the Mind *is* looking?

What if we look and measure like waves when the Mind is not the filter, and like particles when the Mind *is* the filter?

What if self-realized, enlightened people are the ones who can see all the colors, and the rest of us can only see black and white?

Quantum Physicists are actually trying to expand this research to see if it applies on a macro (larger) level. But it is more difficult because as waves get larger, they slow down and at heavier masses they begin to appear constant, almost as if they are not travelling at all. Thus it is even more difficult to see the *wave* side of matter when it constantly looks like a steady *particle*. Perhaps this is why living beings are always perceived to be static matter rather than fluid energy. We are energy, and we are light, and we are travelling, but we don't realize it because we're heavy and appear to be in a state that is constant.

This may seem farfetched, but it's not when you realize that we have already proven all of this on a microscopic scale with atoms and electrons.

In this regard, Religion may be way ahead of science. There is an old term in Buddhism called *maya*. “Illusion” is the exact translation for the word *maya*. That is no coincidence. Someone, somewhere, a long time

ago, was able to see both sides of the optical illusion, to see all the colors of the painting, and has tried to pass this knowledge down to us over the years, to those who would listen.

Maya is used to describe the world we live in. It suggests that we are all in a trance, a part of a play in which we take up a storybook character, and go about our fictional lives, which are not very real, but that are real to us as long as we are part of the play. Buddhism teaches its followers to realize that this is all an illusion, a mirage, and there is a reality that exists on the other side if the Mind is willing to see it.

In fact, even the film industry may be ahead of science. *The Matrix* depicts a world that is artificial, but real to Humans, with the truth being something else.

Perhaps the day is not far when science will catch up to Religion and Hollywood and prove that our reality is different from what we think. Perhaps it is only a matter of time.

I'm creeped out, I'm not sure about you? I know I am the one who is writing this book and expounding on these theories, but to see that science is actually proving some of this makes me want to run to the nearest ashram and spend the rest of my life in frantic meditation. If meditation is indeed the path to training the Mind to see the whole picture. I don't know.

Regardless, you can see why I believe the key to Heaven and permanent Happiness may be Detachment from the Mind. As we learned, the Mind can alter our perceptions emotionally—through attachment to external factors—and visually—through incorrect processing of physical reality.

So of the seven external factors of attachment, we realize that the Mind is the only one that matters, in the end. The other six exist because the Mind *allows* them to exist. Objects, People, Place, Time, Results, the Body and its five Senses . . . these are all translated by the Mind as being important and the solution to our desire for Happiness. And unfortunately, every one of these factors—the ones that we cling to so passionately and with so much hope—is an external factor that is not in our control, and is not in a permanent state of being. They are temporary. As will be our Happiness as long as our Mind continues to attach to the external.

HEAVEN AND HELL

“What is Heaven and what is Hell?” That is the question we were first trying to answer, way back at the beginning of this chapter.

I think we did a decent job of defining Heaven as a state of permanent and complete Happiness. A state where Happiness does not swing up and down, but where the line is steady and constant.

Whether that state is a place that includes pearly gates and virgins and spa treatments and calorie-free chocolate, I do not know, though I highly doubt man-made paradigms can accurately picturize what it will be like.

Instead, based on our analysis, it seems likely to me that Heaven is a state of pure energy, where we are no longer attached to the physical “container” (the body) that currently traps and isolates our energy. A state where we are free from the cycle of rebirth, which means we are free from reincarnating as Humans, Animals, Plants, Ghosts, or other

forms where suffering can exist. A state where we are free from the external, where our Soul Energies are fused together in one peaceful continuum of space. We may refer to this state as Heaven, or God, or the Universe, it is all one and the same.

Perhaps this ultimate destination exists at a higher plane or frequency unknown to Humans. Perhaps dogs can connect to these higher frequencies, and we cannot. Perhaps Rover is more evolved than us, and he is merely humoring his owner with his obedience while the ultimate joke is on Humans, because we are the ones who are slaves to our pets' needs.

(I'm kidding . . . I think?)

Perhaps there are many dimensions that Humans are not meant to know about until our Soul Energies are liberated from the cycle of rebirth.

Or perhaps there is no Heaven Soul Energy state, and we continuously transform into different types of earthly energy, in an endless cycle, forever, just like the other types of energy that exist in the Universe. Perhaps our Soul Energy transforms to heat energy or kinetic energy or nuclear energy once it is released from our bodies. Perhaps the Mind has no influence on what Soul Energy converts to next, and so there is no point in trying to get anywhere. Perhaps, as the atheists insist, there is no God, and there is no way to get to a higher level, we just *are*, and then we are *not*. That's it. Game Over. The End.

Ummmmm

Hmmmmm

Stephen Hawkings would call me a fan of *fairy stories*, because I do prefer to believe that there is a greater, higher state to attain. I don't

know of many people or Religions that feel our current life, here on this Earth, is already Heaven. Taoism seems to come closest, in that it says you can be happy and reach an enlightened stage just by following the course of nature while you are alive. Yet even that Religion teaches you to aspire to something better, in its own way.

In the previous chapter, I briefly mentioned that I do not include Hell in my ice-cream cone. No, it's not because I am perpetually peppy—I do believe in Hell, but I don't believe it is a separate destination where our Soul Energies might be imprisoned, forever, if we don't reach Heaven. As many Eastern Religions suggest, it seems logical that Hell is on this Earth. Hell is the suffering that we go through when we have not yet liberated ourselves from the cycle of rebirth. Which we call reincarnation.

Fires and devils and pitchforks in Hell? It is right here in our world. Have you ever been to a sweatshop in muggy Bombay in the dead heat of summer? I have. It is . . . *unbearable* seems too mild a word to describe how inhumane the conditions can be. Fire? The heat I experienced in that windowless, non-air-conditioned, tiny room—filled with the sweaty bodies of children and adults working compactly together—was as hot as any fire one would find in Hell.

In Greek mythology, Sisyphus was a king punished by being compelled to roll an immense boulder up a hill, only to watch it roll back down, and have this repeated throughout eternity. Pushing a rock up a mountain and having it come down again was the Greek's idea of Hell.

How about those who had to rebuild their whole lives after Hurricane Katrina, the Japanese Tsunami, the Partition of India, the exile of the

Tibetans, and all the other disasters that have befallen us? Or how about our constant pursuit of Happiness, day after dogged day, which brings some progress up a Happiness hill, only for us to slide back down again, at any moment?

Demons who torment the damned? Who poke them with their pitchforks? We have a nice selection of tortures to choose from—right here—on this planet—rendered in prisons, by school bullies, by abusive husbands, by extremists, through chronic pain afflictions, Holocaust crematories, and more.

I think all the horrible images we have of an eternal Hell can be found, in abundance, in assorted displays, right here on Earth. I can't help but agree that Hell is not a separate place, but rather embedded in the miseries we endure as we move through various life forms.

And yet . . . life can be beautiful as well.

People who own almost nothing giving generously to others. A good Samaritan risking his life to save a victim. Mothers willing to sacrifice every ounce of Happiness for the sake of their child. Breathtaking nature. A baby's smile. Having a lifelong dream come true. Dancing. Singing. Friends. Food. Graduating. Graduation Parties. Kindness. Compassion. Marrying the person you love. Any kind of love. There is no shortage of beauty, pleasure, and warmth in this world, and it may be greater than the amount of suffering that exists.

However, that beauty, pleasure, and warmth can be viewed in many ways. As tempting Sirens keeping us attached to this life and the cycle of rebirth. As positive Karma that has been earned by Souls who are being rewarded for their goodness. As a gift from a higher power to cushion

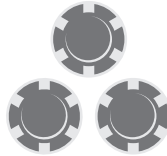
our difficult journey along the way. Or as a teacher and example of what we should strive for, and a taste of the pure love and Happiness that we will experience once we do reach the gates of Heaven.

The idea that we are living in Hell, and that Heaven is someplace else, may seem pessimistic I know. But to me that explanation makes sense. The Buddha said that “Attachment is the Root of all Suffering.” Perhaps by learning to Detach a bit, we can find Heaven, right here, on Earth. Perhaps we can enjoy our cheese while it's there, and learn to be equally content when it's not.

Detachment is a difficult endeavor, however it is one that can liberate not only individuals, but society as well. In the next chapter, we continue to explore the path of Detachment. Detachment from the Ego.

Chapter VI

The Ego



What is the Ego? It is a term often thrown about in the mystical, magical world of Spirituality. Eckhart Tolle wrote a book featured by Oprah called *The Power of Now* which focuses on the Ego.

For those who do not—*gasp!*—watch Oprah, and have never heard the term *Ego* before, let's understand what that means. The Ego being referred to here is not the one defined by Freud in connection with the ID and the Superego. The Freudian reference was framed more in psychological rather than spiritual terms, and is different, though it does have shades of similarity. In the world of Freud, the ID and Superego are at extreme opposites, with the ID responsible for all the dreams we might have, whether they can be fulfilled or not, and the Superego responsible for all the morals that we have, which may sometimes prevent us from

fulfilling the desires of the ID. The Ego is the mediator, trying to meet the selfish hopes of the ID while also adhering to the principals of the Superego.

The spiritual concept of the Ego is different, and there is no reference to terms such as the ID or Superego. There is only the Ego, which is used in conjunction with the word *identity*. The Ego is defined as the creation of, or attachment to, one's identity in the materialistic, illusionary world. It is also responsible for one's perception of other people's identities. The Ego is responsible for me viewing myself as a female, Indian, Financial Planner, age 29ish or so.

When I spoke of Detachment from the Mind in the previous chapter, that was another way to explain Detachment of one's self from the *Ego*. When the Mind recognizes that the external world is just an illusion, or *maya*, it realizes that it is merely following a role in a play. It is acting. And so are others. The characters are not *real*. It realizes that it has created an identity which is in pursuit of external means of Happiness such as objects, people, places, time, or sensory pleasures, which are entirely temporary. Even the body is temporary. When the Mind realizes all that, it no longer creates the Ego for itself or others. It is able to look past the Ego into the Soul.

But it is not enough to recognize our own Ego. It is just as important to recognize and look past the Ego in others.

A human being is part of a whole, called by us the Universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace ALL living creatures

—Albert Einstein

Chapter VII

The Mirror in the Stranger



How many of the following emotions have you experienced during your life?

- irritation
- anger
- sadness
- worry
- fear

Which of the following are dreams and goals that you have had?

- a fulfilling job
- a loving partner
- a nice house
- a stable retirement
- lots of Happiness

Now, turn and look at the next person who comes your way. Perhaps they are in the room with you, or perhaps you can see someone on the street outside your window. You can even turn on the television and look at someone there.

Look at them closely. At first you might notice what they are wearing, how hot they are, how not they are. You might see the uniform of a postman or the suit of a businessman. Try to look past that and truly see the person moving *inside* the clothes. No, don't try to imagine them undressed, you are not about to speak in front of an audience and you are not Marcia Brady.

But notice their movements and their gestures. The fact that they have hair and skin and two eyes and two ears and can walk and talk. Mostly notice the expressions on their faces. You may detect a hint of worry behind a stoic demeanor, or a touch of weariness behind a smile. You may notice someone excited to be out on a beautiful summer day. You may see someone angry and scowling at the world. You may see someone shocked when her archrival, whom she thought she had killed, has returned from the dead. Except for the drama on the soap opera, do the expressions on these faces look familiar? Do you recall a time when you might have had the same feelings?

Guess what? These people are just like you! The person you see in front of you has also experienced the same struggles and joys that you have. They have the same hopes and dreams, they have the same desire to find Happiness, to reach a place in life where they are finally at peace with the world.

Yes, their clothes and skin color might be different. They might

speak with an accent or belong to a completely different profession. But if you stare at them long enough, without looking too creepy, you will begin to realize that the person and their Human Body is a cover for another Soul Energy, just like yours.

If you look closely enough, you will begin to notice *The Mirror in the Stranger*. You will begin to notice that each and every person that exists in this world is a complete and exact reflection of you!

Wait a minute, you say . . . they are not exactly like me?! I'm prettier, funnier, whiter, blacker, browner, weirder, thinner, cuddlier than that other person!

Well, yes, of course you are, if you compare Ego to Ego.

If you are identifying yourself as Preeti Gupta, luminous and bedazzling Financial Planner and soon to be Author (or whatever your name, profession, and opinion of yourself is), then you are different from Joe the Plumber or the annoying coworker wasting space in the next cubicle.

But if you stop identifying yourself with anything external, and therefore temporary—if you strip away the clothes and the Human Body and the conditioned mindset based on what you have been taught in this life—then underneath it all you will recognize that the Soul Energy pulsing through the person in front of you is exactly like the one coursing through you.

If you take away the compiler (the Mind) and the hardware (the Human Body) and go back to the original source code, guess what both of your Soul Energies are coded for? The desire to achieve complete and permanent Happiness.

The other person wants to be HAPPY, just like you!

Welcome to the 5 o'clock news. Our top stories for today:

Rod Blagojevich, a politician in Chicago, has been accused of selling political favors for profit and appears to be relishing the ensuing publicity.

Raj Rajaratnam, founder of the Galleon Hedge Fund Group, has been prosecuted for using insider tips to profit his fund at the expense of other shareholders.

Bernie Madoff, formerly respected investment advisor, receives life sentence for running the largest Ponzi scheme in history, costing investors over \$18 billion dollars.

Marion Jones and Barry Bonds, along with an unprecedented number of athletes, found guilty of steroid use, in hopes of obtaining higher paying contracts for enhanced performances.

What do all of these people have in common? They do not recognize *The Mirror in the Stranger*. They do not stop to think about other people. They only see themselves. Their source code is wired to ask for permanent and complete Happiness, just like that of everyone else. Their Minds translate this to lots and lots of money, as much of it as possible. Their Human Body acts on that translation and tries to pursue that goal. Like many of us. The problem is, these people have no guilt when obtaining that money at the *expense of others*.

There are 7 billion Souls on this planet. 7 billion!! Just in case you didn't get that, one more time . . . 7 BILLION! 7000 MILLIONS!! TONS OF PEOPLE! NOT JUST YOU!

What gives you the right—Mr. Politician—what gives you the right to take taxpayers' money, which they have painstakingly earned, and keep it for the benefit of the four people in your family rather than spend it on the millions of others who have trusted you to look out for their welfare?

What gives you the right—Mr. Wall Street Guy—what gives you the right to ask for insider tips, to profit your hedge fund at the expense of millions of other shareholders in the market? What if everyone behaved like you? What if more people started cheating the system—if enough people were to do that, don't you realize that the stock market would eventually collapse? Is that what you want? Or will you be too rich to care by then?

Don't you realize that if everyone were to try and obtain their Happiness at the expense of others, eventually *you* will be on the receiving end of someone else's selfish and harmful actions? Just like the person who is on the receiving end of yours?

If everyone thought that they were special, and could cut in line, pretty soon there would be no line and chaos would ensue.

In the same way, if everyone starts cheating and doing the same thing that you do, our society would eventually disintegrate. People like you want everyone *else* to follow the rules, you want everyone *else* to be ethical. You would be the first to be enraged if you were cheated by your mechanic or electrician or accountant. You wouldn't want them to

profit unfairly at your expense. Yet you want to be the one who sneaks through the system. Let everyone else play by the rules, while you get to be the exception.

What gives YOU the right, out of the billions of Souls on this planet, to be the exclusive one happy? Don't others want to be happy too? God has already given you the abundant blessings of a free country, an elite education, a large home, a job you enjoy. He could have given these blessings to anyone else, he didn't have to give them to you. There are a few billion other Souls on this planet who would consider themselves lucky to have your privileges. What makes you so special that you feel *you* deserve more money or Happiness than other people on this planet—what makes you think YOU are the chosen one? Do you think you are God's special pet?

Or do you think you deserve ALL the credit for conjuring up your current position, do you think you deserve ALL the credit for the fact that you were born healthy, born into a secure home, born with many opportunities? Do you not attribute *any* of that to the retractable grace of a higher power? Are you truly so arrogant or ignorant that you believe you can take selfish advantage of the gifts that God has given you and continue to exploit them for yourself? Why, then, should God give these gifts to you? Why shouldn't he give them to someone else, someone more deserving, someone who will enjoy them for himself, yes, but also use them to benefit others?

Don't you see what would happen if we all acted like you?! The world would become a selfish place and everyone would end up miserable!

Yet thanks to the decent and moral hearts of many people, they do

not abuse and exploit their God-given privileges. They do not cheat the system. Therefore our society continues to survive and can absorb the harmful behavior of those who grab more than their earned share of Happiness.

Some shareholder, somewhere, lost money on the stock that you profited from due to your dishonest activities. But because many people are wise enough to know right from wrong, to not perpetuate greedy behavior even when they learn about it—the possible chain reaction, the possible falling of the billions of dominoes that make up our society, that meltdown is halted.

SHAME ON YOU!

Humans gassing humans. An innocent man strapped between two cars and torn apart during a riot. A woman being gang raped as onlookers watch on.

Corruption, theft, rape, wars, domestic violence, bribery, cheating . . . these are all a result of attachment to the Ego. They are examples of the Mind translating the Soul's desire for complete and permanent Happiness into permission to grab money, power, land, pleasure, at the expense of everyone else. They allow a person to completely separate himself from others, so focused on his own race and identity and desires, that he is able to destroy another Soul in pursuit of his own Happiness.

Genocide . . . it is the very embodiment of the Ego. The deliberate killing of a large group of people based on their ethnicity, their Religion, or their *identity*. The Holocaust, Rwanda, Darfur, Bosnia, the Khmer-

Rouge, the Partition of India, these are all examples of genocide at its worst, although any war can be credited for pitting identity against identity. The Ego has been responsible for the deaths of millions, conceivably billions, of people since the beginning of time.

The Suicide Bomber . . . it is said that the typical profile is a young man with no job or wife or kids. Someone who doesn't have a strong sense of self in the community, or strong prospects for the future. Someone who is able to blow himself up in the pursuit of an identity—or Ego—which will be that of a martyr who will be revered when gone. One whose name and photo will be remembered in some way. What else is this but the desire to construct an Ego, or the feeling that there is nothing to live for because one doesn't have any?

Family and Friends . . . what else are family and friends except people to whose Souls you have been exposed? Yes, you may have been tied to a sibling or parent by birth. But the real attachment comes afterwards, Souls whose vulnerabilities, dreams, and strengths you grow to know over time. You find their habits and jokes and lifestyle similar to yours, and so you identify with them. Even if they seem different from you on the surface, you still love them, because you have learned that deep inside, they are not so different after all. The reason you don't feel the same way with a stranger is you have never come to know them. With family and friends, it's easier to see your own reflection because you have had a lifetime to look past their Egos and to connect with their Souls.

Fame . . . what else is the desire for fame, but a manifestation of the Ego? Yes, fame can bring luxuries and physical comforts. No doubt. So for some people, that is the attraction. But one can also get that by

winning the lottery. There is a separate obsession for fame itself, fame that gets you recognized on the street, your photo in a magazine, people asking for your autograph and sending you fan mail. As often said, we are a society infatuated with glamour and fame.

Fame, to me, is validation of a person by others. Everyone *approves* of you, everyone *loves* you. Yes, you may enjoy the fact that they are also *jealous* of you, but what is jealousy except another form of love or admiration? Fame, jealousy, admiration, respect, awards, the paparazzi, people paying hundreds for your concert tickets—all this is a validation of *I*. *I*, in my Human Body, am wanted and loved. *I* am a good incarnation, a desirable life form. *I* will never be alone or unloved. *You* are separate, my Mind does not know that we are the same. Since I think that you are not a part of me, since I do not recognize your Soul Energy as connected to mine, I want to get as close to you as possible in the only way I know how—through intimacy, or friendship, or in the case of strangers—fame.

If fame were to come our way, most of us would enjoy it. We would be thrilled to get awards and recognition and have people approve of us as we walk into a room. Despite our knowledge that it is temporary and that our Human Body will disintegrate tomorrow. That all of the fame bestowed on this Human Body will have to be earned *again* if we take on another life form. Struggling actors can spend a lifetime trying to achieve this goal . . . child celebrities can spend a lifetime mourning its loss. The desire for fame, the desire to be a martyr, the desire to do anything to validate one's Ego, or identity, can consume a person entirely and drive them to desperate measures.

The Ego, as we see, can be extremely dangerous and extremely powerful. As soon as a Soul Energy identifies with its Human Body, with its pleasures, with its position in society and the tangible wealth it is able to surround itself with . . . that is when we begin to see the evils of the world emerging.

Yet most of us, including myself, will never be able to Detach completely from our identities or *Ego*. I highly doubt that I will ever become Mother Preeti or Mahatma Gupta. And as soon as I attach myself to my identity, and choose to continue living a conventional life, I am going to need things.

I can't very well be Preeti Gupta, Financial Planner, and not have a job. I can't not have a house. I can't not have clothes. I can't decide to partake in the material world, and then be able to remain completely happy even if I lose my job and can't pay my bills. My Ego, Preeti Gupta, has committed to paying rent. It has committed to certain responsibilities. If it is my dharma, or duty, to fulfill any earthly responsibilities that I have agreed to undertake, then how can I not be worried when I am not able to do so?

I can't Detach completely from my Ego, but I can remain Detached enough to recognize when circumstances are beyond my control. I can do my best to fulfill my responsibilities, and then let go and allow my destiny, or Karma, to take care of the rest. I can use my knowledge of the Ego and its temporariness—its illusory nature—to smooth the line on my Happy Graph as much as possible.

More important, I can use my knowledge of the Ego to become conscious of the identical Soul Energy hidden behind those I meet

every day. I can sense the ache in a stranger's sad eyes, and I can see my own sadness reflected in them.

Their pain reminds me of my pain. Their impatience and tiredness reminds me of mine. I've acted impatiently before. Maybe not exactly in the same way. Maybe I had a better excuse for it, while the cashier, scowling at me as I fumble for my change, appears to have none. But how do I know if her behavior is inexcusable, how can I judge? Maybe she had a disturbing childhood. Maybe something happened in life to make her that way. Maybe I would be exactly the same, or worse, had I gone through the same life incidents. Or maybe not. Maybe I would have reacted better. It's hard to know.

So I'll leave that for God to judge, for destiny to decide. And I will forgive her either way. If this stranger is truly acting inconsiderately, she will affect her Karma accordingly. If she is normally a friendly person, if she is just having a rough day or going through a tough period . . . then showing her compassion will enhance my Karma. Instead of snapping back, I can say a kind word, a gesture I would have appreciated during *my* stressful day some time ago. If enough people were to treat others the way they would want to be treated . . . if enough people were to empathetically hug someone who looks in need, even someone they do not know . . . then one day when you or I are going through difficult times, and in need of cheering up, magically—it would seem—out of nowhere, someone would be there to embrace *us*. We might all learn to recognize ourselves in the other and see *The Mirror in the Stranger*.

I can adopt a child. I want my own biological children, for all the reasons that other people want them. Since I am almost 40, it may not

be possible. But I can use my knowledge of Soul Energy and the Ego to adopt a child, and recognize that though the child didn't come from my womb, the child is mine just the same. The body is temporary, relationships are temporary. I may be someone's sister or friend or mother in this life, in another life I could be a stranger. Earthly relationships can be beautiful, but they are also part of the Ego. There is nothing wrong with engaging in them, unless they are used to block out relationships with others. If I marry someone who already has children, I can use my knowledge of identity and the Ego to look past the fact that his children were borne of another woman, and embrace their Soul Energies as if they were just like mine, just like the biological children I may or may not have. Because they are.

I can show tolerance to those who are different from myself. Love between a man and a man or a woman and a woman . . . between someone who is black and someone who is white . . . between someone who makes less money and someone who makes more . . . these are problems for those who associate love with the Ego or the identities of the Souls involved. Instead they do not realize that they are witness to an even higher form of love, one that transcends artificial identities or barriers and connects one like Soul Energy with another.

I can see a stranger, and find my brother in him. I see the same odd gestures, the same hopeful smile, and I am able to project the vulnerabilities and eccentricities that I love from someone I know, onto someone I don't know. I may find that stranger different at first, one whose habits are unfamiliar. But I might have thought the same of my own family and friends had destiny not placed me in their path. I might have found

my own brother odd had I met him as a stranger. It is only because I have come to know the Souls of my family and friends that I am able to love them more than the people around me. But warmth and compassion for everyone comes easily once you are able to project yourself or your loved ones onto other Souls that cross your path.

We are all in a trance, a part of a play in which we wear our costumes and say our lines. When the play ends, so will our storybook characters, but we believe they are real. As long as we identify ourselves as Preeti Gupta, Financial Planner, or Joe Shmoe, the Plumber, our identities, our *Egos* are very much alive. Our attachment to the Ego is what drives the choices in our lives, and the more we identify with our Ego, the more we separate ourselves from the identities of others. The longer the list becomes of why *you* are different from *me*, why we are not alike, the more I am able to find you strange, scary, wrong. The more I am able to hurt you, to hate you. But the shorter that list becomes, and the less Ego I have, the more I am able to realize how similar we really are.

The Ego is demanding, but it does not have to be in control. The Ego is in control only as much as we allow it to be. Fulfill the responsibilities of your Ego, but beyond that, look past it, and look compassionately at the thousands of other Egos that will pass by you in your lifetime. Look past their clothes and bodies, look at the emotions reflected in their eyes, and recognize those emotions as your own. You were once in their place, feeling that emotion, and you may be there once again, perhaps sooner than you think. As you become aware of the sameness of those around you, your Ego will no longer control you or separate you, and you will begin to see . . . *The Mirror in the Stranger*.

Chapter VIII

Karma—Can it be Proven?



Wait! . . . (you might be wondering) . . . why is it so important that we recognize The Mirror in the Stranger? It's a nice moral concept, but what does that have to do with *my* Spirituality and *my* Salvation? What's in it for *me*?

Apart from the Utopian answer of *Because it's not just about you, Spirituality is also about helping others*, I have a more appealing answer for those of us who are not so evolved on the spiritual path.

The more you help others, the more good Karma points you are supposed to earn, and the higher the chance that you will go to Heaven.

Karma is so familiar a concept it has made its way into mainstream vocabulary. There are songs dedicated to the idea, such as “Instant Karma!” by John Lennon, and “Karma” by Alicia Keys. There is a

Superheroine from Marvel Comics named Karma. Karma is used to refer to user reputation ratings on websites. There are Karma soaps, perfumes, medical supplies, audio equipment, and water purification systems. There is a hybrid car named Karma. Karma is even the name of a natural dog food made by Proctor and Gamble. Don't ask me to explain that one.

Its basic premise is well known—any good or bad you do for others will eventually come back as a reward or punishment to you. But there are many who question whether we can prove Karma. Can we use scientific knowledge to explain how it might work?

Well, not yet, otherwise we'd all have learned about it in the classroom. It's still a theory, a philosophy. How does one go about proving a philosophy? In the chapter on Soul Energy, we examined *circumstantial evidence* to determine whether Soul Energy might exist. In the chapter on Detachment, we used *logic* to validate the idea of disconnecting our expectations of permanent Happiness from temporary, external factors. In the chapter on the Ego, I just yelled at people. That was fun!

In regards to Karma, how do we go about exploring its possible existence? Can we use circumstantial evidence or logic to see it in action?

There are those who say we can, especially when accounting for short-term Karma. They would say that short-term Karma is not a spiritual concept so much as a *cause-and-effect* type philosophical or scientific or mathematical likelihood. You are a nice person. People will be nice to you. You help people out. People will be more likely to help you.

You are an ogre-like person who is not Shrek. People will be ogre-like to you.

Mo: Wham!

Larry: Owww!

Larry: Kapow!

Curly: Hey!!

Curly: Plonk!

Mo: Why I oughta . . . !!

See a pattern here?

The People Who Do Not Agree might say that it doesn't always happen this way. Nice people don't always get treated nicely. And vice-versa. It would seem that what they are implying, if they don't believe in cause-and-effect, or Karma, is that some things happen in the Universe that can be completely random.

Let's examine that concept for a moment—"randomness". What does this mean? Do things happen in the Universe that are truly "random", or is there always a cause? Because that is at the heart of the debate around Karma, isn't it? Some say that blessings or tragedies are due to Karma earned from past behavior, and others insist there is no correlation and it is simply due to good or bad luck.

There are two different ways to define the concept of "randomness". The first would be related to events that happen that can never be traced to anything—they just materialize out of thin air.

The second definition would say that every effect can be traced to

some cause, but the cause-and-effect process is random in that there is no “free will” or “intelligent Mind” or “Karma” behind anything. Everything can be attributable to biology, chemistry, physics, and the rest of science.

I don't believe the first type of randomness exists. I believe that even in a coin toss, the outcome might seem random, but it is a result of different variables such as the air pressure in the room, the velocity at which the hand tossed the coin, gravity, and other factors. It is conceivable that if someone knew how to throw a coin at just the right speed and angle, they could bias the results where they would no longer appear random, and heads might appear more than tails.

I base this off a scientific principle called reductionism.

Reductionism refers to the theory that any complicated object or process can be broken down into the interaction of its simpler components. In other words, a complex system is nothing other than the sum of its individual parts. Reductionists would say that the Big Bang was not random, there was a series of chemical reactions that took place beforehand which resulted in the chain of events that followed. Yes, it was random in that the Big Bang created life unintentionally. The Earth and Humans might not have been the product of chemical events that were “intelligently designed”. But those events can certainly be explained.

Holism is the idea that a complex system is not just the sum of its parts, but may have additional properties based on the fact that these individual parts have come together. In other words, if you have ingredients A and B and C, each with separate properties, you may

not be able to predict how ABC will work because when the three ingredients are combined, the new complex system can change and act in a way that is different from the sum of its parts. Holism is usually associated with people who call themselves religious or spiritual.

I am more of a spiritual person than not, but I happen to agree with the reductionists. To me holism is simply reductionism, with a part of the system not yet known to us. In other words, maybe there is an unusual change when A and B and C are added together, but if our science evolves to that point, it may eventually be able to measure or prove what will happen in that scenario. We may not have gotten there yet, but when we do, we will find the missing link.

So I believe that everything in life can be traced to some chain of events that caused that situation to occur. I think that if the exact same cocktail of variables were to be replicated, the exact same outcome would occur every time. However it is rare to be able to replicate every tiny variable in a coin toss, for example, so more often than not, the results appear to be random because one does not know how to change the factors involved to create a more biased outcome. But theoretically, I assume it could be done.

Similarly, when life appears to be treating someone unfairly, I highly doubt it is random. There must be SOME cause for that effect to happen. The People Who Do Not Agree might agree that there is an explanation for why one person gets into a major car accident, while another wins an Oscar. But they would not agree that this is attributable to anything other than neutral causes that are biological, chemical, or physical, as opposed to “volition”, “thinking”, or “Karma”. This is what

they mean by “random”. Good and bad luck may be connected to general scientific causes but not to spiritual ones. The Human Mind has no control over what it does, it is simply a passenger, with “synapses” and “firing neurons” and “hormones” in the driver's seat.

However, if we believe that there is enough circumstantial evidence to point to the existence of free will, the intelligent Mind, and Soul Energy, then it is likely that there is a spiritual component to someone getting into an accident, or someone winning a prize, or someone being the recipient of a kind gesture. We might not know what it is yet, but it is based on the sum of numerous individual events that have happened previously, whether ten years ago or a thousand years ago. Not so coincidentally, that is what we would define as Karma.

So the word “random” does not mean the same thing to me that it might mean to others, because I believe that every effect has a cause. Some of them are in our control, and some of them are not. “Random” can be used to describe those situations that were created through a sequence of lifeless, unplanned scientific events. But “random” cannot be used to describe a scenario where a stranger gives a homeless guy \$100, out of sheer kindness. I just don't find it possible that this generous act can be credited to passive chemistry or biology only. It is more probable that there is a factor of active choice, values, and compassion as well. I believe there is something causing those neurons or hormones to react in a particular way. No, there is no “holistic mystery”, everything can be explained and reduced to its simpler components. We simply are not yet evolved enough to link “kindness” or “evil” or “good luck” or “bad luck”

occurrences to their individual elements, some of which may involve Karma and Soul Energy.

I also find it conceivable that, one day, Karma could be proven out through other means—Osmosis, Magnetic Energy—there are many scientific principles that might apply in some way if we could expand our Minds to consider them.

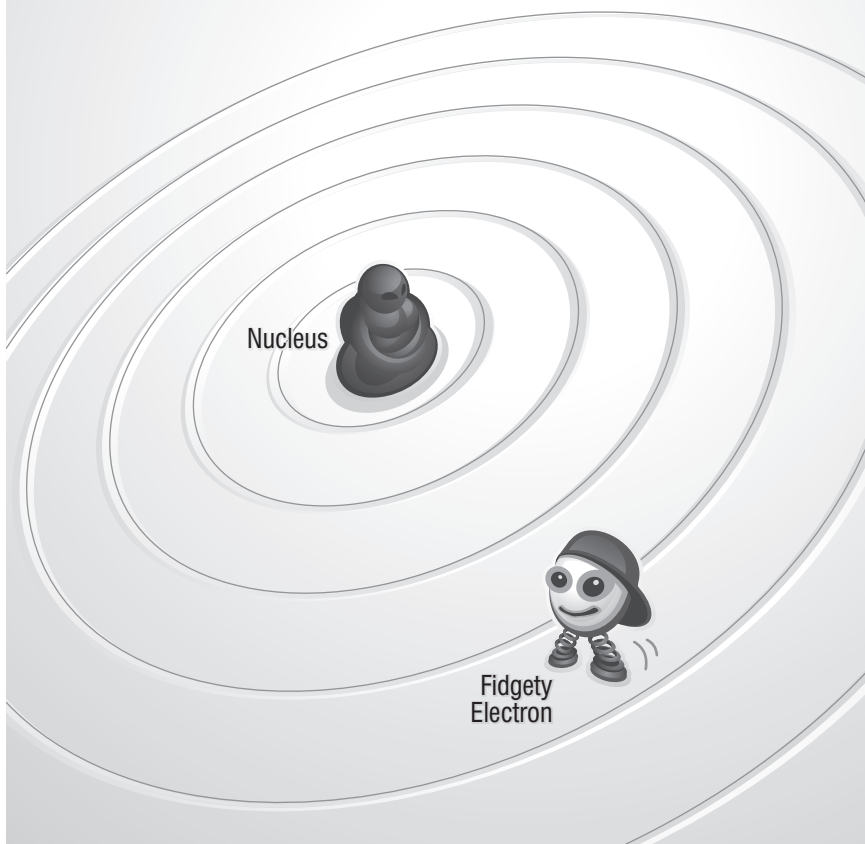
For example, there is a book called *The Universe in an Atom*, written by the Dalai Lama. Although his book doesn't go deeply into the specific idea of our Universe resembling an Atom (he talks more about the general compatibility of science and Spirituality), it struck me as an interesting possibility. *Curioser and curioser!* I thought as my Mind slipped down that slope.

THE APE THEORY

To explore the idea of an *Atomic Universe*, first we have to learn a little about Atoms and Photons and Electrons. Let's call this the *APE theory*, for short. As in, how we might go from being hairy smelly Apes to hairy smelly Humans. I made this up, by the way. Please don't go to any of your geeky science friends and ask them about the APE Atomic Universe theory. They will look at you like you are nuts. Or, if they act like they know what you are talking about, you will then know that THEY are nuts.

So . . . an Atom is a nice round . . . *thingamajig* . . . that consists of a Nucleus at the center. It has various Orbits circling around it. And dancing around the various Orbits are these fidgety *Electrons*. Like so:

Atom

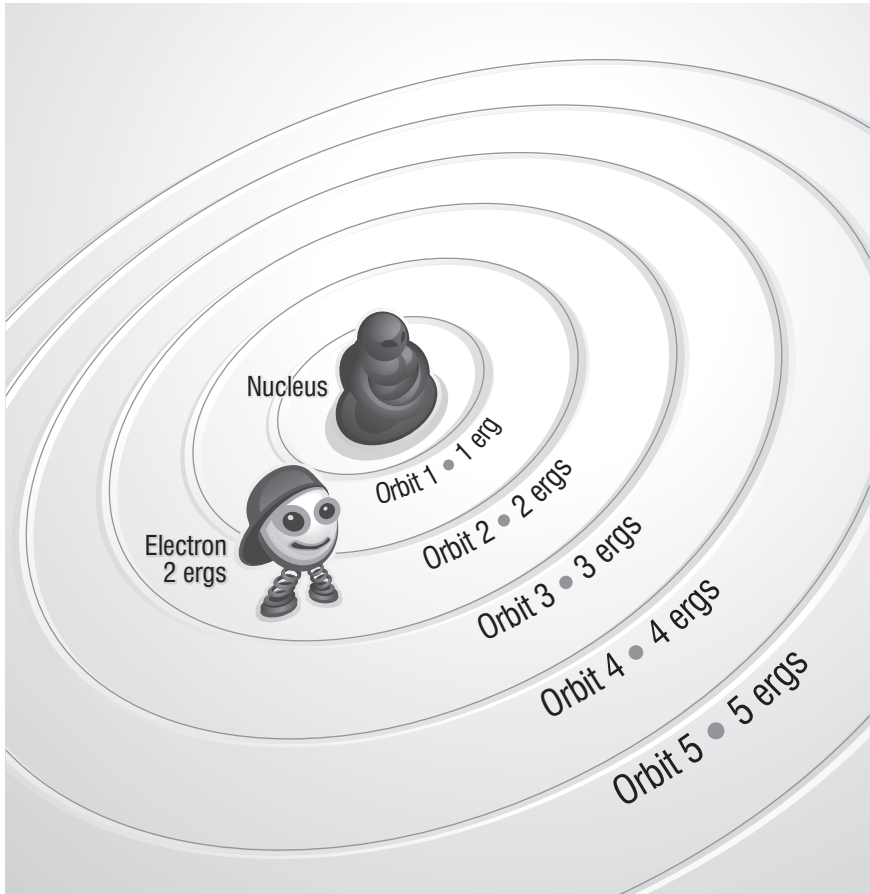


I call the Electrons *fidgety* because they are never seen in one place, they tend to jump around a lot within their Orbit, using their kinetic energy. They can also jump from Orbit to Orbit, or even Atom to Atom. They do this when they absorb and add energy to their existing kinetic energy, and are then able to leap tall Orbits in a single bound.

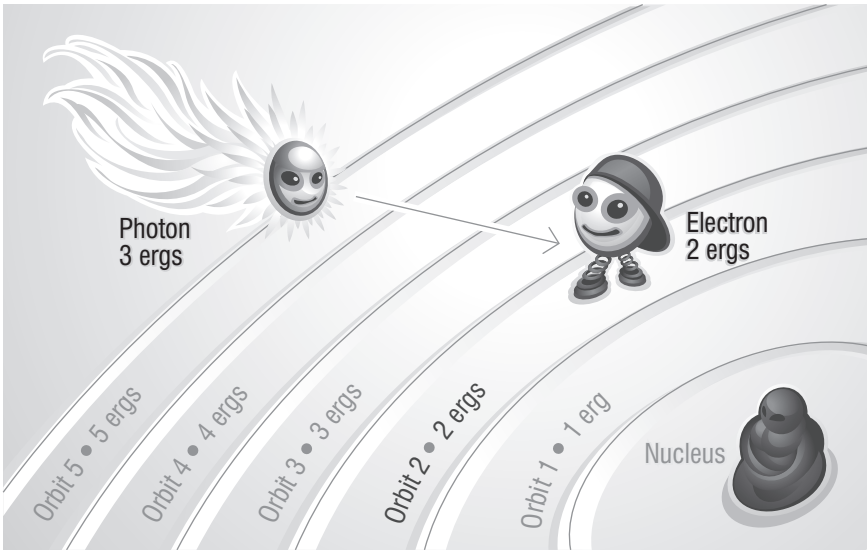
So the Electron is dancing around its Orbit with the potential to jump Orbits. The number of Orbits can vary, but for our example, let's

say there are 5 different Orbits in this Atom, with each Orbit having 1 more erg than the level below it. Notice how the fidgety Electron has only 2 ergs, so we have placed it in Orbit 2.

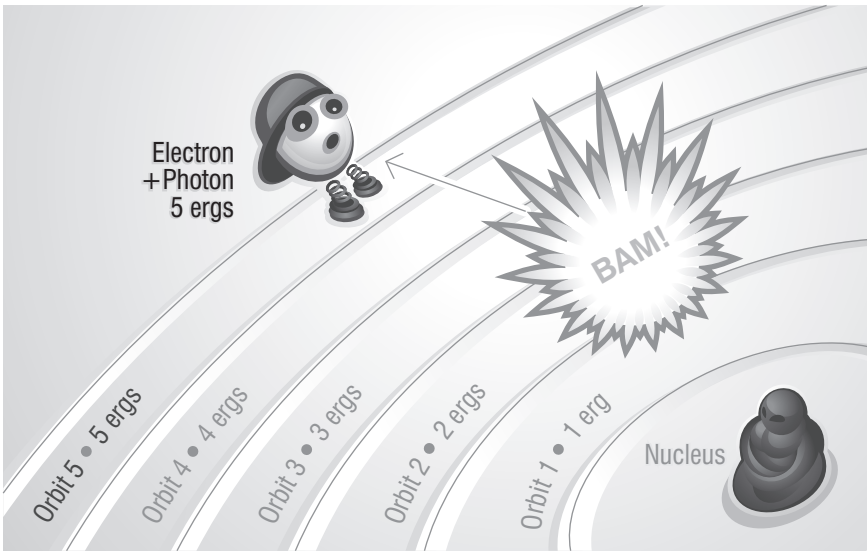
Like so:



One fine day, the Electron is stumbling about, minding its own business, when BAM! It collides with a Photon. Photons are *packets of energy* that can travel at the speed of light. (Hence the word *photo*.)



During the collision, the Electron absorbs 3 ergs of energy from the Photon. Added to its previous 2 ergs, it now has 5 ergs. It skips a few Orbits (yes, Electrons can do that) and jumps to Orbit 5.



In this way, the Electron was able to move up a few levels, but it had to have extra energy to do that. In the upper Orbits, the Electron is in an overly *excitable* state. It now has a lot of energy, so it's bouncing around even more than before in its new, elevated Orbit. But as expected, it's hard to maintain a super-high level of energy and bouncing around. Even little monster kids who have just eaten loads of Halloween candy will eventually tire out and lose energy. The kids are fighting gravity by jumping up and down. Unless they can maintain that high energy level and continue to fight gravity, they are eventually going to slow down.

This is what can happen to an Electron. It is not as stable at higher energy levels and Orbits. The Nucleus of the Atom has a strong gravitational pull—just like the Earth has gravitational pull on energetic kids—and the Electron can easily lose energy and be knocked out of its higher Orbit and pulled back into a lower one.

When it gets pulled back down to a lower Orbit, the Electron emits some of the Photons (packets of energy) that it had absorbed. The lower it drops in Orbits, the less energy it has.

The idea of Electrons skipping around Orbits reminds me of us Humans. We are always trying to reach a higher “Orbit” as well, either here, in this life, or in the afterlife. We constantly make New Year's Resolutions and strive to achieve advanced goals we set for ourselves. Once upon a time we were also a God-fearing society and life revolved around faith. Even today, Spirituality is one of the fastest growing “trends”—people are still searching for purpose and peace.

However, trying to be good and improve our habits is not easy, it takes a lot of energy to push ourselves to do better. We'll make some

hard-won progress, only to slide right back down to where we started. The “gravitational pull” of our base desires can be strong, and it can be easy to succumb and return to the path of least resistance.

We're exactly like the fidgety Electrons in this regard—easily knocked out of higher states of existence that require higher levels of energy to maintain. Guess what?! We Humans actually ARE Electrons, in a sense. We happen to be comprised of billions of them! But we are different from the example of a single, inorganic Electron that is analyzed on a microscopic scale in that we are living, organic beings on a larger scale. We are not only comprised of billions of Electrons, but other substances too. Our behavior is not going to exactly match that of a single, almost invisible Electron. But what if it comes close? What if, in a way, we are a parallel version of a fidgety Electron on a larger, living dimension?

Let's see if we can replace everything that we just looked at on an *inorganic, micro* scale with its equivalent on an *organic, macro* scale. We'll call our theory Quantum *Spirituality* to differentiate it from Quantum *Physics*.

When we are discussing anything involved with Quantum Spirituality, we'll use a “♡” to denote the concept of an organic, living being, differentiating Quantum Spirituality from Quantum Physics. Accordingly, when referring to an Atom within Quantum Spirituality, we will write *Atom*♡. The same concept will be used to name the mass of Electrons that comprise living beings, and the Orbits, and the Nucleus—

Electrons♡ • Orbits♡ • Nucleus♡

Let's start with the Orbits[♡] that would comprise the Atom[♡], or the Atomic Universe in which we live. Earlier, I used 5 Orbits in the Quantum Physics illustration. For Quantum Spirituality, let's go with 84,000 Orbits[♡]. If you recall, Hinduism says there may be 84,000 life forms we can go through before reaching Heaven. I don't know the reasons behind that specific number, but for lack of a better guess, we'll go with it for now.

It's going to be hard to illustrate 84,000 Orbits[♡] on these pages, so let's collectively group them into five categories of Orbits[♡]. Orbits[♡] 1–4 will consist of 21,000 sub-Orbits[♡] each, and the 5th one will represent Heaven. In fact, Orbit[♡] 5 may even be *outside* of the Atom[♡], because when Electrons[♡] absorb enough energy, they can actually jump out of the Atom[♡] into another Atom[♡] (or another Universe, in this case). So Heaven may involve us jumping out of our current Atom[♡] and into another. Either way, Orbit[♡] 5 is our ultimate destination.

Since we are taking some tenets from Hinduism, we'll also go with its theory that Plants are the lowest living form in existence, followed by Animals, and then Humans. Let's divide the 84,000 Orbits[♡] as follows:

Orbit[♡] 1 (sub-Orbits[♡] 1–21,000): Plants

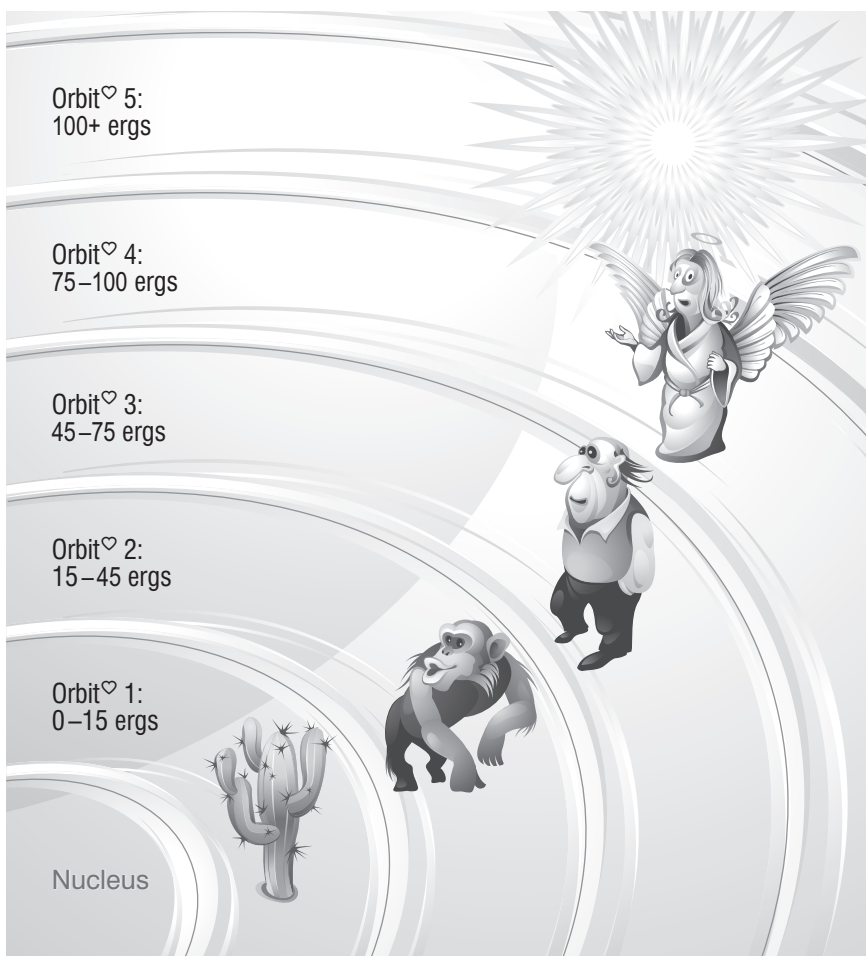
Orbit[♡] 2 (sub-Orbits[♡] 21,000–42,000): Animals

Orbit[♡] 3 (sub-Orbits[♡] 42,000–63,000): Humans

Orbit[♡] 4 (sub-Orbits[♡] 63,000–84,000): Ghosts and Angels

Orbit[♡] 5: Heaven

And because living beings are more complex and on a larger scale than single, inorganic Electrons, we'll increase the estimated number of ergs needed to jump Orbits[♥] in our Atomic Universe. Plants don't do much, and they don't seem to be the brightest bulbs in the box. Since anything below 15 watts is considered a fairly dim bulb, we'll say that Orbit[♥] 1 tops off at 15 ergs, Orbit[♥] 2 (Animals) is around 15 to 45 ergs, and so on.



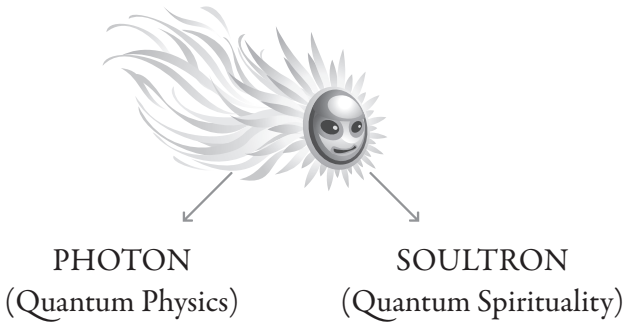
Now, how do we climb Orbits[♡], or sub-Orbits[♡], in our Atomic Universe? Do we also need to collide with Photons to gain more kinetic energy in order to leap tall Orbits[♡] in a single bound?

I would assume that something similar to the light energy in Photons *would be* required for living beings to accumulate enough energy to jump. Let's look at the types of energy that we know living beings possess. We know that we have chemical energy flowing through us, which is generated from the food, water, and oxygen that we intake. We know that we can convert chemical energy to other types, like kinetic energy for movement, sound energy for speech, and heat energy for body temperature maintenance. In addition, we believe there is Soul Energy. So which of these energies can we increase in order to jump to a higher Orbit[♡]?

Can we reach another Orbit[♡] by increasing our chemical energy— i.e. eating, drinking, or breathing more? It doesn't seem likely. We can actually die from doing that, in fact, and it doesn't seem plausible that one can jump Orbits[♡] merely by eating thousands of extra calories, however appealing that sounds. Can we reach another Orbit[♡] by running faster (kinetic energy) or talking more (sound energy)? Increasing any of these types of energy doesn't seem to make sense either.

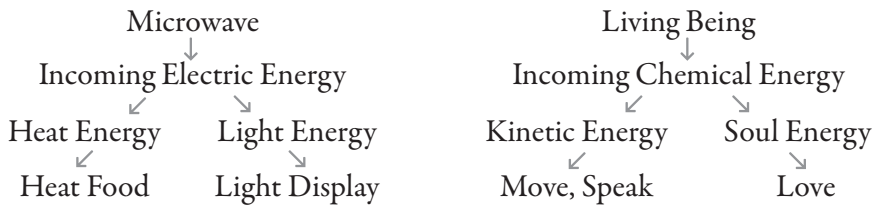
What makes sense is increasing one's Soul Energy. Soul Energy seems similar to light energy (Photons) in many ways. Light has always been associated with warm, positive feelings. The Sun provides light and is regarded as pleasant to be near. Light is a metaphor for purity and goodness. People who describe divine experiences always describe it using light. Perhaps Soul Energy *is* the light energy that is present in living beings. Perhaps Soul Energy is comprised of *Soultrons*, or packets of brightly lit Soul

Energy, which are simply a more complex, organic version of a Photon.



If so, how are Soultrons generated? Are they going to come floating through the air and dive into us? Well, since energy can neither be created nor destroyed, they have to be generated from a conversion of another type of energy. Maybe Soultrons DO float through the air and dive into us, in the form of positive energy directed our way by another person, one who we may be generously helping, for example. That positive, grateful energy which they send towards us might be absorbable in the form of Soultrons. Maybe Soultrons consist of packets of dazzling, positive energy which circulate around the world and make their way to us when we have earned the good Karma to attract them.

Another possibility (in our make-believe world) is that Soultrons would be generated from the energy that is already circulating within us, based on the compiling instructions of our *Mind*. Just as vacuums and microwaves take incoming electricity and divert it for various uses such as heating food or lighting up a display, similarly our Mind may take incoming energy and decide where it wants it to go: basic biological needs or enlightened spiritual needs.



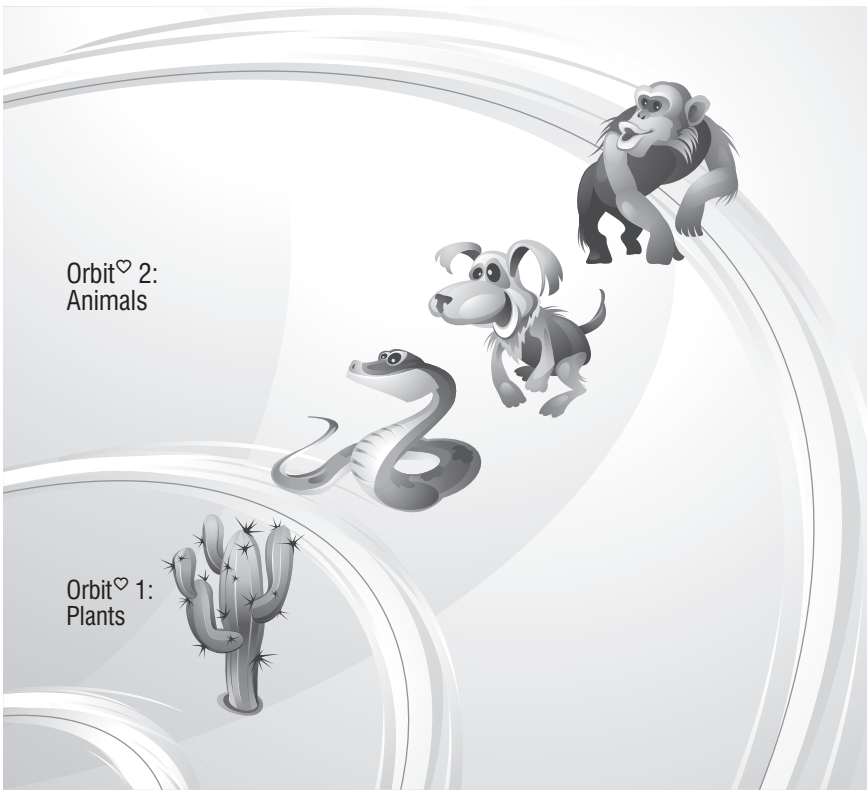
To understand all this, let's start with Orbit[♡] 1—Plants. Plants would be the closest to the Nucleus[♡] and require the least amounts of Soul Energy, or Soultrons, to stay in that Orbit[♡]. Now . . . Plants don't have much free will. They can't run in slow motion and throw themselves in front of another Plant to save it from being chewed on by an Animal, screaming “Nooooooo, TAKE ME INSTEAD!!” as they sacrifice themselves for their dearly beloved Plant friend. They can't decide that they are feeling a bit lazy and just don't want to do any photosynthesizing today. All they can do is pretty much sit there, having to photosynthesize light—whether they want to or not—and grow a little taller. Maybe lean towards the sun a bit, if they feel like it. That's all. If there is any type of Mind in a Plant, that Mind appears to be diverting all incoming energy to meeting the Plant's biological, or physical needs.

At Orbit[♡] 2, we've got Animals. Let's start with the evil Snake, the one that tempted Adam and Eve with an apple, the Animal that usually seems up to no good with its slithery moves and beady eyes. In Hindu mythology, Snakes are actually supposed to be protectors and good omens, but I've never met a Snake I've liked, so I am going to categorize them at the lower end of the Animal totem pole. Besides, it doesn't appear to me they have much mindpower either, they seem pretty helpless in the face of their own instincts for food and survival. I don't

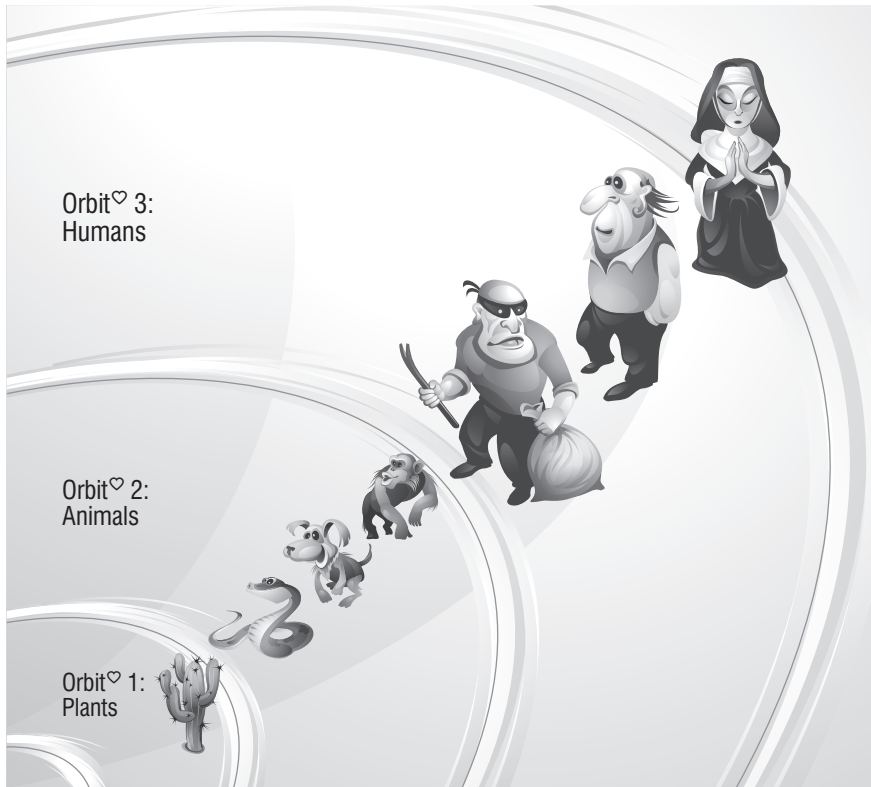
think they spend their energy on much else.

On the other hand we've got a Benji, who can not only understand instructions from his master when he is told to "Go Fetch Boy!", he would also sacrifice his own life to save his cherished master from danger, if the need ever arose. Benji's got skill, free will, and sensitivity. He is not always focused on his own needs, he thinks about others. Whereas the Snake might be at sub-Orbit[♥] 25,000, Benji could be at sub-Orbit[♥] 41,000, just a few sub-Orbits[♥] away from the Apes which are thought to be the closest Animals to us Humans.

Here is what our totem pole looks like so far:



Then we've got Orbit[♥] 3—Humans. With Criminals at the lowest level, regular Joe Shmoes in the middle, and maybe Nuns at the highest sub-Orbit[♥]. Like so:



Criminals are almost like Animals in that they are more focused on their baser needs and physical comforts than taking into consideration the feelings of others. That is why they are closer to the Nucleus[♥], where less Soul Energy is required in order to stay. It is easier to give in to one's wants and expend chemical energy towards selfish or physical needs, than to muster the Soul Energy to resist and discipline yourself to act more

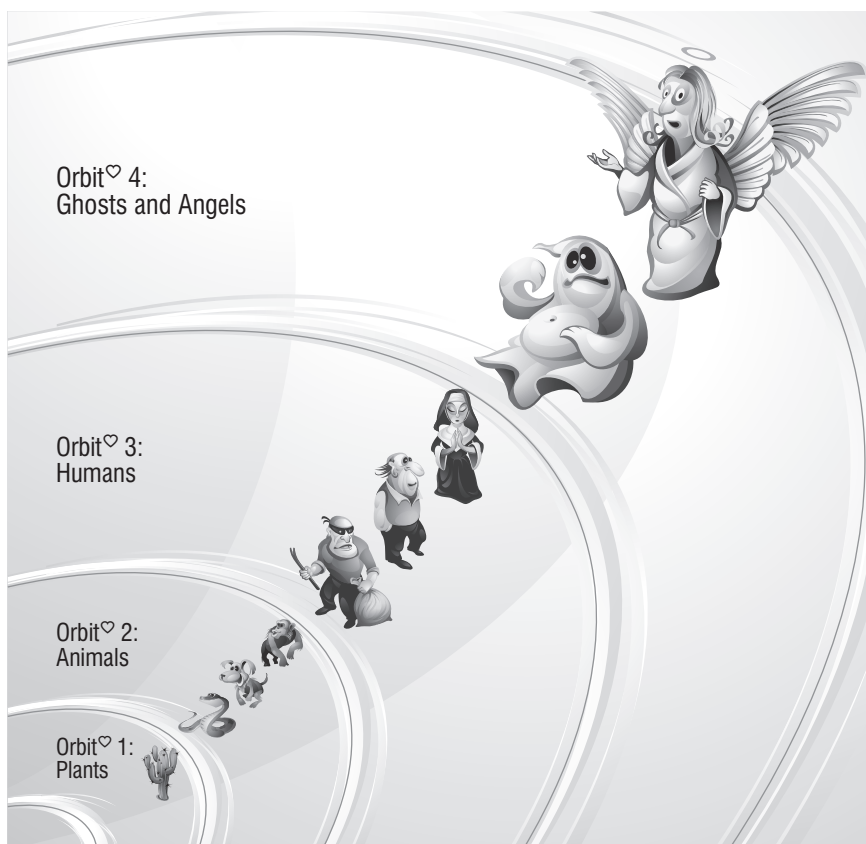
ethically and charitably. (You'll be glad to know I refrained from any lawyer jokes here. Besides, I come from the world of investments, money, and Wall Street. Something about glass houses and stones crossed my mind.)

Unlike Criminals, Nuns would have a high level of Soul Energy because they need to direct very little of their incoming energy towards pursuing bodily comforts. They are not running around at demanding jobs so they can then run around after work buying expensive clothes. They are not agitated when someone cuts in front of them in line. (Nuns probably don't cut in front of each other anyway.) They don't need much energy for the typical tasks that you and I, regular Joe Shmoes, or Flo Shmoes, do. Therefore most of their energy can go towards the brightly lit Soul that is glowing inside. Whereas you and I may have a 60 erg Soul Energy bulb that takes less energy to maintain, a Nun might have a 75 erg bulb, requiring more Soul Energy to power it and putting her in a higher Orbit[♡] than the rest of us.

Criminals, Joe Shmoes, and everyone in between would be more concerned with the lamps they are inhabiting rather than the wattage of their bulbs. Some might not want to be a typical lamp but prefer to be one of the fancier designs. Their incoming energy would be spent on adding decorations to their lampshades, or getting their bulbs colored or frosted to match the latest winter fashions, which are beautiful to look at but obscure a lot of the light that shines through. As the light gets dimmer and harder to notice, obstructed by the glass and lampshades and other adornments, the Mind might begin to ignore the light and instruct the body to put more and more attention into the packaging.

Orbit[♡] 4 would house Ghosts and Angels, who might have a very thin and clear glass bulb, almost invisible. Most of their light would be shining

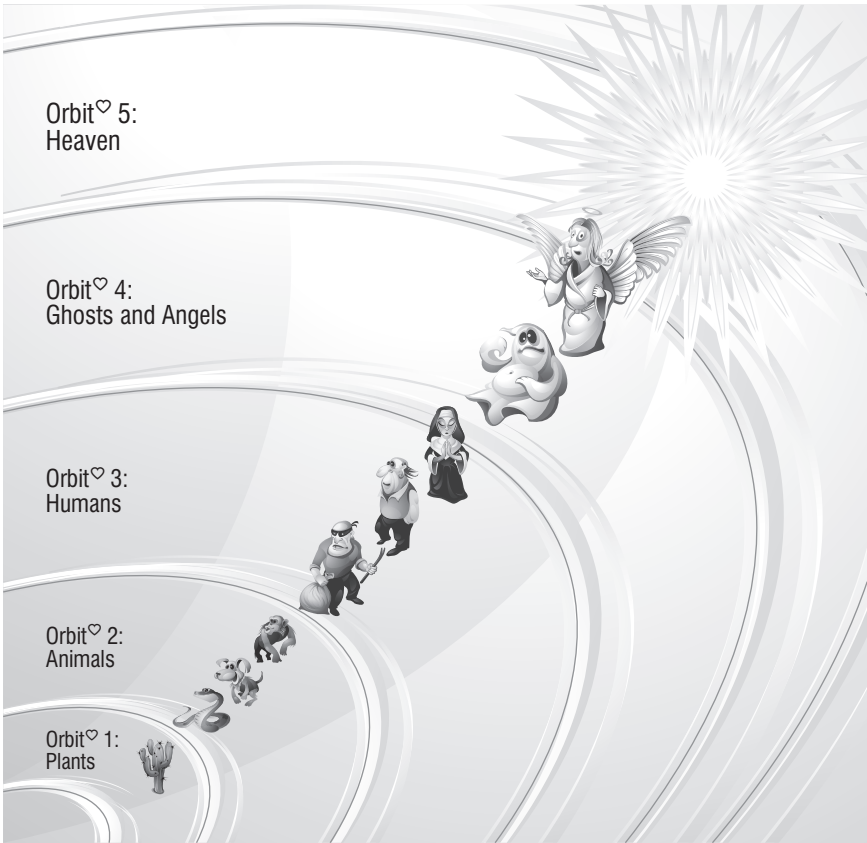
through, with only a bit of their physical form visible when they appear to us occasionally as “apparitions”.



The physical form is almost nonexistent at this stage, because the Mind is not sending any energy to the body, or outer casing, and is instead using all available energy to maintain the 95 erg Soul Energy light at this level. Since it is no longer being fed or catered to, the physical form is withering and about to disappear. Sometimes, however, a Ghost may have unfinished business with the Orbits[♥] below (especially the

Human Orbit[♥]), and use incoming energy to create a vestige of physical form or sound. Taking on a physical form or creating sound would be a way for the Ghost to present itself and its needs to those it might encounter. As with any of the fidgety Electrons[♥] at any of the Orbit[♥] levels, it is always in danger of succumbing to the strong gravitational pull of the earthly desires below and using more energy to fulfill base pleasures, thus taking away from its Soul Energy supply and knocking it back down into the lower Orbits[♥].

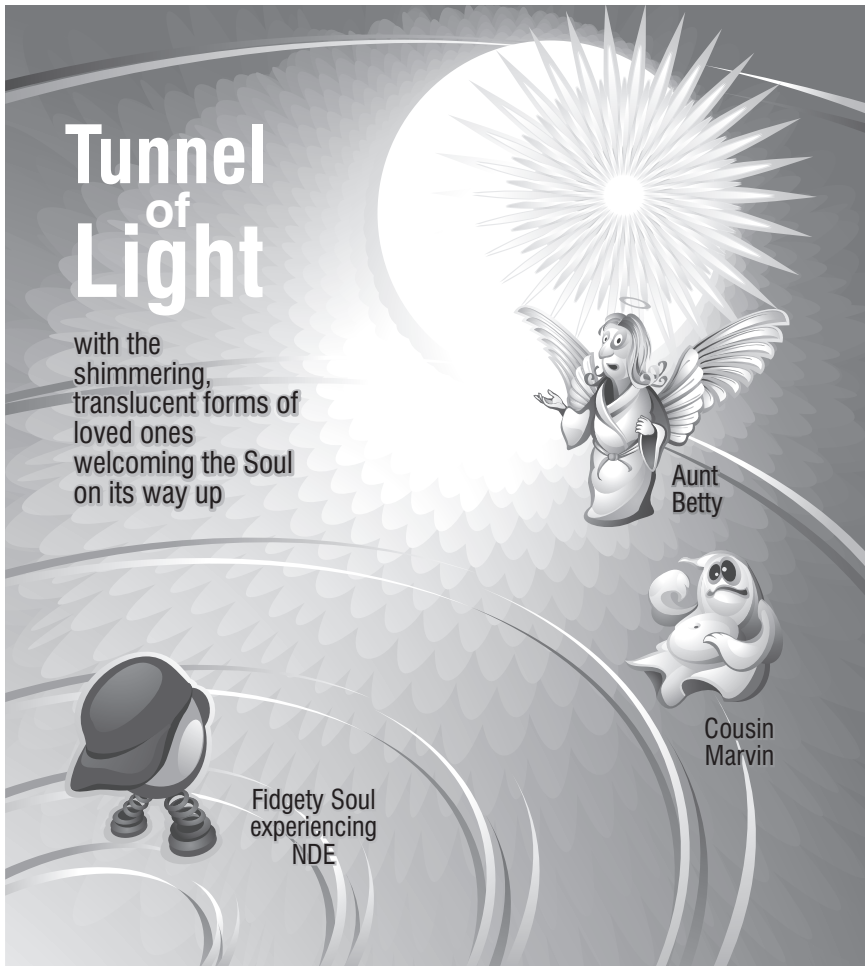
And finally, at Orbit[♥] 5, we've got Heaven.



At that level there is no physical form of any kind, Plant, Animal, Human, Ghost, Glass Bulb, anything. There is simply a very, very bright light, as described by many who claim to have reached that level through meditation or dreams or near-death experiences. Because there is no physical form to please with food, clothing, and luxuries, any energy at that level is purely Soul Energy. It is not converting or diverting to anything else. It is not attached to temporary, external factors which it believes will produce permanent Happiness. It is not trapped inside some container or cage. It is free and flowing. In addition to pure and unfettered light, there is a feeling of intense *love*, one that many have described during their stories of having glimpsed Heaven for brief moments in time. It seems logical that if a Soul is not worried about its own comforts or bodily needs, if it has no body or form to even speak of, it would be intermingled with other Soul Energies in one continuum of Energy, where there is no separation, and all Energy is embraced and joined and loved as one. It's no wonder people wanted to stay and found it difficult to return from this place of overwhelming love—there were probably trillions of merged Souls waiting to welcome and embrace them when they arrived. But these visitors were told that it was not yet their time. Perhaps it was due to the fact that not enough Soultrons, or Soul Energy, had been accumulated to jump to that final Orbit[♡]. Perhaps they were able to make it to Heaven temporarily, through a brief surge in energy, but quickly fell back down when it couldn't be sustained.

The idea of traveling through higher Orbits[♡] to reach Heaven also fits with the stories of those who have claimed to have gone through a

Tunnel during their trip, during which they were welcomed by ghostly or shimmering visions of loved ones greeting them as they came through.



Perhaps these are the apparitions of Ghosts or Angels who have not completely shed their external form and are still stuck in Orbit[♥] 4. Or they may be the forms of those who have made it to Heaven and

have no body, but are able to take on physical characteristics to be recognizable if needed. These stories are all consistent with the idea of shedding more and more of the physical form, accumulating more light energy, and feeling less separated from others as one reaches that final, divine, brightly lit, loving place called Heaven. For those of us who manage to reach Orbit[♡] 5 in the afterlife, hopefully we stay there, and are not so easily pulled back down again by the temptations of apples and snakes and free will, though it is supposed to be difficult to remain at higher Orbits[♡]. Or hopefully, Heaven—our final destination—involves jumping out of our Atomic Universe into another, or existing in no Universe at all. It would be nice to just BE, for once, and stop being so fidgety all the time.

So this might be how Soultrons are accumulated. At each level there is a tug-of-war between material needs and spiritual needs. If the call and temptations of physical comforts and external objects is stronger, most of the incoming energy will be diverted by the Mind to meeting those needs. With a dimly lit Soul Energy bulb at the lower Orbit[♡] levels, it is easy for the Mind to ignore the light. Acts of benevolence and helping other Souls will also be fewer at the lower Orbit[♡] levels, because the Mind is busy meeting its owner's needs first.

If the Soul and spiritual desires are dominant—if the Mind is focused more internally than externally—if it is compiling source code correctly—the Mind will divert more energy to the generation of Soultrons which help maintain a vibrant Soul Energy light. It will also perform increasing acts of generosity and love, because if it is not as involved with its own needs, it has more time to care about others.

This is how Karma might be explained. As Soultrons are earned, a Soul progresses up through the 84,000 Orbits[♡]. At each Orbit[♡], there is more light energy and more love, inside the Soul, and surrounding the Soul through like-minded beings who are similarly evolved. People or life forms from lower Orbits[♡] are always present as well, but perhaps not as extensively the higher up one travels. The sub-Orbit[♡] energy field that you are surrounded by may not be the same as mine, though it appears as if we exist on the same plane. That may explain why good or bad things happen to some and not to others. They may be surrounded by more or less positive energy, depending on the Orbit[♡] they inhabit.

Now, let's take a break for a moment while I remind you that this *APE Theory* is made up. We're just hypothesizing here. The Dalai Lama wrote a book called *The Universe in an Atom*, and we're envisioning what that might look like if it were really true.

However, this is not all based off of thin air. For example, when a lie detector test is administered, it tries to predict whether a person is lying based on an increased heart rate, sweating, and other reactions that occur when someone is being dishonest. It seems that negative actions or experiences—lying, stealing, cruelty—require extra energy in some shape or form.

In the same way, it has been shown that Tibetan monks who meditate have decreased breathing rates, and their bodily functions can slow down. Those who are at peace, and highly evolved, seem to have less activity within.

One could question this and say that adrenaline can surge for a good Samaritan in the middle of risking his own life to save someone

else's. Positive acts don't always involve calm, collected temperaments. However, those kinds of situations would only involve momentary changes in a person's state of mind, and would not reflect their long-term condition.

Overall it seems logical that positive acts and a positive state of mind require less energy for internal physical activity, leaving more to be converted to Soul Energy. It does seem likely that someone who has a steady Happy Graph remains more relaxed and uses less energy than someone whose Happy Graph continually goes up and down. When the Mind is agitated and constantly in a state of flux, it is going to require a lot more resources to sustain itself and the body.

There are many people who would dismiss these types of crazy visions because we can't prove them. But if we are in the middle of the Orbit[♡] sandwich—if we are in Orbit[♡] 3—then perhaps we are never going to understand the sandwich completely, no matter how hard we try. Maybe wild theories are the closest we'll come. After all, we are in the middle of the sandwich itself, we are not the person looking down on it as they get ready to eat it. The person who *made* the sandwich knows that there is bread and lettuce and other types of goodies within. All we may be meant to know is that we are the baloney.

So perhaps scientists will ALWAYS have problems seeing the whole Orbit sandwich. Perhaps they will NEVER be able to fully replicate Quantum Physics at macro, higher energy levels—at our level, that is, because WE are macro and WE are high energy. In other words, we know what goes on with single, almost invisible atoms or electrons. We can look down on these tiny snacks and know what's in

them and understand them. But when it comes to applying the same knowledge to our level, the footlong subs, we can't. That's probably because we'll never be able to look down upon ourselves from the same perspective. We are in the middle of the totem pole.

We have tried. We have attempted to build structures like the Superconducting Supercollider and Large Hadron Collider to replicate the process of high energy particles flying around during the Big Bang. We have not been completely successful. We are more able to replicate processes and nature when they involve low energy events at small scales. It's no wonder that we are not able to fully prove the idea of Ghosts or Angels or God. They are at higher energy levels than us. They can probably see us, but we cannot see them. We are behind tinted windows, except we're on the wrong side.

So perhaps Supercolliders will never get us there, but we may have the ability—the free will and the intelligence—to increase our energy levels on our own, so that we may join the others in higher Orbits[♥] and behold the entire Atomic Universe in which we live. With enough kind acts where we think less about ourselves and more about others, with enough focus on compassion and less on compulsions, with enough good Karma earned Soultron by Soultron, we might one day light our Souls so brightly that we finally make it to the top of our Atomic Universe. Where we ultimately get to stay and live Happily Ever After.

THE END.

I hope you enjoyed our psychedelic trip through Quantum Wonderland. That was just a quick one. I could take you on a dozen

others. I'll save that for another book. But it is an example of how science and existing frameworks may one day be extrapolated or applied to spiritual concepts like Karma. And it is an example of how there may be a solid basis to the continual insistence by revered spiritual teachers, throughout the centuries, that Spirituality and Religion are synergistic with science, medicine, and energy.

Regardless of the believability of our “look through the looking glass”, and regardless of whether Karma works through Magnetic Energy or Osmosis or Reductionism or Cause-and-Effect or the 3 Stooges or Soultrons or Orbits, in the end all we need to know is that it's basically a great, big, cosmic *spreadsheet* in the sky. An accounting of our debits and credits. A notes payable and a notes receivable. A list, checked twice, with a column for naughty and a column for nice.

The overall point is that Karma involves some accountability that the Soul is held to, and any debts that it owes must be repaid.

But even if we accept the idea of Karma, there are still questions we all have as to how it works. How does one go about accumulating good Karma?

It is a sensitive topic for many reasons. If you spend five minutes browsing through message boards on the Internet where people debate the concept of Karma, you'll find lovely, eloquent arguments for and against Karma, such as:

HaRRy_T: Karma is b*#\$h*t! It's a cruel way for people to feel superior to others.

SwimSwamSwami: Karma seems fair. Just like people can't get away with crimes on Earth without being punished, the same is true for the entire Universe.

jiggy_wiggy_3: Karma is a made-up story you tell yourself to feel better. It's a crutch for scared people who need an explanation for things.

PhilosophiA: I have felt Karma working in my life and those of others. I've seen cases where people did something nice for someone else, and later something amazingly unexpected happened to them. Out of nowhere! It had to be Karma.

Crispy^lips: If Karma was real, then you wouldn't have so many greedy people being rewarded in this world for their behavior.

And on and on goes the ping-pong game. Let's join in and play too, shall we? I always love a good heated argument!

Chapter IX

Karma—How does it Work?



*souL*whaT:* Karma is just an excuse to ignore people who suffer. What about those poor babies who haven't done anything wrong and they die? What about those who were part of the Holocaust? Are we saying they DESERVED to suffer?!

KarmaQueen: This is the question asked most frequently in regards to Karma. My answer is no, I don't think we can make that judgment. There are two reasons why:

- 1) I think all bad Karma must be repaid. But not necessarily by suffering.
- 2) Even if bad Karma can be repaid by suffering, all suffering does not equal bad Karma.

Regarding the first point, how do we Humans know that bad Karma is repaid by suffering? What if it can only be repaid by a Soul doing a *positive* act for someone? In other words, what if the justice system for Karma is not an *eye-for-an-eye*, but involves *community service*? And not the half-hearted, Paris Hilton kind either. The real deal.

Maybe a Soul has to donate money or buy a gift for someone in this life, to make up for bribes he took in his previous life. Maybe his wallet being pickpocketed in this life is not Karmic payback for the money he extorted previously. That could simply be an unfortunate event, due to some other reason. After all, the Universe may not have control over everything and everybody. There is supposed to be free will involved on the part of Humans. If the Universe could make someone do something, how would it then account for the bad Karma of the new Soul that was compelled to steal the wallet? It shouldn't count.

Maybe all the Universe can do is keep the Soul in its rebirth cycle until it has paid off its bad Karma through positive actions. Maybe it has no control over suffering inflicted or felt, because suffering is only creatable by Humans, not the Universe.

We don't know either way. *Consequently, it is not appropriate for us to judge someone's Karma by what is happening to them.* You will find me repeating that statement a lot in this chapter.

Regarding my second point, even if bad Karma *can* be repaid by suffering, how do we know that all suffering is a repayment of Karma? There could be many other reasons for suffering, and repayment of Karma could be just one of them. For example:

- What we think of as suffering may not be to the person experiencing it.
- Perhaps suffering is there to kickstart someone's journey to Enlightenment.
- Perhaps suffering is there to help someone burn through the last stretch of their bad Karma and reach Heaven faster.
- Perhaps suffering is helping a Soul develop more empathy for others.
- Perhaps someone who is suffering is paying off someone else's Karmic debt.

What we think of as suffering may not be to the person experiencing it. We know that the *Mind* is responsible for our Happiness or UnHappiness. Our emotions do not stem from our physical or material or biological experiences. We know that even rich, young celebrities can be depressed, while a slum dweller can be relatively content. There is always some type of adversity in anyone's life, but we Humans shouldn't judge whose suffering is worse. That is what followers of the caste system in India tried to do—those born into lower professions were considered less evolved than others, and deserving of their poorer station in life. That is dangerous and wrong in my opinion, and patronizing in its view of who is more or less fortunate. Suffering cannot be measured by anyone.

Perhaps suffering is there to kickstart someone's journey to Enlightenment. How many of us would think about God if it weren't for the problems

in our lives? Unfortunately, few of us think about our Souls and the afterlife when everything is going well, that is why suffering may actually be a blessing in disguise.

Sometimes it is easier to Detach from this world when you don't have as much vested in it. What we perceive as misfortune may actually be a gift, if viewed from a spiritual perspective. I can tell you from personal experience that my spiritual search started when things were not going so well for me, and I started to question the meaning of it all. Maybe my suffering was due to past bad Karma, or maybe it was there to nudge me onto the path of Enlightenment.

Perhaps suffering is there to help someone burn through the last stretch of their bad Karma and reach Heaven faster.

Some say that when a Soul is near the end of their journey, the Universe might be able to help speed up any negative Karma that needs to be repaid. Instead of scattering difficult periods over a long stretch of time, the Universe might present a heavy dose all at once. Perhaps a dying baby is actually a Soul about to be released from the cycle of rebirth, and he is light years ahead of the rest of us on the spiritual path. Yes, it might imply that the poor baby *deserves* his suffering, but it would also imply that he is a very enlightened Soul. It is not being said that he is the reincarnation of Hitler and deserves his terrible pain more than anyone else. Tremendous hardships in a person's life may actually be an indication that they are very close to their final liberation.

Perhaps suffering is helping a Soul develop more empathy for others.

Perhaps, as I feel may partially be the case with me, suffering brings awareness and sensitivity to a person's Soul, and leads them to contribute more to society and help others on *their* path. Until you have experienced many types of pain, and gone to the deepest, darkest, most depressing places a Soul can reach, it is hard to understand the spectrum of suffering that can be seen in others. I know of many sheltered people who have led a fairly straightforward and typical life, hitting all the right milestones at the right times, and always living in security and among like-minded people. While they are kind, they are not visionary or open-minded—they cannot imagine what it would be like in another person's shoes. They have a harder time seeing *The Mirror in the Stranger*. Suffering can be a powerful teacher for those who need to be taught something.

Perhaps someone who is suffering is paying off someone else's Karmic debt. There is no better example of this than Jesus Christ. Or a parent who would willingly take a bullet to save their child. What if there are Souls, up in Heaven, who have agreed to come down to Earth and atone for some of the negative Karma in the Universe on behalf of other Souls? Isn't that what Jesus Christ did for all of us when he died on the cross? Someone may not deserve the suffering they are experiencing, rather they may deserve love and gratitude for the magnitude of their sacrifice.

For all these potential reasons, and many more, it is not for us to say that someone *deserves* their suffering or bad luck. *It is not fair for us*

to judge someone's Karma by what is happening to them. It is possible that suffering *is* a manifestation of someone's bad Karma. But we were not there at the Celestial Trial when the Universe or God handed down that Soul's sentence. We do not know what the charges are, if any. Maybe their suffering or tragedy has nothing to do with Karma, maybe they are undergoing it for some other reason. So it's better that we leave the judging to God and the Universe, and redirect our energies to alleviating suffering wherever we see it.

hUMPitydUMPity: Alright, we may not know for sure, but let's say there *are* situations where suffering and happiness may be a part of the Karmic process—how does the Universe get a concrete beam to fall on someone's head? How does it make a lottery machine give someone the winning numbers?

KarmaQueen: Under the principle of reductionism, we assume there is a series of individual components that make up a complex outcome. If we break these events down, we know that some type of energy would be involved with both of these incidents. The beam would fall through some force exerting its influence on it, whether it be gravitational energy pulling the beam to the ground, or wind energy knocking it off a roof. In the same way, kinetic energy is involved when someone hands over money to buy a lottery ticket, and when the cashier operates the machine that generates the ticket for the customer. Most events in life and the universe can be attributable to some type, or types, of energy. So perhaps there is also our own

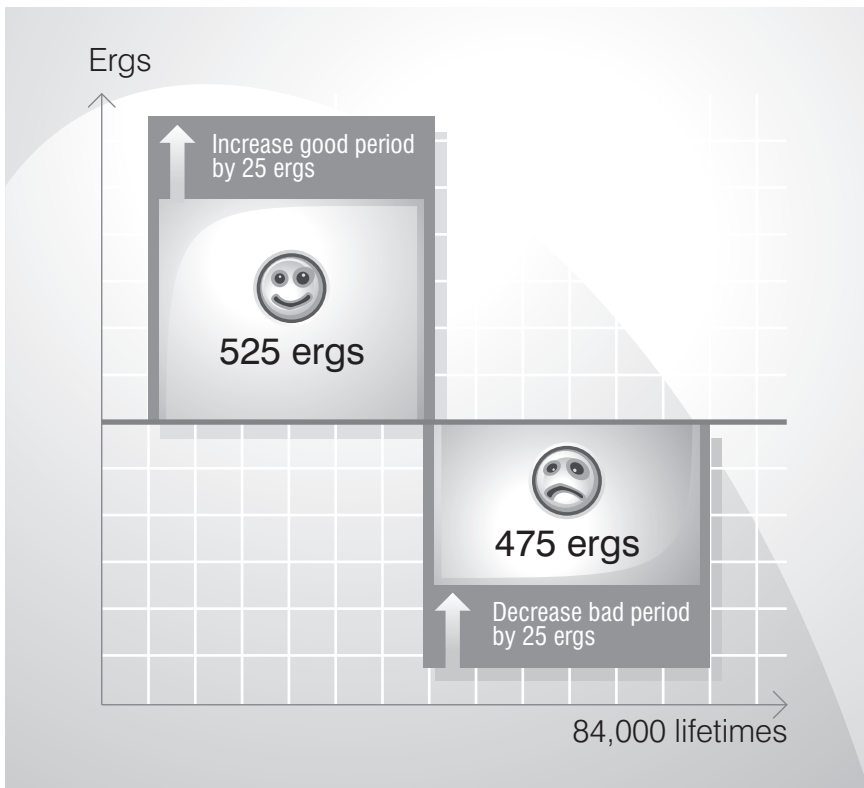
Karmic Energy acting in combination with neutral, “non-free-will” types of energy. If you possess a good amount of Soul Energy, then whatever you do—speak, walk, breathe, drive, learn, think, buy—might be infused with that energy, in conjunction with kinetic, heat, wind, sound, and other types. You expend chemical energy, which is converted to kinetic energy, when you hand the cashier your money for a lottery ticket. Perhaps intermixed with that kinetic energy is also a number of Soul Energy ergs, or Soultrons, which brings about a proportionally positive outcome. Maybe 2 ergs☺ of Soultrons wins you a mini lotto, and 10 ergs☺ of Soultrons wins you the mega jackpot.

Perhaps everything you do in life is propelled by some amount of Soul Energy, and the more you have to spare, the more positive you can experience. However, just like spent chemical energy which must be replenished by breathing, eating, and drinking, in the same way, Soul Energy which you’ve “spent” may also need to be replenished. As you enjoy the benefits of your past good behavior and Karma through current Soul Energy expenditure, you may need to continue generating more good Karma so that you will have Soul Energy to expend in the future as well.

Eye4eye4: Don't you think the Universe is rather mean and unforgiving if it makes you pay for *everything* you've done wrong? What if you committed some offenses in your last life, but you have become a moral person in this life? Do you still have to pay for all that you did in the past, or is there any credit for good behavior?

KarmaQueen: Well, first of all, you are paying for it, in a sense. If you are a good person in this life, doing good deeds, you are adding positive energy to the Universe. This might make up for any negative energy you may have emitted in the past. As we discussed, paying for your past bad Karma may not require you to suffer. It might be payable by your future good deeds.

In fact, there are those who claim that you *can* wipe out, or decrease your bad Karma by replacing it with good Karma. If you earned 25 ergs☺ due to commendable behavior, you could increase your good periods by 25 ergs☺, or decrease your bad periods by 25 ergs☹. And vice-versa.



So a concrete beam that is about to fall on you through gravitational forces could be counteracted by the 25 ergs☺ of Soul Energy you recently earned, resulting in the avoidance of a traumatic injury and enabling you to continue your life in good health and spirits.

mothermayi: Well if I can influence the good or bad periods of my life by earning extra good or bad Karma, can I also influence the Universe on where I want to spend it?

KarmaQueen: Yes, it is thought that you can engineer a redistribution of where your good Karma points are allocated, based on a combination of your own efforts towards a goal, your desires, and the number of good Karma points available to spend.

Let's say you have 50 ergs☺ of Happiness from past good Karma that will be coming to you in this lifetime. Based on the leftover desires from your past incarnation, which the Universe is supposed to try and fulfill as much as it can, it is planning to allocate your good Karma points as follows:

Love —	10 ergs of Happiness
Health —	10 ergs of Happiness
Wealth —	30 ergs of Happiness


TOTAL — 50 ergs of Happiness

A lot of your good Karma might be going towards Wealth because

in your last life you died in poverty and had an unfulfilled desire to experience comfort and great luxury.

But let's say that as you go through your current life, your interests change. You are no longer as interested in Wealth. Instead, you seriously want to get married and start a family, so you put much of your efforts into trying to find the right partner.

The Universe might now plan a different distribution of your 50 ergs☺ of Happiness:

Love —	30 ergs of Happiness	
Health —	10 ergs of Happiness	
Wealth —	10 ergs of Happiness	
<hr/>		
TOTAL —	50 ergs of Happiness	

The theory is that if you have a strong desire for success in a particular area, then the vibrations of your efforts, your Mind's thoughts, and your body's energy field will combine together to push your positive Karma points towards fulfilling your dream. It may not happen to the degree you hope, or in the way that you hope, but you are more likely to experience success in this area since you are subconsciously asking the Universe for it.

It is said that the Universe wants to help you fulfill your worldly desires so that you advance beyond them, and realize that permanent Happiness will not be achieved by any of this. Otherwise you will continue to cling to the material life, like a ghost with unfinished business who can't seem to let go and move on.

Chakra_Khan: So is there such a thing as predestiny? It seems you are saying that you *can* change things.

KarmaQueen: Yes, that is exactly right. To answer the age-old question of whether our fate is in our control, or if it is already laid out, it seems that almost nothing is predestined. You may not be able to erase the past, so you are destined to reap whatever you sowed, in some way. But that type of predestiny is not the type where you sit there like a floppy puppet while the Universe pulls at your strings willy-nilly. That type of predestiny is a destiny created from what YOU did previously. Your Previous Acts = Your Predestiny. And you *do* have the ability to change that predestiny by your efforts in your current life, as we just learned. You can increase or decrease upcoming good or bad periods, and you can influence the types of experiences you will have. So neglecting to wear a seat belt, thinking that the Universe will protect you if you are not meant to have a car accident, is not advised! Nothing is random or fixed in this Universe.

curiousgeorgecat: But I don't understand why this all has to be such a mystery?! Why doesn't the Universe allow me to remember what I did wrong in a previous life, so I can try to atone for it now? What is the point of me stumbling around blindly in my current life without benefitting from what I've learned in the past?

KarmaQueen: A remarkably valid question, and one that I have as well. I have no idea why. Just like I have no idea why God gave Eve free

will to eat an apple and commit a sin. What is the point of either, free will or not remembering past mistakes?

Some say that we are blessed with the ability to forget the details of the suffering that we went through in the past, because those memories could be torturous to bear on top of our current struggles. But it is said that we *do* remember what we learned from our past deeds, albeit indirectly. In other words, we are born with a certain amount of wisdom or individuality (in Chapter 2 we discussed how babies have personalities even at one year of age). Some believe that is an imprint from a past life, and we bring our spiritual progress or knowledge wherever we go. In fact, they say that the lines on our non-dominant hand (usually our left hand), can indicate how much wisdom we bring with us when we are born. We discuss this more when learning about Palm Reading in Chapter 11.

Even so, I still don't understand why we can't remember what we did wrong so we would know not to do it again. I guess whatever happens in Past Lives, stays in Past Lives, but your losses and winnings come with you and so does your hangover.

SOCKittoME: Because no one can remember their past lives, I've heard people comfort themselves by using that as an excuse. If they lose money to someone, they'll say—"It's okay, I must have owed him money from a previous life." How does it work? If you steal from someone in this life, will you have to pay the money back to that specific person in another life?

KarmaQueen: I don't recall coming across any theories in this regard.

Maybe you *will* pay back your Karmic debt to that *particular* Soul, even if it's in a future lifetime. Or maybe you are issued a notes payable for the same general *area*—love, health, money—to which you negatively contributed. For example, in a past life you were a rich landowner or money-lender who squeezed the poor peasant farmers. In this life you are still rich, but you are being taxed at a ridiculous rate and YOU are now being squeezed by the poor. Or something less Republican than that. (Especially since I'm one of the poor.)

Or maybe, you simply owe positive energy to the world in general, and any that you deposit back into the cosmic piggy bank gets redistributed by the Universe on a pro-rata basis to everyone. Whatever the rules are for repayment, I just hope that the interest rates are not too high.

imnotPG: Well what if someone has done something wrong to *me*?

Can I at least get my revenge? Isn't that fair, and isn't that going to happen anyway, through Karma, whether or not I have a part in it?

KarmaQueen: You shouldn't take matters into your own hands. I doubt it's a good idea. For example, let's say that someone . . . to make it easy we'll give them a name . . . let's call him *Ex-boyfriend* . . . is not a very nice person (any resemblance to characters living or dead, or living in Cupertino, CA is purely coincidental).

Now let's say that Mr. Ex liked to play games. He would make plans to get together on the weekend. Then he would change his

Mind but decide that a two minute phone call to let the other person know was too unreasonable a demand on his precious, VIP time. Instead he would simply vanish for a while, leaving the other person bewildered and sad, wondering what they had done wrong.

Now let us say that that the doormat on the other end finally got fed up with this repeated rudeness and decided to teach Mr. Ex a lesson. So she dumped a few bags of stinking garbage in his prized Mercedes. Or put a nice, ground-in layer of yellow turmeric powder all over his white carpet. Or . . . oooh . . . oooh . . . (this is so exciting) . . . put flyers in each of his neighbor's mailboxes describing how cruel he could be with detailed examples of what he had said about each of them.

How can we be sure that the vengeful acts committed by the victim evenly balanced out the wrongs experienced? What if Mr. Ex was simply ignorant of his transgressions, and had no idea of the misery he was causing . . . whereas his victim had full intentions of inflicting emotional distress on Mr. Ex, and accumulated much more negative Karma due to her state of Mind? If Mr. Ex is truly acting inconsiderately, he will be punished according to the laws of Karma. So I would advise letting the Universe take care of whoever has wronged you, and moving on with your life.

Though I'll admit, it does feel magnificent to at least *imagine* getting revenge! That's probably not encouraged either. But hopefully *imagining* revenge is a lesser charge because that crime has already been committed by . . . uh . . . the person in this story.

yosoyGUAPO: What if I still don't believe in Karma, but I believe in being a good person? Is that the same thing?

KarmaQueen: If you are a decent person, whether or not you believe in Karma doesn't matter much. Most of us believe in being ethical, and doing the right thing anyway. Most of us would not like to be the cause of anyone's discomfort. The only people who need to fear Karmic retribution are those who justify their unethical behavior by thinking that nice guys (or gals) finish last. They use the injustice of the world to excuse their selfish desire to get ahead at any cost. But most likely, those who act with integrity *will* be the final winners, it's just not always evident from this life itself.

JJ-John: OK, fine, let's say that I do believe in Karma. How do I know if a particular action is good or bad? What if I kill someone in self-defense? Do I rack up the same Karmic debt as someone who committed pre-meditated murder?

KarmaQueen: It is said that Karmic actions and Karmic balancing all occur in the Mind. It's not based on what you physically do. It is based on your *intent*. If you kill someone out of self-defense, and you truly had no choice, my guess would be that it doesn't increase your bad Karma. But I am not an authority on this, and I've never heard specific examples of Karmic do's and don'ts explained anywhere.

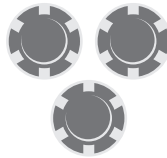
However, I have a golden rule that I follow if I am ever confused about my next step. If I were in the other person's shoes, what

would I want done, or what would I find fair? My intentions towards the other person are probably honorable if I would not object to being on the receiving end of my own actions. The Bible sums it up perfectly—*Do unto others what you would have them do unto you.*

Nevertheless, I agree, it is hard to know what to do at times. These are issues that I have struggled with as well. In the following chapter, I talk about one such dilemma that I have yet to resolve. Vegetarianism.

Chapter X

Vegetarianism *and* Squashing Bugs



I squash bugs. There. I confessed. I feel *so* much better. I didn't want to take you through this whole hoity-toity-animals-are-souls-too-they-feel-pain-too-yadda-yadda-yadda and lay on the guilt trip and then have you discount everything when you got to the end because you found out that

I squash bugs.

And spiders. And centipedes. Eww . . . I am shuddering just thinking about them! Centipedes have got to be the ugliest creatures God has ever created. They are long and hairy and dark and crawly and eeewww If I see one, it's like a reflex, I can't help it. I either slam a shoe on it, vacuum it up, or slowly and torturously poison it to death with a can of insecticide.

This last way of killing bugs makes me feel the guiltiest. I have seen them rushing around anxiously, trying to get away from their impending death, as all creatures who want to avoid suffering would try to do. It must be agonizing for them to feel the spray and chemicals burning their bodies or choking the air out of them. I can see them scuttling around, then slowing down, then eventually dying as the poison finally completes its morbid job.

My goal is to try and not use the spray, though I prefer it over the other two methods of vacuuming or shoeing them to death. The spray method was my favorite because it allowed me to be at a farther distance while murdering the poor bug.

Nevertheless I am trying to stop the spray habit, but I will admit—I don't know when, if ever, I will be able to stop from killing them altogether. I simply can't imagine being able to sleep in a room that I know has centipedes crawling around in it.

In my defense, I don't kill creepy-crawlies for fun. I don't go out, in my hunter's hat, with my tiny bug gun, and count the day as successful if I bring home the carcass of a nice, hairy bug that I can now hang on my mantle.

Indeed, if the stupid bug would just stay in *its* territory—and by *its territory*, I mean anywhere that is not in *my* territory—then I would leave it alone.

And how large is my territory, really? 800 square feet of space in my little apartment, another 50 square feet for my car, and a 10 foot radius surrounding me whenever I am at the office, store, or other place outside my home? Ugly Bug has the rest of the world to roam in, so when it

ventures into my eyesight, and therefore my territory, I am sorry, mate, but you just signed your own death sentence.

I know I am likely going to Hell for this. And since Hell supposedly involves reincarnation—according to me and this book—it means I am going to be reborn again. Probably as a bug, too, that will be tortured to death by someone else like myself. It is only fair of course.

I do believe bugs are fellow beings with the same Soul Energy pulsing through them that runs through me. I have believed this for a few years now, but I just turned Vegetarian four months ago. I had always deferred the idea of turning Vegetarian to a later date when I was finally settled in life and could concentrate on my diet by cooking at home. I justified eating meat by my hectic lifestyle and takeout habit. There didn't seem to be much I could order, besides pizza, tacos, and other foods with cheese and carbs, if I were to try and order Vegetarian.

I had seen shows on television about how Animals are killed. I had even read a few books where they described the pain and fear that Animals feel as they are being slaughtered. I learned that Animals will struggle hard to break free—how pigs can squeal and cry. They showed how sad the mother pigs were when their babies were taken from them, some of them refused to eat for a long time afterwards, lying in the hay and having no motivation to move. It was obvious that the Animals did not take too kindly to being intruded upon by us Humans. But as usual, that didn't change my meat-eating habits. As usual, the show made me cringe and want to be a Vegetarian *eventually*, but I was able to defer the adoption of that new habit until some vague time in the future. I swatted my Alarm Clock snooze button more than once.

Then just recently, a serious accident happened to me during a crippling blizzard on the East Coast. It was on December 26, 2010, the day after Christmas and our family gathering. I was driving home when suddenly my car slipped on an icy highway, slammed into the concrete divider at 70 mph, flipped upside down in the air—“like in a James Bond movie” according to witnesses—and against the odds, landed upright on its tires. That was the first miracle. A second miracle occurred when a cop on the other side of the highway was able to cut across the divider as he noticed the accident taking place, and block speeding traffic from smashing right into my car as it thudded back onto the busy road.

Then there was a third miracle—the car was completely totaled but I was completely fine. The shattered windshield was all over the front seat, the four side windows were gone, both airbags had deployed, the roof and front of the car had caved in, the tires had broken off, and phones, CDs, and belongings flew out, never to be found. But except for a few scratches and minor whiplash from which I fully recovered, I was fine. I didn't even see a doctor. The insurance claims adjuster told me I should go out and buy a lottery ticket because I was that lucky.

Just a few days before the accident, I had been surfing channels and chanced upon a show that profiled the dirtiest jobs in America. It was yet another television program on Animals and how we get our meat. I had caught about ten minutes of the host visiting a slaughterhouse, watching the Animals go down a conveyor line. The Animals were hanging upside down as they were moved along, at one point being hammered and stunned by blunt force to be immobilized before

they were to be killed. I had seen a version of this before. But there was a difference this time.

When I had the accident a few days later, I somehow *connected* my experience of hitting a concrete wall with stunning, jolting, absolute blunt force to the experience of those Animals. Concrete is not like wood or metal or the soft tissue of a body—concrete is not going anywhere, it's not going to buckle even an inch. If anyone is going to absorb the impact of the unholy dead stop, it's the car and person on the other side. When my car slammed against the divider, not more than six inches of space separated me from the concrete, which was flush against my door. I could have been pulverized had the metal caved in. Although it lasted less than a minute, I was petrified as I helplessly sat strapped in my skidding car, with the knowledge of the blows that were about to come.

As I began to recover over the next few weeks, I realized how lucky I was even to brush my teeth on my own. Anything could have happened to me.

I was spared, by nothing other than God's mercy. As the accident replayed itself in my Mind during the days and nights afterwards, the show began to replay itself as well. Like me, the Animals had been vulnerable and trapped as they were dragged along, subject to crippling force and their own terror. Now that I knew what that experience felt like, how in the world could I justify putting other living creatures through it in the future? For what? Just so I could enjoy my dinner? And who was I, anyway? What made me so special that *I* should be spared, but not the poor, helpless Animals I was eating by the thousands every year? I was no longer a passive third party with a separate identity from

the Animals. Whether I wanted to or not, I kept breaking through the barrier of my Human form and connecting to the Souls of the Animals.

That is the story of how I turned Vegetarian. I had experienced the same pain and shock that the Animals had, and I was finally able to see . . .

The Mirror in the Stranger.

Before that, despite my knowledge of Soul Energy and Animal suffering, I was able to eat them for dinner with little more than a twinge of guilt. After the accident, I was physically able to relate to the terror that I was inflicting on another Soul—any Soul—and I was no longer able to do it.

In fact, when I first wrote this chapter, a few months ago, it was about how I was *not* Vegetarian. I am rewriting this chapter today because that has changed, but as you can see, only recently.

My point is—it is not always easy to convert knowledge into action. And it is not always a complete, clean transition. Yet despite so much awareness of suffering—that of Animals and my own—and despite my turning Vegetarian and avoiding the purchase of leather or fur products—I still can't bring myself to scoop up Yucky Bug and nudge it back into the outside world, alive.

In fact, there are admirable people who undergo the further inconvenience of not consuming dairy products and eggs, or even onions, garlic, and other Plants which are thought to die because they are pulled out at the roots when harvested.

There are many who will go hungry at parties, due to the lack of choices based on their restrictive lifestyle. Or they will refrain from using cosmetics or items that were tested on Animals. All of this takes

an enormous investment of time and energy. It takes time to research the companies from which one can buy products, or to cook at home, or to drive an extra thirty minutes to go to a Vegan restaurant.

Except for my Vegetarianism, and ban on certain obvious products, I will confess that I don't do any of the rest. I buy all types of cosmetics. Even though I know that Animals suffer greatly at times when used for testing. Chemicals used in the cosmetics are dripped into their eyes, so it can be determined at what levels they are toxic enough to blind the Animals, and thus possibly harm Humans. There has been video footage of rabbits lined up in a row, in a vise-like contraption which looks scarily similar to the guillotine, and struggling so hard to escape as chemicals are injected, they broke their own necks in the effort.

I hear about this, yet somehow I am able to continue on with my regular life after spending the requisite few minutes being outraged at the testing, shaking my head and clucking my tongue. Some justification might be made for Animal use in medical testing, but there appears to be none for torturing Animals to make people look better. Yet I continue to buy all types of cosmetics. I might not buy certain brands if I knew that they were tested on Animals, but I don't make the extra effort to find out. One of the excuses I give myself is that numerous cosmetic companies have stopped testing on Animals, so most likely I am not partaking in such cruelty. But I know that many of my actions are driven by laziness and denial.

I consume eggs, dairy, onions, garlic, and the like. Even though some say true Vegetarians shouldn't. Part of the reason is that I haven't done proper research yet to determine if I need to go to that extreme.

And part of the reason is that even if I do the research, I am not sure I will come to a conclusive opinion on whether I am consuming living, suffering creatures or not. Those edibles appear to fall in a gray area, and I seem reluctant to inconvenience myself too much if there is any flicker of doubt.

Although I am horrified at the idea of inflicting any type of pain on any living creature that might feel that pain, I continue to do so. Some of it I do knowingly—in the case of bugs—and some of it I do unknowingly. And not wanting to know. In this paradoxical play called *Animal Cruelty*, I am the entertainer wearing a moustache AND skipping around with a frilly parasol, all at the same time.

Vegetarianism is advocated by many great Religions. Sometimes the reasons are less spiritual and more practical—i.e. don't kill cows because their dung and milk are useful. Sometimes the reason is more evolved, but simple—don't inflict suffering on a fellow living creature.

But a third reason given at times is based on reincarnation and the paying of Karmic dues. They say that snuffing out a life form before its predestined time might condemn the poor Soul Energy to repeat that life cycle in order to complete its sentence of Karmic payback, before it is allowed to convert to another, higher life form. If I eat a chicken that has been killed in order to provide me food, then it might have to be reborn again as a chicken, and finish out its chicken life sentence, before getting a promotion to the next level of a turkey. Since the goal is to liberate one's self from rebirth, and having to spend more time in a particular incarnation is not desirable, this is not a beneficial outcome for the chicken or the unfortunate bug that I

Hoovered. That is the theory.

Not tampering with the cycle of rebirth is also why suicide and euthanasia are prohibited for Humans. We are not supposed to interfere with the Universe's plan for us.

So if squashing bugs is wrong, then I am accumulating more bad Karma for myself. That is certainly not desirable, because if it is true that I will have to experience the suffering that I have caused other Souls, then I am in for some painful times ahead.

It is also said that when we eat meat, we are ingesting negative energy into our bodies. Some believe that the fear of the Animal when it was killed—their pain and shock and misery—gets locked into the meat when it is slaughtered, and that energy gets transferred to us when we eat it. I am not sure if that makes a person more fearful and miserable themselves, or gives them a tendency to inflict more fear and misery on others, but in either case, it doesn't sound promising.

Yet a small part of me questions whether killing Animals for food is so wrong. After all, an argument can be made that being butchered for food *isn't* condemning a chicken to being born again as a chicken. Maybe becoming a chicken sandwich is part of the cycle of death and rebirth, and it's actually a *blessing* that the chicken is now free to move on to its next incarnation. After all, why would the Universe punish the poor chicken for its life being cut short by someone *else*? It's not the poor chicken's fault!

Another argument can be made that the food chain is Karmic payback for Animals and Plants. It appears that there are not as many forms of suffering that they undergo, as compared to Humans. And if

suffering *is* a means to burning through negative Karma, perhaps this is one of the ways the Universe allows them to do it.

Yet another argument can be made that other Animals, which are God's creatures as well, get their food from killing other Animals. Hunting is a natural part of the food chain. So if God created Animals that way, how can it be wrong for Humans?

But we are intelligent enough to decide not to inflict pain. Hunting for food may have been imposed on Animals as a natural instinct, but perhaps we are not supposed to perpetuate it. After all, we don't like it when a lion or crocodile consumes one of us, do we? If not for the progress our civilization has made as a whole, where we can keep certain Animals relegated to jungles and safari-land, there might have been a lot more of *us* becoming a part of the meat-eating food chain. When one of us gets bitten or eaten by an Animal, we are outraged and hunt the Animal down and kill it. But we Humans can consume millions of Animals a year, and that is supposed to be okay?

But then, wouldn't the lions and crocodiles do the same, if they could? Isn't this simply survival of the fittest, a system of nature that God himself created?

I can almost hear the argument between Humans and Animals play out in my head:

Me: I don't see why I can't eat you. You eat other Animals. You would eat me if you could.

Lion: Yes, but I don't know any better. You do.

Me: Exactly. You don't know any better. We're the intelligent ones, so it would be cruel for anyone to eat or kill us, because we would know what is happening. You don't.

Lion: You're in complete denial. Do you not see us try to escape whenever you are about to kill us? We will try so hard to avoid the torment you are about to impose on us, we'll even injure ourselves trying to get away from you. And you Humans call yourselves *humane*? Why don't you kill dogs and eat them, then?

Me: Because they are cute . . . and they love us . . . and they seem intelligent . . .

Lion: In that case, would you be willing to eat a mentally insane person who may not be acting so cute, and who is not capable of loving anyone? They don't know what's happening to them!

Me: No, that would be cruel . . . they are Humans . . .

Lion: So you don't kill any Humans, and you don't kill dogs or cats or gerbils . . . but anything that doesn't have intelligence or any Animal that you don't personally care about, you are willing to kill? Instead of using your superior intelligence and abilities to protect the weaker species and exercise the

compassion that you have been given the ability to show—and which you want God to show you—you exploit your strengths to grab what you can for your own pleasure and advantage?

Me: Uh . . . yes go away

I don't know. Although I have started feeling strongly about not using Animals for food, I can see the justification for thinking either way.

Some say it is okay to eat meat as long as you remember where it came from, and give thanks to those who have helped provide for you. Mark Zuckerberg (founder of Facebook) gives himself a personal challenge every year. One year it was to learn Chinese. The next year it was to wear a tie every day. This past year it was to only eat meat that he had killed himself.

This year, my personal challenge is around being thankful for the food I have to eat. I think many people forget that a living being has to die for you to eat meat, so my goal revolves around not letting myself forget that and being thankful for what I have. This year I've basically become a vegetarian since the only meat I'm eating is from animals I've killed myself. So far, this has been a good experience. I'm eating a lot healthier foods and I've learned a lot about sustainable farming and raising of animals.

I started thinking about this last year when I had a pig roast at my house. A bunch of people told me that even though they loved eating pork, they really didn't want to think about the fact that the pig used to be alive. That just seemed irresponsible to me. I don't have an issue with anything people choose to eat, but I do think they should take responsibility and be thankful for what they eat rather than trying to ignore where it came from.

Some people take other paths besides turning into complete Vegetarians, or only eating meat that they have killed. They may decide to forgo certain types of meat. Perhaps they won't eat veal or lobster, and will only eat meat that has been killed "humanely". Some might only eat Kosher or Halal meat. Others may decide to forgo all types of meat on certain days of the week. Some people don't cook it at home, but they will eat meat outside, if there is no appealing Vegetarian dish on the menu.

These are all possibilities. Or perhaps it is better to be safe than sorry in this regard, and simply avoid all meat. My gut feeling says that eating meat is wrong. If we follow the golden rule of Karma, and put ourselves on the receiving end, I'm pretty certain we would not like it there. Dying is not fun in any style, but a natural death would be preferred to being boiled alive or gonged while hanging upside-down on a conveyor belt. Otherwise Animals would not struggle so hard to escape when cornered, and would not be so sad when separated from their children.

I find it very possible that the bugs I crush might have the Soul Energy of someone I loved in a previous life. The Soul of a former child. A friend. Someone I once knew who was kind and noble. Perhaps a dog I used to own. I would do anything to not have pain inflicted on those I love in this life, yet I knowingly inflict pain on another Soul Energy, simply because it is not in a form that I recognize in its current incarnation. It is not in the form of a sibling, parent, friend, pet . . . forms that are temporary and illusory, but that matter to me because my external looking Mind gives them validity and love over other living creatures.

Treating all Soul Energies compassionately—whether in Human, Animal, Plant, or other life form—can only be good. There is no risk of incurring bad Karma by *not* eating meat. But there may be a risk the other way around. It all depends on how we want to hedge our bets for the afterlife . . . how many chips we are willing to place on God.

From my own conflicting practices regarding this matter, I know it is not an easy path to follow. It is up to you what your path will be, every one of us is at different points in our journey and must decide for ourselves. Here is where *I* am, at this particular moment, in *my* journey. I hope my sharing it has been helpful.

Chapter XI

Channeling *and* Tracking Energy



ASTROLOGY

April 21, 2012, Taurus: *Today is a day to keep one hand on the brake. Go slowly, avoid risky curves, and stop often to reassess.*

OK . . . what does that *mean*? Does anyone KNOW? Can anyone TELL me?

Am I not supposed to drive? Or if I drive, should I drive only in a straight line until I get to the end of the city because I can't take a turn, at which point I will find myself inadvertently driving off the pier into the river, at which point I will stop to reassess?

Should I not have that meeting with my boss today? Or should I have the meeting, but talk slowly, and repeat myself every few minutes in my efforts to stop and reassess?

We have finished pause ignore confused looks around me pause some more I repeat, we have finished

Perhaps I should walk sloooooowly to work. But instead of that keeping me out of harm's way, it will put me in it, because my fellow impatient New Yorkers will simply bulldoze their way over me as they curse and flip me the finger.

It's not like I do anything risky anyway. My life is pretty humdrum. I am not Donald Trump making billion dollar decisions or investments. I am more comparable to Mike Brady who comes home from work to a simple, groovy life where everybody knows my name and they're always glad I came.

I am pretty dismissive of the tarot-card, crystal ball, seemingly random type of fortune-telling that is offered by those strange looking people floating around in their muumuus. Sorry if I am offending anyone, I am just giving you my opinion. A lot of people do take the twelve sun signs and all of that seriously, but I just can't convince myself to get behind it. It seems that I am *all* twelve signs at the same time. They are all sufficiently general enough to apply to me. Aren't all of us able to look at those vague little horoscopes that newspapers are so fond of printing, and find something in each of them that could apply to one's self if contorted in the right way?!

But let me tell you a little story.

Once upon a time a fair, very beautiful, very thin, very kind wee lass was getting . . . gasp! . . . divorced.

Divorce is a serious, sad event, there is no doubt. It is painful and is to be avoided if at all possible.

However, this fair lass felt it was a positive step in life and was looking forward to the changes coming up in her future.

Unfortunately, her loving but concerned relatives were worried that her world was coming to an end. They wanted to make sure that she was not doomed to a life of a dried-out old spinster, complete with cats, shawls, and vanilla wafers with tea.

So each of them, separately, without realizing what the other was up to, took the birth details of the fair lass—time, date, and geographical location—and asked Astrologers to calculate her natal horoscope.

The horoscopes differed in ways, and matched in others. One said that she would be married by the end of the year, and have a daughter and son by 2008. (It is 2012, and she is still single and sans kids).

Another said that she would move to a foreign country within the next two to three years. (It is six years later, and she is still in the US, the country of her birth).

A third said that she would soon meet very influential people and receive a great gift of knowledge within the coming months. (She did move cross-country to Silicon Valley and met highly successful investors to whom she appealed for funding and was unanimously rejected. They kindly shared their invaluable *knowledge* and told her she was wasting her time on the web startup she had devotedly founded with her entire life savings. She views that *knowledge* as being the complete *opposite* of a *great gift*!!!? *Knowledge, my @\$#&@!!*).

It seemed none of the Astrologers could agree on when this poor, lonely lass was to find her charming, lonely lad and beget her two, un-lonely kids.

However, all five of the horoscopes that were calculated—by different Astrologers, in different countries, in different years, mostly in her absence—all five had the same thing to say about her professional future. It caught her attention because it was not something that was foreseen for her brothers, her sister, her cousins, her parents, or anyone else getting their horoscope read from these same Astrologers. It was exclusively predicted for her, and the prediction stood out as being a bit unusual.

All five of them said that she would be somewhat famous one day, and that she would have an overflow of money pouring into her life. Even more spooky, they all independently gave dates that seemed eerily close together—one pegged her super success as starting in 2007, the other said 2009, one said 2011, another said 2012, and the last one didn't give a date but said it would be in the *2nd half* of her life. The first Astrologer had been consulted in 1995 (before her marriage) and the others post 2005 (after her divorce). Like those consulted over ten years later, even the first Astrologer had prophesied success around the same estimated timeframe, anywhere from 2007-2012. With such an unusual similarity behind such disparate readings, it began to seem that there was more than just coincidence at play.

And who is that lucky, wee lass who will be showered with fame and fans and adoration and bags of money?? ME!! It's *me* we're talking about!! That was *my* prediction that the nosy relatives got read! Bet you didn't see THAT one coming!

Except it's already 2012 and no sign of any fame yet. The jig is up if it doesn't happen by the end of this year, but currently, I, for one, choose

to believe that it is POSSIBLE!! While I am a modest, dignified, retiring type of person—a woman of few words—I can totally, completely, awesomely see that happening! Whoooo-hooooo!! Yay ME!

I am already compiling my list of I Told You So! people who doubted me over the years and to whom I will immaturely gloat once it all happens:

- 1) Everyone who rolled their eyes at my so-called crazy endeavors including the stuck-up investors who turned me down (even though they were sort of right)
- 2) The friends who have their nice houses with their SUVs and 2.5 kids and secretly shake their heads at me, the wild rebel amongst them who has veered off the safe and well-trodden path (even though I can understand why)
- 3) The childhood tormenters who said I smelled (no comment)
- 4) And ALL the others who shall remain nameless unless everything comes true . . . in which case I plan to publish a nice, long, detailed list of who they are!

I can't wait! I am going to take the list, plan my route, and personally knock on the door of each one and when they open it, say say
“Talk to the hand!” “Eat my dust!” “Cry me a river!” (exact Legendary Revenge Statement to be determined when said fame actually happens)

There is a slight, nagging worry in the back of my Mind that wonders if this *fame* will be the good kind, i.e. Oprah-ish, where she invites me to talk on her channel and asks me a question and I begin to cry, and she begins to cry, and then the audience cries, and then we give each other warm, supportive hugs, after which Oprah gives us all diamond Porsches which we can find if we look under our seats, SURPRISE!

Or will it be the not so desirable, *infamous* kind, a la OJ Simpson or Rod Blagojevich where people make fun of me because I like fame and I like to talk about myself. Oh God . . . come to think of it . . . did they write books too?!! Forget it! I am not going to think too deeply on this. I, for one, choose to be an upbeat, optimistic person, and I am unshakably confident that my fame will be the rapturous, glorious, soaring kind! Amen!

Before I get too excited, let me admit again that, so far, none of this has actually come true—neither the personal predictions nor the professional predictions. Not only am I *not* married, and *without* kids, I am also dead broke and slightly in *debt* due to the money I ploughed into my startups. And I am certainly not famous. At all. Unless you count my widespread reputation for being the entrepreneurial, foolish black sheep amongst my conservative, stable, doctor-populated Indian community, where the parents shake their heads at the outrageous risks I have taken and thank their lucky stars that their kids are not like me. Someone even compared me to Jenny from *Forrest Gump*. He said I reminded him of Jenny because I couldn't seem to hold still or hold a job. I was touched.

In addition to my having had this unusual and rather unique predic-

tion made about my life, I've heard, over the years, from various members in the community, how certain Astrologers *could* predict things, and how it was not hocus-pocus or magic, but based concretely on science, the planets, and mathematical calculations. Many of these are very educated, very sensible, down-to-earth people who are not the type to say these kinds of things unless they had really witnessed these predictions coming true. At first I attributed all these stories to *confirmation bias*, where people ignore the times that things did *not* go the right way, and only remember the times that they did. But there were too many people with solid, non-superstitious backgrounds telling me the same thing for me to ignore the issue. So I kept an open Mind, especially when it was explained to me how Astrology works, and how it has its foundation in math and science.

Although I remain more doubtful of Astrology than not, a small part of me feels there may be some basis to the type of predictions made using stars, celestial positions, and other mathematical calculations derived from the details of a person's birth.

The reasoning behind those calculations is based on . . . once again . . . you guessed it (or didn't guess it) . . . energy!

Astrology believes that each Soul Energy is traveling its own path of reincarnation and Karmic Energy patterns. Remember how I theorized that each Soul Energy might have 1000 ergs to go through in order to reach Heaven—perhaps 500 negative ergs☹ and 500 positive ergs☺? Each of us would have positive and negative periods or experiences in our life, but some of us might have more negative front-loaded in the beginning of a life cycle, others might have it in random spurts, while

the rest might have it spread evenly throughout. Overall, we would each go through the same number of trials and tribulations and tempting material successes that would beguile our Souls to remain attached to the external.

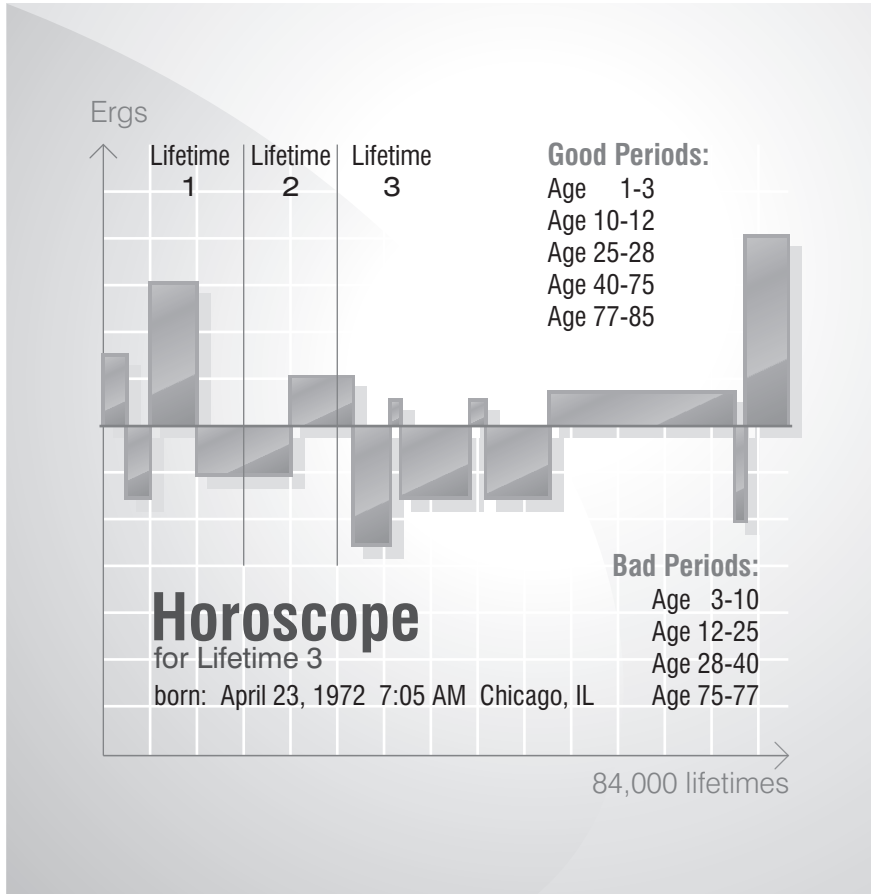
Astrology is based on this philosophy. It says that when we are born, we can determine the trajectory we are on for this particular incarnation (i.e. Human form) based on calculations of different planets and their energy fields and other celestial matters taken into account. Unlike the generalized horoscopes of the twelve sun signs, natal Astrology is based on a unique calculation for each individual. Using date of birth, time of birth, and geographical location (mine is April 23, 1972, 7:05 AM, Chicago, IL), the Astrologer comes up with a customized prediction for the set of coordinates a Soul was born into.

An Astrologer would use my natal chart to predict when I might have a good period coming up, and how long a difficult one might last. He might see that I had an average childhood, and foresee a much better adulthood. He might tell me to expect marriage during a particular year. He might warn me to be careful during a certain three month period because the influence of the energy field of a particular planet is strong, and may present me with negative temptations.

Astrology attributes specific properties to each planet and its energy field. For example, Saturn is considered a strong planet, one that can bring wisdom, fame, and strength if present in the right coordinates, but can also be highly malefic and bring sorrow, difficulties, and destruction. Apparently I have a negative Saturn influence for the first part of my life, and the positive influence of Saturn and other planets

in the second part.

After taking into account all these factors, an allocation of the good and bad ergs I have accumulated through Karma, over many lifetimes, might be forecasted as follows:



The chart above is just an illustration that I created in order to explain my point. The actual charts that Astrologers draw up are completely different and appropriately mysterious looking, like this:



This chart has been drawn from my actual birth coordinates. It is one of the tools that Astrologers use to view the interplay of various celestial bodies and their energy fields, including which planets are dominant or rising and will have more influence than the others. Combinations of certain planets sitting together in one *house* or section of a horoscope can mean something different than another combination that is present in someone else's horoscope. Based on the positions of the planets in the chart—which are all mathematically calculated—Astrologers try to interpret what the energy fields mean in terms of

favorable or unfavorable periods in areas of wealth, health, career, family, love, aging, and more. If a particular planet is known for bringing success in the career area, and it is the ascending or dominant planet, then Astrologers might say that someone will soon be getting a great promotion or advancing in their field. Or they might interpret it as something else. Sometimes an upcoming stretch of time might not indicate a predominance of pleasant or unpleasant occurrences, but a sprinkling of both.

The part that is relatively standard in the whole process is the calculation and drawing up of the chart. From what I understand there are variances, but overall, natal Astrology does not differ that greatly in how it is taught across the world. The part that is open to subjective interpretation is what the calculations mean.

I can see the connection between Astrology and the idea of energy being the force behind the Universe, the Earth, our Souls, our Life Cycles, everything. Apparently everyone would have an entirely unique horoscope if we could pinpoint the exact location and time a baby was born. Because obviously you can't have more than one baby born at the same coordinates, at the same moment. Even twins are delivered at least a few minutes apart. But since people don't record the exact latitude and longitude of where they were born, horoscopes are a bit less unique in practice than they are in theory. It is possible that a baby who was born in the same hospital as me, around the same time, would have a similar natal chart. Yet apparently, even coordinates and charts that are imprecise can still result in a fairly accurate horoscope. It is only in borderline cases that predictions may not be accurate, where being just a few feet,

or a few seconds off, might result in a different horoscope. So the idea of there being a unique horoscope for each of us, rather than only twelve different possibilities, appeals to my sense of logic much more. The idea that each of us has a unique Karmic trajectory, calculated from planetary energy influences, appeals to my growing inclination that energy drives everything.

As I said, I would not have bothered to get horoscope calculations done on my own, since I had never believed in it. But when there was this one, rather odd similarity, regarding my impending fame amongst the horoscope readings my most generous relatives solicited on my behalf, it did make me sit up, pay attention, and stop trying to explain to them the very Western concept of personal privacy.

However the skeptic in me wonders if everyone is making similar predictions because they have all learned to do calculations in the same way. The teachings of Astrology may be untrue, but those who practice it may match each other in their horoscope readings because they are all drawing from the same incorrect bank of knowledge.

Another reason for my skepticism is that even the same Astrologer does not seem to consistently give the same reading. I went back to one of the Astrologers years later, who I knew would not remember me, and got my horoscope read again. I wanted to see if the new reading would match the earlier one. Sure enough, it did NOT! There were similarities, but in many ways it was different. AHA! Gotcha! The Astrologer was most annoyed when I confronted him with the discrepancy, and he had no explanation as to why. He better not have put a curse on me after I left!

However, as I theorized previously, there is a possibility that many who claim to have supernatural abilities are quacks or amateurs, but there exist real and knowledgeable Astrologers who *could* give accurate predictions if only we were lucky enough to find them. Just like there may also exist real psychokinetics who can bend spoons, and people who have actually been reincarnated and can remember past lives. I have a feeling that the genuine, learned Astrologers are those who are not charging tons of money for their craft, and prefer not to give readings because they know the damage it can do to people who take them too seriously and stop living life in the present moment.

After years of seeing evidence for both sides, my conclusion is that Astrology consists of a convincing methodology, yet should be taken with a grain of salt. I continue to strive towards my goals through sheer hard work. I try not to sit back and take it easy on my inflatable barcalounger, thinking that my destiny is already laid out for me regardless of my own efforts. If I am going to be successful no matter what I do—great!—if I am going to be successful only if I work for it, then I've got that base covered too. Either way, if the day does come when I turn famous and make lots of money, then

I TOLD YOU SO!!

PALM READING

Now that we've started on this tantric trail, I can't help but give a brief tip of the hat to Astrology's cousin—Palm Reading. Like Astrology, the art of Palmistry attempts to foretell your future. Unlike Astrology, Palmistry does not foretell the timing of good and bad phases. Rather, it

focuses on milestones such as marriage, kids, health, wealth, length of life, and career. Astrology addresses this as well, but Palmistry is more able to differentiate between what is permanently etched in your destiny, on your non-dominant hand, and what can be changed by your Karmic efforts, on your dominant hand. (For most of us, our right hand would be the dominant one.)

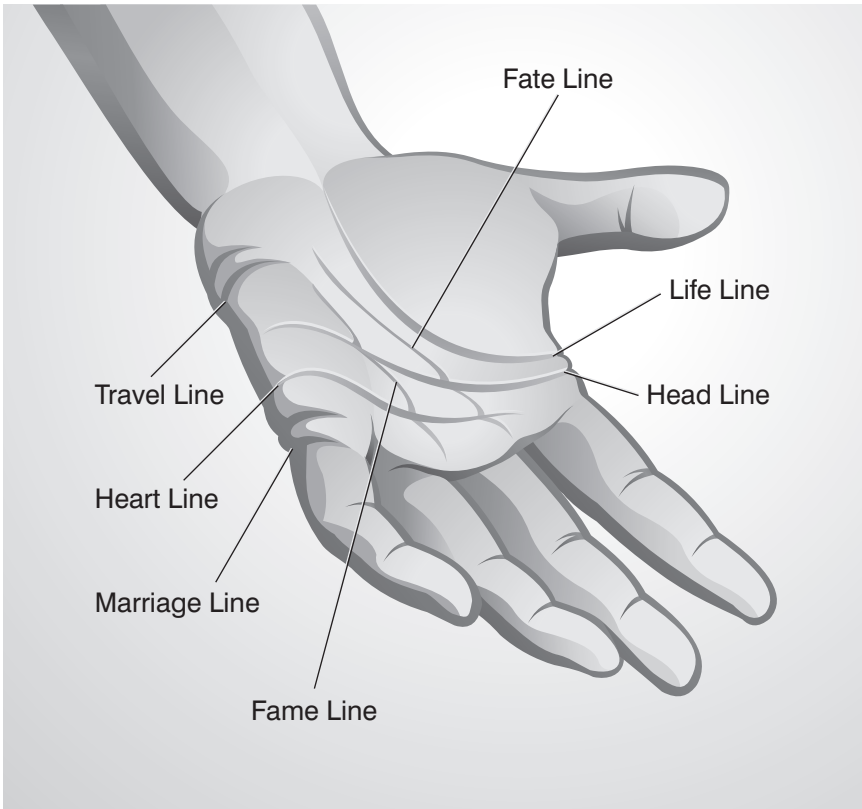
The art of Palmistry follows the theory of nature vs. nurture. It is thought that the left hand (non-dominant) represents *past* Karma and acquired spiritual knowledge. It tells the Palm Reader about your personality or your strengths and weaknesses, such as your level of intelligence, patience, and sensitivity. Based on this, the Palm Reader can gauge your larger potential. Some say the left palm can even tell the story of unmet desires that are being carried over into this life, because, as mentioned in the chapter on Karma, the Universe will try to help the Soul meet those goals to encourage it to move past them and progress further towards Enlightenment.

Along with the left hand, the right hand (dominant) is also used to predict events that might be referred to as *predestined*. However, the lines on your right hand can change, along with the future, based on your efforts in this life. There may be accomplishments predicted for career, marriage, and other areas. But they can change if something you do in the present affects your priorities and your Karmic balance. The right hand is like a balance sheet, which is a snapshot of where you are at the present moment. Your balance sheet can change in the future depending on your new cosmic profits and losses.

This is a big reason that I find both Astrology and Palm Reading to have some credibility. I like the idea that I *can* affect my future with my current actions. Our lives have not been laid out by the arbitrary whimsy of some mischievous God. Rather, as we discussed in the Karma chapter, our *predestiny* is actually based on accomplishments from a PREvious life. And we can change what is predestined in two ways. Either by adding more good or bad Karma to our cosmic balance, thus enhancing or diluting what is already predestined. Or by making more of an effort towards a particular goal, thus shifting the allocation of our good Karma points to our new areas of priority. Notice how the *dominant* hand is the one that is supposed to depict our changing lines—it is our *current* actions which are dominant, nothing is fully predestined.

Have I ever gotten my palm read? Yes I have, but not by anyone who seemed truly knowledgeable in the art. It is common practice for some Uncle or Auntie to be sitting next to me at a party, and take my hand to give me an off-the-cuff reading. In fact, I've even had some young, rather sketchy members of the opposite gender pretend to “read” my palm, which gave them a convenient excuse to hold my hand. Does this happen to people from other cultures, or is this just a questionable pickup method specific to my community?

Since most go by the same reservoir of Palm Reading knowledge—one line is our Heart Line, another is our Brain Line, a third is our Life Line—I usually do get similarly vague readings. But again, if everyone is learning the same methods, then everyone's predictions will match.



That doesn't mean that what they have learned is correct to begin with. In addition, I am not entirely sure how Palmistry relates to energy. How do lines change on the dominant hand, in accordance with our current actions—how is energy involved? I don't know.

However, I must sheepishly confess that I have leaned on these readings during certain situations. Whenever I am sitting in a plane experiencing turbulence, or hear a scary noise when I am alone, I calm my frantically beating heart by staring at the life line etched on both of my palms. I am supposed to have a long, relatively accident-free life. That means I CAN'T die in a plane accident, can I? There

are at least two instances I can recall, where I sat in a bouncing plane, clutching my hands to my chest, quietly chanting “long lifeline, long lifeline” as I prayed for the turbulence to end. Sad, but true!

COLORS, NUMBERS, STONES, AND SUGAR

While I have an open Mind towards Astrology and Palmistry, there is a part of this whole field that I find hard to digest. That is the part that says a person can wear lucky Colors, have lucky Numbers, or wear certain Gemstones, and possibly deflect any difficult times coming their way. There is also a whole list of *unlucky* Stones and Colors and Numbers that one should avoid as well. I can go with our *actions* affecting our lives, because we are *earning* whatever good or bad will be happening to us. But it doesn't sound fair that we can use inanimate objects to passively increase our good fortune.

What if someone is poor and can't afford to buy a wardrobe full of their lucky Colors? And why should certain Stones make me more likely to get a job than not get a job? That doesn't sound right to me.

Black is considered an inauspicious Color, but it is one of my favorites, so I ignore the warning and wear that Color all the time. I don't go out of my way to wear light grey or blue, which are actually supposed to be my lucky Colors. I don't use my lucky Number of 3 to buy lottery tickets with the Numbers 333333 on March 3 at 3:33 PM.

I do take very seriously, however, the recommendation that I wear my Birthstone, the diamond, to ward off evil energy. And as soon as

I find my next husband, I am sure he will provide the protective halo of diamonds needed to guard his precious and beloved wife from whatever it is that is out to get her.

I am not being greedy! Hey, precious Gems like rubies, diamonds, and emeralds, are thought to emanate energy, you know! In fact, the sapphire, one of my favorites, is actually considered dangerous if not handled properly. It is thought that wearing a particular Stone, based on what is recommended from an Astrological calculation, can help the wearer reflect or deflect other energy, such as that coming from the planets. Here is an interesting excerpt from the book, *The Healing Power of Gemstones*¹, that explains this theory:

Healing stones are crystals of clear and purified minerals that are also found in the human body.

Healing stones serve as valuable agents of electromagnetic energy that influences the electrochemical nature of the human organism . . . Healing stones work with physiochemical energy as well as with pranic* energy, whether used as jewelry or taken orally as pastes or oxides.

Healing stones absorb and produce specific energies that are related to the frequencies of the light that they receive. These frequencies can be seen as colors and are

¹Harish Johari, *The Healing Power of Gemstones* (Vermont: Destiny Books, 1996)

related to planetary energies that go well beyond the visible light frequencies.

Astrologers and gem therapists use healing gemstones as talismans or birthstones to compensate for the loss of energy caused by weak planets or to provide more strength to the exalted favorable planets.

* Pranic Energy is similar to what we are referring to as *Soul Energy*

I think this sounds completely, and convincingly true, and even Suze Orman should approve my need to bejewel myself in diamonds. Despite my . . . lack of finances. Hey, it's an investment in my own future! Maybe *buying* a diamond will influence the cosmos to *bring* me more diamonds! One can never be too dismissive of the power of a healing sparkler.

Alright, fine, I will admit I am making fun of the idea that Stones can counteract the undesirable energy that I may have accumulated from committing sins in the past. Although the fact that the effect of Stones, Colors, and Numbers is explained by energy does make me wonder if there isn't a wee bit of something to the theory. Anything begins to sound more plausible to me if it is tied to energy, because I do believe that everything in our life revolves around energy.

Didn't Nancy Reagan consult her Astrologist on these types of issues—lucky Days, lucky Numbers—whenever President Reagan had to go out? She admitted once, in an interview, that she wasn't sure if any of this would work. But she needed a way to feel some sense of control after the assassination attempt on the President, and this was her way of

trying to get it.

While it does feel comforting to think that you can improve your future through relatively painless methods, as I said, it doesn't seem fair that inanimate objects or passive activities can atone for any negative energy generated through past live actions. So while I don't discount the power of Stones, Colors, and Numbers completely, I mostly dismiss this part of Astrology as being far-fetched.

But since I believe that self-created, *action-oriented* Karmic Energy can enhance my future, I am more apt to give in to relatives or Astrologers who instruct me to volunteer my time or donate some item to charity in order to generate more positive Karma for myself. Regardless of whether it will or not, I usually comply, since my exertions will help someone either way. So when I was told to distribute bags of clothes, thread, oil, and sugar to the needy during a past trip to India (my recommended sin-cleansing ritual), well, I went along with it. I'll admit my compliance went beyond altruistic motives. I was hedging my bets in case sugar truly *is* my lucky alms vehicle. I might have been Marie Antoinette in a past life, where I haughtily responded "Let them eat cake!" when told of the hunger in my kingdom. Perhaps it is that arrogance that I need to atone for in this life by giving people oil and sugar so they really *can* eat cake. You never know!?!

CHANTING, MANTRAS, PRAYERS, AND MEDITATION

Unlike with inanimate objects like Stones, Colors, and Numbers, I can see *some* logic to the premise that Chanting, Mantras, Prayers, and Meditation can have a beneficial effect.

While there may be subtle differences, I will group them together as one concept because overall they involve thoughts, sounds, or words, and they have similar objectives. The objectives can vary from asking for a particular wish to be fulfilled, to calming the Mind, to simply bringing one's self closer to God.

A Chant or Mantra or Prayer or Meditation is supposed to work because of what's in your Mind. (Yes, I know. The *Mind?! That old thing again? Sheesh!*)

The Mind uses these tools to focus internally and steady itself, or to focus externally on sending a message out to the Universe. Sometimes this is attempted silently, and sometimes with sound. Producing and being surrounded by sound may help a person to concentrate more than if they were to try to sit in silence. The word *Om* is commonly used as a general Chant, but words with specific meaning can be used too.

In fact, Mantras can be very targeted Chants asking the Universe for help in achieving a specific goal. For example, if you are worried about work, you could make use of a Job Mantra. While you are Mantra-ing, the vibrations of your thoughts are supposed to affect your energy field, and possibly result in a calmer, more peaceful temperament that causes you to be a more pleasant person to work with, which unbeknownst to you may have been your problem. In addition, the vibrations might make their way to your boss's Mind (who you are subconsciously trying to communicate with) and have the same effect on him.

Mantras are usually in Sanskrit, so it's hard for me to translate. Nevertheless, I'll do my best to do so for one regarding *work*. It goes something like this:

Roses are red, Violets are blue . . .

Give me a Job, any will do . . .

Or win me the Lottery, I beg of you.

Or something like that. Electrifying stuff, isn't it? OK, there is a chance I may not have translated that correctly, but there genuinely are *Job Mantras* that are prescribed by wise spiritual leaders to supposedly help a person with this problem. Prayers, Meditation, and general Chants are based on the same premise, that the vibrations produced by your thoughts and sounds can create positive energy and positive thinking.

However, as with Karma, the benefits of Chanting or Mantra-ing or Prayers or Meditation are obtained only if you are focused on the objective. The benefits are based on *intent*, not just going through the motions.

So chanting a Mantra or Prayer over and over, while sitting piously in a temple, and surreptitiously ogling the cute guy or girl who is attending the service and looks like they have the makings of an ideal spouse or booty call, is not going to get you anywhere. It's certainly not going to get you anywhere spiritually, and you are better off looking for a puppy or baby to be your wingthing.

You have to *mean* what you *Mantra*. You can't *cheat* on your *Chant*.

How plausible is the idea that sound and thought vibrations can travel through the air, perhaps thousands of miles, and be picked up by the Universe or by the person for whom they were intended? It does sound crazy at first. Is it really possible that there is such a thing

as “I Want a Job” Energy or “I Want to be Happier at Work” Energy? Well, remember, there are all types of energy that may exist, that we have not yet discovered. Energy can also be a loose term for vibrations or brainwaves, which I think *do* travel through the air, and which I believe *can* carry with them very specific messages. Here is why I believe that—

ESP

—I have a cousin who claims that occasionally, not often, but every once in a while, he will get a vision that turns out to be true a short time later.

He claims that he saw our grandmother in a dream, telling him that she had to leave and that she came to say goodbye. He claims he had this dream the night she died, but before he was informed of the news.

When he told me this, I skeptically began peppering him with questions, trying to get a feel for whether he was serious. My cousin is a smart, mostly normal kid who didn't seem to be under any hallucinatory drugs that I knew of.

Most unexpectedly, he gave me an explanation for these visions which has stuck with me years later and opened my Mind to the possibilities of a sixth sense existing for a select few.

He said that he compares his experience of receiving *brainwaves* to a radio receiving *radiowaves*. A radio station can record its program hundreds of miles away, and transmit its program to the radio in your home through its satellite dish, which sends out radiowaves received by your home's antenna.

In the same way, he wonders if his Mind or brain can pick up brain-waves or thoughts being subconsciously transmitted by people who are thinking of him. His body might have a more receptive antenna for picking up waves and frequencies that others don't.

Wavelengths of light give power to television sets and lasers. Digital data runs through cable wire and drives the Internet. Cell phones receive signals through the air, for the most part, except when you are stuck at some remote place in the jungle where you need your phone the most and it chooses to become a nice, useless paperweight at that precise moment.

So isn't it possible, that perhaps, somehow, thoughts can be transmitted and picked up by the right antenna, just like all the other types of waves that we have already discovered and harnessed within science? I made a reference in a previous chapter to dogs who can hear high-pitched frequencies that Humans can't. Perhaps brainwaves fall into the same category—perhaps only a select few can “hear” them.

In fact, the proof of that may already be here. Increasingly, we hear of a new technology or computer or machine that is able to be operated by the Mind.

“Toyota makes a wheelchair powered by brainwaves . . .”

—June 2009

“Patients in Jacksonville's Mayo Clinic campus have become the world's first cyborg spellers, conjuring computerized letters using nothing but the power of the Mind . . .”

—Mar 2010

“On the Horizon, Avatars, Robots, and other Mind-
Controlled Machines . . .” —Feb 2011

And one of the first signs of evidence that the Mind could transmit information? The lie detector (polygraph) machine invented in 1921 and in use even today.

Many people explain all this by saying that the body sends biological impulses or signals to various parts of the body, which are readable by the machines that pick up on the differing patterns of neuron firings, or increased heart rate, or other bodily clues. People say there is a perfectly scientific and reasonable explanation for all of this, and it's not due to “mystical powers” of the Mind and invisible brainwaves that are being sent through the air.

That doesn't make complete sense to me. Something is causing breathing and heart rates to increase, palms to sweat, and neurons to fire more rapidly. There is a signal being sent to the neurons for them to act that way, a signal that conveys fear or guilt or a command to move or spell and which causes the body to react the way it does. Where is that signal coming from? It is coming from the Mind.

But yes, so far our science and technology does not seem to read brainwaves directly, it only reads the biological side effect of those brainwaves. That is why ESP is not yet taken seriously, there is no evidence of it obtainable by measuring physical changes in the body. Yet perhaps ESP will be explained in terms of biology one day. We may finally create the technology to capture and read brainwaves, just like we have created the technology to generate and send radiowaves. Just

because we haven't done so yet does not mean that ESP is not possible. I am simply open to it being true before science and medicine have caught up with the circumstantial evidence already pointing to its existence.

SO, IN CONCLUSION

With all of the Charts and Mind Machines and ESP stories and Astrology Ph.D.'s out there, I think there is an eensy-weensy, tiny-winy miniscularian possibility that Palm Reading and Fortune Telling and Chanting and Prayers and ESP are real. I am still skeptical of my cousin and his ESP powers, for the most part, but I find myself being less of a demeaning bully to him—as is normally the right of any older cousin—since he told me that story. *Just in case.*

And if I am advised to do something nice for someone else—to offer them sugar or flour or cake pans or whatever—I do it, because even if it is not erasing some specific Karmic debt I owe from my last life, at least I'll be doing a good deed, regardless. It couldn't hurt.

Meanwhile, I await the lucky man who will marry me and shower me in protective Diamond Energy and proudly smile as I accept my Oscar and Nobel Prize and Pulitzer Prize and hug from Oprah and Jay Leno as I rise to fame and am further showered with gobs of money.

By the way, where is he??? He better arrive here soon, he was supposed to have shown up in 2008, he is already four years late! Apparently my attempt to transmit *sultry, come hither* brainwaves, while wearing LIGHT GREY sweatpants, and leaning against THREE pillows while wearing my DIAMOND tiara, is not working. For now.

But there is always the possibility that it will

ACTION IS THE OTHER HALF

Putting it all
together

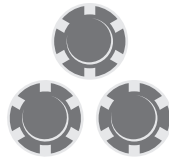
PART

3



Chapter XII

Religion—our Personal Trainer



There is a saying that “Knowledge is the first half of a Battle, and Action is the second half.”

This is not a new concept. It applies to Spirituality, and to the rest of the world as well. Many of us spend years in school obtaining the knowledge to become... nurses... or plumbers... then spend the second half of our life jabbing needles into people, or plungers into toilets. First obtain jabbing knowledge, then have fun jabbing. Knowledge. Action.

Once we have obtained the knowledge of what Spirituality means to us, how do we put it into action?

The first possibility is to follow a clear-cut guide that is already laid out for us. This is what we refer to as organized Religion. I feel there is nothing wrong with following a particular Religion. As long as it helps us to accomplish the objectives we seek and teaches us to be open-minded

to the way of others.

But if we believe in Soul Energy, Reincarnation, Karma, and Detachment, can they be observed in any Religion, or are we limited to a chosen few, like Buddhism, or Hinduism, which specifically address these concepts?

Since we have defined Detachment as one of the keys to reaching Heaven, let's start by examining this concept within the various Religions.

Many Religions do encourage different degrees of Detachment. A few have religious heads that are models of *complete* Detachment. Nuns, monks, swamis, and some priests remain unmarried and celibate with few possessions. They embody the extreme and ultimate form of Detachment, even while living here, on Earth.

Within other Religions, leaders marry and run a household but encourage philanthropy through tithing or other contributions. This involves the reduction of monetary attachments. And of course, the very purpose of Religion is to teach its followers to invest some time into the afterlife, whether through prayer, rituals, pilgrimages, fasting, or other practices, which involves time away from regular activities. There is always some form of Detachment from the material world implied in any Religion.

In addition to Detachment, most Religions teach you to “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. Most Religions teach a philosophy similar to Karma. Perhaps they don't tie this philosophy to reincarnation, or to selfish and selfless deeds carrying over to affect us in another life. But the important point is that they do encourage benevolent behavior.

Mother Theresa is a perfect example of someone who was an enlightened Soul. She had few possessions (Detachment) and spent most of her life in humanitarian service of others (Karma). She didn't seem to care about the fame bestowed upon her either (Ego). Although she was Catholic, she was tolerant of other viewpoints, and did not regard her way as the only way.

Beyond the commonalities of Detachment and Karma, however, there are many differences among Religions. Some say that our current life form is the only one where Enlightenment can be achieved. Some proclaim that there is only one way to reach God, and that you must follow that particular way or you are doomed. Some sanction meat consumption and also consider it a holy offering. Others strongly feel the opposite. Some advocate violence as a justified means in reaching a particular end. Some base their entire teachings on the premise of non-violence.

I view Religions as different styles of instruction. Some of us prefer the classroom setting. Some of us learn better with a one-on-one tutor. Some of us like online, self-study classes. Some of us learn better with visual aids.

Some of us require daily rituals and prayers as a reminder to keep 3 chips on the Maybe square. Rituals and repeated chantings also help to ingrain teachings, just like a school kid learns to write by tracing alphabet letters over and over again.

Some of us need different deities to personify different qualities or lessons. For example, in Hinduism, the Goddess of Wealth reminds us to be grateful for our success and realize that it is not only due to our own

efforts, but to blessings from the Universe. The God of Destruction reminds us that everything we have can be destroyed tomorrow, and to not abuse our gifts or remain too attached to them. Even though these many Gods are simply representative of one God and one truth (unlike Greek mythology which really *did* believe in several Gods), Hinduism has created these numerous deities to appeal to the various personalities of its disciples.

Religions cater to different people in different ways. It gets them to focus on their inner Soul Energy and remember that there is more to life and Happiness than external factors and pursuits. Although I am not a fan of organized Religion for myself, I do believe it can be beneficial for many people.

Without Religion, most people lack a clear set of rules that help define their values and provide guidance on how to act. That, in turn, allows people to continue ignoring the subject, and to put all their energies into their current, tangible lives. It allows them to keep swatting at their Spirituality Alarm Clock in order to sleep in for just five more minutes, years, or decades, and to think about the afterlife *later*. Much later.

In times past, Religion served a purpose. Centuries ago, there was little science, so it was a way to understand the mysteries of the world.

Question: Why do people get diseases?

Answer: Because Zeus was angered when we didn't spin 2.096 times counter-clockwise while sacrificing a Unicorn and he has now given us the Plague! Or the Pox! Or A Pox on Us! A Pox on Us, Thus! Or whatever!

As scientific knowledge grew, Religion was used less to explain earthly phenomena, although it still filled in the gaps to unanswered questions. Mainly, it was a way for people to set aside a certain amount of time daily, or at least weekly, to focus on something other than themselves and their own lives. Whether it was a few hours spent attending church every Sunday, or saying prayers every night, Religion reminded people to balance the investment in their current life with the investment in their afterlife. To be ambitious AND charitable. To have monetary wealth AND spiritual wealth.

Religion served as a personal trainer in a sense, keeping people on track with daily, weekly, or monthly, sermons, festivals, or rituals. Some were more extreme, of course, and some were quite balanced. But they were successful at toning and beautifying people's insides with strict discipline and harsh words if people slacked off.

Susan Powter: It does take work and it ain't easy—but
man, the rewards!

All Religions: It does take work and it ain't easy—but man,
the rewards!

Bob Harper (Biggest Loser): I know it hurts but I'm saving
your life right now.

Violent Missionary: I know it hurts but I'm saving your life
right now.

Richard Simmons: If you don't give up, you can't fail.

Born-Again Christian: If you don't give up, you can't fail.

Jane Fonda: Feel the Burn!

Bishop Cauchon to Joan of Arc: Feel the Burn!

Jillian Michaels (Biggest Loser): Feel the fear. Do it anyway!

Puritans to Hester Prynne: Feel the fear. Don't do it anyway!

Religion acted as the personal trainer for our Souls. Without organized Religion in the lives of us spiritual people, it has been easy to neglect this part of our development, to become flabby and unattractive. To be fit and beautiful on the outside, but not on the inside.

Many of us vaguely *spiritual* people have fat, jiggly-wiggly, cellulite-filled Souls. It is no surprise that we have become the Me generation. We no longer have a personal trainer to make us exercise our spiritual Minds. We no longer affiliate ourselves with a particular Religion. *ERGO* we are free to be lackadaisical and tell ourselves that we are *good people* and that as long as we don't harm others in our fierce pursuit of physical comforts, we are being sufficiently spiritual and thoughtful of God.

So in its own way, organized Religion does help society and individuals to spend at least some time thinking about a higher purpose. As I said before, there is nothing wrong with following a formal, organized Religion. As long as it is tolerant and does not lead you to condemn other people for their views. Unfortunately, many have aspects of “*WE are right, and YOU are wrong, we're going to Heaven, and you're going to Hell, na-na-na-na-boo-boo* — Whap — Thunk — Kapow — Hit — Bomb!”

These Religions may get someone partially towards Enlightenment, but unfortunately their questionable teachings may also induce a follower to generate negative Karma for himself through his hurtful practices. The leaders of these faiths may be relatively Detached from worldly pursuits, and advocate charity, but they can condemn those who think differently and may even condone their killing.

This, to me, is not a completely Detached state. Yes, the leaders may not indulge in the material life very much, but they are still attached to the Ego, or the identity of themselves and their followers. They are still attached to the world in terms of its man-made languages and books and perspectives. They may not be as physically or financially attached, but they are mentally attached.

Religion can be a step backwards when it involves blind faith. Which is not something I need to preach to many of you because that type of person would not be reading this book. But it is interesting to me how extremely educated, otherwise down-to-earth people can get so caught up in proving that their path is the one and only . . . that they are exclusively blessed by God because of their devout adherence to whatever has been taught them.

I remember once, almost twenty-five years ago when I was a teenager, going to the temple during a time when there was rumor of a miracle being witnessed around the world. Apparently idols in temples were *drinking* any milk presented to them?! Perhaps it was a particular deity that was thirsty, and not all of them, I don't remember exactly. At the temple, I skeptically stood next to an idol where a well groomed, seemingly professional woman was bending down, holding a teaspoonful of milk

next to the painted mouth of a stone idol. Though I was amused at the fact that she was even trying, I expected her to eventually dismiss the whole “miracle” as a hoax when she found that the milk wasn’t being consumed. But over the next few minutes, I watched as the milk slowly dripped from the teaspoon onto the sand below, which had apparently been laid out to absorb all the milk spilling that must have been going on all day, every day, during that “miraculous” time of dairy slurping.

She tried not to make it too obvious that she was slightly shaking the spoon to slowly get rid of the milk, but no one she knew was watching anyway, it was just a crowd of strangers and myself. Finally, after about five minutes, when there was still a bit of milk left in the teaspoon, she triumphantly straightened up (thereby spilling the rest of it), started walking towards her family, and proclaimed (in Hindi): *He drank it! He drank it! God has drunk the milk from my spoon!*

I didn't catch her family's reaction because people had already started shoving their way towards the idol to get their turn, and I had to arm my way past the crowd to leave the temple. To this day, I remember that event clearly, because it illustrated to me how people can make themselves believe something if they sincerely want to. I am sure I do that at times too, but I think many of us spiritual people are trying our best *not* to do that, and that is why we prefer customizing our own set of values as opposed to following any one Religion.

However, I think there is a way to follow a particular Religion, yet retain one's individual beliefs as well. Religion does not have to be followed blindly or completely for it to be helpful.

Mother Theresa is a good example of this again. She followed the teachings of Catholicism, even as she struggled with doubts about the existence of God. The letters that were published after her death scandalized many people since she wrote about doubting God, and feeling that he had left her—questioning his very existence, at times. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Yet despite that, she carried on with what she mostly felt was right, and she used a particular Religion to keep her on that path.

In addition, she took an unusual route, in that she spent a majority of her life helping the poor in a country that was predominantly of another Religion. It's admirable that she and her followers did not try to convert those she was helping. She did not let her Religion confine her to the activities and countries one would expect of someone bound to a particular faith.

Thus, organized Religion can be helpful even to those who have doubts, like many of us. Just because we aren't 100 percent sure about a particular Religion, doesn't mean that we can't engage in it.

If a spouse, or family member, or someone close to us is adamant about practicing their faith in a certain way, it might be easier and more peaceful to go along with it and use that particular Religion's set of rules to reach the same goals.

Although I am not very well read in Religion, or even in Spirituality, I have read parts of the Bible, Quran, and the Bhagavad Geeta. I have been to a Church, a Temple, and other religious establishments, and I have no problems visiting them again if an occasion arises where I'm asked to go.

I may not agree with everything that is being preached in the Sermon that day, but I focus on the overall message and use that time to meditate on my own Spirituality.

I sometimes fast an entire day without any food or water. Many Religions advocate that as a way to purify the Mind by taking its focus away from the needs of the body, towards those who don't have the benediction of food and security. Like Islam, which has a thirty day fasting period every year that requires a tremendous amount of admirable discipline. Or similarly, during Lent, when a person gives up one of their favorite foods.

(It might not be taught this way in any Religion, but isn't fasting a technique to also try when asking the Heavens or God for something? I think that is a legitimate reason for it!? Hey, it worked for Mahatma Gandhi . . . he fasted and got an entire country its Independence! I don't know if starving myself will convince God to give me what I want, but just in case it does, I throw in a virtuous starvation day here and there.)

As I mentioned in the Astrology chapter, some Religions connote black colors with inauspicious occurrences. I don't actually believe in that, per se. Black is one of my favorite colors and it does such a wonderful job in hiding the Boston Cream donut I ate last night. However a few years ago I was leaving the house for my once-in-a-lifetime laser eye surgery, and I paused, turned back around, and changed from the black pants I was wearing to a pair that was light grey. Light grey is supposedly an auspicious color for me, as you may recall. Not that I really worried that something would happen if I wore black . . . but just in case, you know . . . it was a question of my eyes after all!

If you are now wondering whether I am superstitious, I am not. I do not shriek and hop around if I break a mirror or see a black cat cross my path. I do not create evil voodoo dolls of people I dislike and stick little needles into them. Regardless of how fun that actually sounds.

My point is you can take parts of, or all of, a particular Religion, and still reach Heaven and God. Though the Spirituality laid out in this book most closely resembles Buddhism, you do not have to declare yourself a Buddhist in order to apply these concepts to your life. You can learn the values of Karma and Detachment from Catholicism, Christianity, Judaism, and others. I am not trying to go to Heaven by converting you to Buddhism, it just so happens that the spiritual formula I write about borrows heavily from that faith. (Although if I *could* go to Heaven for converting you, I will admit that I *would* try. Hey! A Soul's gotta do, what a Soul's gotta do!)

Religion *can* be a useful tool in training us to focus on the internal and to remember that there is more to life than material pursuits. It can be the path to Detachment and peaceful surrender to the Universe when life becomes rocky and things don't go as expected. It can teach us to be compassionate and earn good Karma. If your Spirituality is not getting you anywhere, or the people around you—family, potential mates—are very much into a particular faith, you can participate in organized Religion and still make progress on your journey to Enlightenment.

For those of us who prefer to seek and practice Spirituality without Religion as a personal trainer, what other path can we take?

Enter *Meditation*

Chapter XIII

Intermittent Meditation Flashes (IMF)



If an alternative to Religion, and listening to a weekly sermon is desired, *Meditation* is supposed to help accomplish the same goals. Meditation can act as our personal trainer and focus us on our spiritual growth on a consistent basis. It is said that from *right thoughts* will eventually come *right actions*. There are no elaborate rituals or festivals or prayers or fasting schedules required in do-it-yourself Spirituality. Most of it relies on putting our *knowledge* into *action*.

If we are not following the path of an organized Religion, and we want to put a few chips on the Maybe square, then Meditation will help us think about our beliefs—Detachment, Karma, the Ego, Soul Energy, liberation from Reincarnation, or anything else—and remind us to follow them.

That's it. Simple. Regularly focus on core values and goals, then try to put them into action as often as possible using one's conscience and common sense.

Meditation is supposed to be the foundation for all of this. If we Meditate, we are supposed to be able to withdraw from everything going on around us. The noise, the weather, the bug crawling up our leg. We are supposed to go into a trance of some type, where our Minds are blank, no longer focused on the external. No longer acting as the compiler and translating our Soul's source code in the wrong way.

To Meditate, we are supposed to sit still, clear our Mind of all thoughts, and just . . . I don't know . . . BE . . .

Our Mind is neither *here nor there*, we are neither *in nor out*, we are the *sun* and the *moon* and the *twilight zone* and . . .

Huh?

I think that is what we are supposed to do.

I remember reading or hearing somewhere that if your Mind *does* have thoughts of the external—such as your life, your emotions, cupcakes, or anything else—you are supposed to observe those thoughts in a disconnected, dispassionate, third-party observer way, and let them flit and flee and dance across your Mind while you act like the unimpressed critic sitting upright and snobbily in his chair, looking down his nose at the performance on display.

This is how it is supposed to work. Daily or perhaps weekly, you cuddle up to a wall in your home, with a nice, satiny pillow cushioning your relationship with the floor, and fold your feet into the lotus position.

You then put your hands on your knees, close your eyes, and chant:

“Ommmmmmmm!”

Deep breath.

“Ommmmmmmmmmmmmmmm!”

Now because you are a spiritual person, and don't necessarily affiliate with one Religion in particular, feel free to pick another word besides *OM* if you prefer. Any soothing, mystical, neutral word will do.

For those who are experienced *Meditation-ers*, they quickly slip into this blissful, otherworldly state where they are no longer bothered with pesky, trivial details of the world but instead are dipped into the sublime light of the pure, everlasting Ecstasy that lives within all of us.

That is what I have heard. That is what is *supposed* to happen. That is what I *hoped* would happen the four times I tried Meditating.

I read with fascination the attempt by the adorable Elizabeth Gilbert in her book, *Eat Pray Love*, to Meditate in an ashram in India. She endearingly calls herself a “spastic fool” in the endeavor to focus her distracted Mind and Meditate in the proper lotus position. I was so *with her* up to that point! I was thinking *Wow, this woman is just like me!* But eventually she does get to the place she wants to go, and experiences the bliss she was after. That's when she lost me ☹.

Deepak Chopra talks about Meditating to the internal biorhythms of one's own heart . . . and breathing slowly, with breaths apart . . . and not putting the donkey, before the cart . . . and something, something . . . transcendental-ish.

Yeah . . . hmmm . . . I tried all that . . . I did . . . not happening here . . . NOPE . . . nada . . . zilch

The more I try *not* to focus on the outside world, the more I *do*. The cleaner and purer my thoughts are supposed to be, the more mischievous and naughty my thoughts become. Almost as if my Mind is a rebellious teenager that wants to do the opposite of what it's told just to retain its independence.

Although I do wonder what happens once I reach that sublime state? Wouldn't I want to give up everything after that? It's like, if you were shown a miracle, would you go back to doubting God? How can I sully myself by going back to paying bills and making the bed when I have been to a place that is neither here nor there, flim nor flam, sam I am, green eggs and ham?! Maybe it's like the magic kiss by Superman, where he kisses Lois Lane and she forgets everything, including the knowledge of who HE is . . . you are there, somewhere, while Meditating, and you get to know HIM or IT or THAT for an instant! You're there! And then God gives you a big hug as you are leaving so that you forget most of it once you are back on Earth. I am not sure what will happen when I get to the peak of Meditation Mountain, if I ever do. Still, I keep trying in my own way.

What seems to work for me is something I call *Intermittent Meditation Flashes*. IMF, for short. As I go through my day, I almost always have thoughts of my Spirituality and beliefs humming somewhere in the background, subconsciously guiding my actions, even the most mundane. Like a second audio track.

For example, at a grocery store, I will pick up a box of cereal, then change my Mind when I get to the fruit aisle. Too lazy to go back to the cereal aisle, I might put the rejected cereal box somewhere near

the pineapples.

Then I will have an IMF, and decide that isn't a nice thing to do. How would I like it if I owned the grocery store and I had to pay my staff extra just to walk around reorganizing all the random pieces of merchandise left whimsically around the store by self-absorbed customers?

I know this sounds exaggerated, but I promise you, it's true! I do think this way! I was not so cognizant of other people and the effect of my behavior on them a few years before. As I've mentioned, some of these ideas slowly came about after years of knowledge and lectures and ideologies stewed and simmered in my head. It wasn't as if I had a sudden epiphany and decided to flip a switch from careless cereal box shopper to responsible pineapple shopper.

It can get annoying at times, it's a pain to be so obsessive about such small details. But while I am selfish enough to ignore my beliefs and squash bugs, I can't seem to muster up the selfishness to misplace grocery products.

Sadly, it seems obvious, even to me, that if one were going to err and slip in their spiritual beliefs, it would be preferable to err on the side of keeping a living creature alive, and not worry so much about making a cereal box homeless.

I also do things like clean out the lint from the dryer so the next person has it lint free. Even though I cleaned it out before I used it, and isn't the rule that you are only responsible for cleaning out the lint *before* you use it, not *after* you use it? In other words, it's a *pre-dry* lint rule, not a *post-dry* lint rule? I thought *Laundry Etiquette* is different from *Real Estate Etiquette*, where the home is expected to be cleaned by you

after you leave, so that the buyers you sold to will find the home in *move-in condition*. But I don't think you are supposed to leave the dryer in *dry-in condition*. From what I understand. Yet I will find myself cleaning out the lint, just because . . . just as a courtesy to the next person, because if I was that person, I would probably appreciate it if someone did that for me. I know it's not a great heroic deed, but hey, every Karma crumb counts!

Sometimes I will have IMF episodes at night, when I am lying in bed, trying to fall asleep. I will be in the middle of contemplating yet another, unfinished project, and I will suddenly remember the gratitude of someone I helped that day with a small, but kind gesture. In a sea of never-ending to-do lists and routines, I will realize how that was the only real moment, the only real accomplishment of my day. Or I might sheepishly remember how I had done something not-so-nice, perhaps while in a rush, and how I could improve my behavior or temperament next time. It's easier to reflect on your actions from afar, when you're no longer in the moment and can flash back to events in your Mind. In fact, I would say that by *not* clearing my Mind of external distractions like one is supposed to do in traditional Meditation, I am able to *better* Meditate. I am able to review actual events from my day and reflect on how I might further incorporate Spirituality into my daily practices.

When I see a sad or inspirational movie, it will trigger thoughts of life and my purpose in it. I will think about what I can do to help people who may be going through the pain I just witnessed on screen, or how I can be a source of inspiration for others. When I saw the movie *Black Swan*, it reminded me of the pressure we all go through to achieve success

in our careers. It probably had a subconscious part in my having started a group for entrepreneurs, like myself, who might be in need of some guidance.

I used to roll my eyes at poetry before. I never understood its appeal, beyond the kind written in a Mother's Day card. But after all that I have been through in life, when I read poetry today I understand the emotions spilling forth. It's so obvious to me now, when I was so oblivious before. The suffering and beauty that is so hauntingly etched out in lyrical words can reassure and remind me that my emotions are universal and that other Souls exist with the same dreams and desires.

Songwriters and their music describe the pain and joy of connecting to another Soul. A smiling baby who is not yet aware of who he is shows me how much purer love and Happiness can be if there is no Ego.

I can Meditate on Detachment and the fleeting nature of wealth when I watch the news and learn of a major disaster wiping out an entire city. I remember to enjoy my current possessions, but not get too attached. They are here today, but could be gone tomorrow, in an instant.

I am reminded of Karma when seeing a hero act in the face of a tragedy—a woman who took her purse and tried to knock a gun out of an intruder's hands as he pointed it at an entire school board full of men. I marveled at the tremendous love she displayed for those other than herself . . . and how she tried to save them the way she would have wanted to be saved.

Whenever I am involved with any type of activity involving nature, such as jogging, kayaking, or taking a walk, I eventually begin to contemplate my surroundings. I always find myself wondering who

created it all, and why we spend a lifetime pursuing artificial pleasures and sitting in cubicles when there is so much color and natural beauty to be enjoyed instead.

These are the ways that I slip into brief episodes of Meditation, and chances are that they will begin to happen to you with increasing frequency as you delve deeper into your own Spirituality. I remember hearing once, at a lecture somewhere, that traditional Meditation becomes less and less necessary as certain concepts become more embedded in our thoughts. If you begin viewing the world through the lens of your spiritual beliefs, and if they are the invisible backbone behind even the most mundane of tasks that you do, then in a way, you are already Meditating subconsciously at all times.

However reaching that stage is easier said than done, and to get there we first need to take baby steps. So here's another, less common technique to test—if you don't mind freaking yourself out a bit. Try staring intensely into a mirror, right into your own eyes. No, this does not mean that you are vain or in love with yourself. However, they say that the “eyes are the window to the Soul”, and perhaps this is why looking into your own eyes may work as a Meditation technique.

But on the rare occasion I happen to catch myself in the mirror in a way that is different from the usual “makeup face” and “brush-my-teeth face”, I am startled by what I see. I am so used to seeing myself with the familiarity of who I am, filtered through my own Mind, that when I accidentally look at myself as a stranger would, without any knowledge of the person underneath, it can be rather disorienting.

Wow, this is how I appear to other people? I know how I look in

photographs and videos, but this is different. I think staring into your own eyes, and forgetting your own thoughts, you wonder who that person really is, you think of yourself as a stranger. Just like you would feel if you looked into the eyes of a new person for the first time. I've inadvertently slipped into this state for just a moment, and it's been . . . well, let's just say that I don't like looking into my own eyes too long. After passing the “who is this stranger?” dimension, I swing to the opposite side of the pendulum, and start holding myself accountable for who I am, faults and all. I get a bit scared of my own self. I don't know how to explain it.

It's funny, after writing this paragraph, I did a search to see if “meditating in the mirror” is something others have talked about, so I could describe it better, and lo and behold! It's commonly called *Mirror Meditation!* What is even more uncanny is that others have also talked about how spooky it is. I had no idea that some people even consider it dangerous. That sounds rather dramatic to me . . . but it *is* creepy after a while. Proceed with caution and please don't come to haunt me if something happens to you and your spirit.

Watching the news, observing nature, doing laundry, listening to music, looking into the mirror—these are the moments that trigger Intermittent Meditation Flashes, and bring a glimpse of Detachment, Karma, the Ego, and Soul Energy. I have no explanation as to why and when my IMF will kick in. But this is how I Meditate, and until I can learn to Meditate *properly* in the correct lotus position with my posture straight, and my thoughts clean and pure, and my Mind in eternal and blissful bliss, I'll just have to make do with IMF.

Feel free to try my method or to Meditate the traditional way. Any way, I think, is fine. In fact, though I poke fun at traditional Meditation, I am joking. I know it genuinely works for many—it is a great skill to acquire. My point is not to discount the usual methods, but to tell you that if you are not able to practice it that way, you can still Meditate or pursue spiritual growth. It is not an all or nothing situation where you feel like a loser because you can't sit still for even a few minutes without scratching something.

If you are able to incorporate Spirituality into your daily life through other ways, then you don't need to sit in a special position. If the freshness of nature triggers an IMF episode, or if you are more apt to think about life and its meaning after watching an emotional movie, or reading a book, then I think those are great experiences to leverage. Use them as diving boards to push yourself off into the well-known sea of reflection.

Or, if you still find yourself forgetting to put a chip or two on the right square, despite your best intentions, then perhaps you *should* schedule time for traditional Meditation. It has worked for many, many people. The point is to do *something* and spend *some* time focusing on goals other than the external. Don't let your spiritual self become flabby.

It doesn't have to take more than a few minutes. Have a seat, close your eyes, take a deep breath, and chant—

EEEEErrrrrrrrrrggggggg!

Happy Meditating!

Chapter XIV
Putting 3 Chips on God—Conclusion



In conclusion, after everything we have learned, what is my advice to you on how to implement this knowledge into your life?

Renounce everything (by giving it to me) and you'll be Happy.

THE END

Just kidding.

The Real Chapter XIV

Putting 3 Chips on God—Conclusion

1. CHOOSING A SPIRITUAL PATH

MONKHOOD OR MONEY?

I arise from my plank bed. It's 4 AM in the morning. I slip my feet into wooden sandals and swiftly change out of the saffron yellow robe I am wearing. I wear another one just like it, after taking a quick, purifying, ice-cold bath. I brush my teeth with a twig. There is not much else to do since I wear no makeup and my head is shaven. I give it a good rub however, just to make sure the hair bristles are all facing the same orderly direction. I am ready to start the day and proceed soundlessly down the long corridor. I make it to the prayer hall, assume my lotus position, and start my daylong meditation. There is no need to eat before I start, I eat only one meal a day. There is no need to greet the others who are in the room, because like me, they haven't spoken a word in ten years.

CUT!!! Cut, cut, CUT!!!

The alarm rings and after swatting at it a few times, I sit up, stretch my arms, and finally make my way out of the cozy down comforter. I do a quick run on the treadmill, get ready, and eat the lovely eggs and toast that my housekeeper has prepared. I slip on my \$400 shoes and designer

Italian coat, and high-tail it out to the gleaming, silver sports sedan parked in the four car garage of my five bedroom mansion with two pools. At work, I look out the window at the beautiful view of Manhattan, while sipping my daily foam hazelnut cappuccino. I then settle into the ERGonomic friendly, plush leather chair in front of my beautiful mahogany desk. I turn on my three monitors and start my day.

OK . . . in my defense, I still have a job in the second scenario. It's not like I envisioned myself lying on a massage table at a spa, which I patronize daily as the trophy wife of a millionaire. I am still working, you know!

I know life is not going to be perfect, how can you not know that once you've understood the Happy Graph and the idea that complete and permanent Happiness might only come about if you Detach yourself from everything temporary and external? I know that. I understand that. Yes despite all that I know, I can't swallow the idea of living the ascetic swami life for the next 40-50 years.

I LIKE LIFE

Despite its ups and downs, life can be quite fun overall. I don't want to Detach completely from the world, even though I have enough knowledge to understand that the Happiness I derive from it may be constantly changing and imperfect.

In fact, there is a theory in Hinduism that talks about the four stages of life—The Student, The Householder, The Retired, and The Spiritual.

The first two stages involve a person actively engaged in the material world. The last two stages involve a gradual descent into Spirituality and renouncement from the world. In other words, most people take the usual path—studying, getting a job, getting married, fulfilling their responsibilities, and trying to find Happiness in the worldly life until they near the end of it.

When a person has experienced all that life has to offer, they can then look back and realize that what they were pursuing was never fully achieved. None of the struggles or joys resulted in the goal that was there from the beginning—complete and permanent Happiness. Once a Soul has been able to personally experience and eliminate material pursuits as the way to Happiness, they begin to gravitate naturally towards Spirituality as the final possible solution.

Then there are those who don't need to go through all of this. They are able to skip the first two or three stages and reach an enlightened stage much sooner than the rest of us.

I think I am in the second of the four phases—The Householder. I've completed my education and have a career. I get my nails done. I travel. I have the latest gadgets. I eat out at nice restaurants. I watch movies. I like owning stuff. I'd like to own more stuff. And I'd like to stay in this stage for awhile, I need to experience everything first. I am not ready to renounce everything just yet.

But why, if I am still in the *Householder* stage, have I already thought so much about Spirituality? The only reason I got there earlier than most is because I have had a bit more time to reflect on it than the average person. As someone who was newly single at 35, and facing a career

change, I was at an age when life experiences catch up and one has gained enough wisdom to reflect on the point of it all. Most people don't have time for that, because they have partners or kids or a great job to keep them busy and distracted. I didn't. Believe me, I tried.

I tried to go the semi-normal route, hoping to find a partner and hoping to achieve success in my field. I call it semi-normal, because instead of pursuing the traditional path towards a stable job, I invested most of my energy into running my own business. But whatever I did, it was directed towards achieving Happiness in the material world. I made the occasional donation or volunteering effort, like many others, but most of my life has been in pursuit of the American Dream and then some.

I put so much time and money into my entrepreneurial ventures, one after the other, starting from the age of 22, that I thought I would force the Universe to give me the success I desired, based on sheer stubbornness and persistence. I started an Import-Export venture as my first business, working as an Auditor at the now defunct Arthur Andersen during the day, then coming home, sometimes very late during peak season, and starting my second shift as an entrepreneur. I tried my hand at the business for a year, and when it finally broke even, I shut it down, having realized that trading wasn't my niche. However the experience confirmed for me that I *was* an entrepreneur, and I then began focusing on the Web. Most of the times I was working a job in addition to being an entrepreneur, or running one business to support another, and I put in 80–100 hour work weeks. I basically worked every waking moment, including Friday and Saturday nights. I did that for most of my 20s and 30s.

That doesn't leave a person much time for Spirituality, one would think. That is . . . until you start to fail. Or when others around you think you have failed, because you haven't been able to make a living from your efforts and have to start over again in your mid 30s in the corporate world. Shifting from entrepreneurship to the corporate world can be very, very hard to do when you took big risks that have set you back financially, and when you took risks in not climbing up the corporate ladder and not building up a commercially impressive, marketable resume. It can be hard to work for someone else when you have been used to being your own boss, fulfilling your every creative wish and challenging yourself in a way that few corporate jobs can do. Those who are entrepreneurs know what I am speaking about.

And so, despite my most strenuous attempts at succeeding in the material world, and finding a partner, I didn't have as many welcome distractions in the past few years to keep me as busy as many of my peers. Entrepreneurism can be isolating, and so can being single. I had a lot of time to think on my own.

MORE ACTION, NOT KNOWLEDGE

And so here I am. Lucky you! I've had time to think about Spirituality. No, in my period of isolation, I haven't left the world to become a moness for a few years, studying in the mountains with teacher monks. I haven't obtained a PH.D. or medical degree which might have a more formal connection to Spirituality. In fact, there are many people out there who could run circles around me when it comes to discussing the topics I've presented. I don't know much more beyond what I've written

in this book. As I mentioned when I introduced myself to you in the first chapter, my shaky attention span has not allowed me to absorb the detail of what people discuss in Spirituality groups or other books. Perhaps I would have paid attention to a book written by Donald Chopra or Britney Lama. I even tried to read some Dummy books on Buddhism, Spirituality, Hinduism, and World Religions, and let me just say that . . . well . . . someone needs to come out with a series for *Super Dummies*.

I haven't done much with Spirituality beyond thinking about it. Nevertheless, I have this arrogant feeling that I know all that I need to know. I don't feel there is much else to learn in terms of the concepts behind Spirituality, what I feel is that I need to learn how to *apply* them to my life. Rather than acquiring additional *knowledge*, I am more interested in *actions* I should be performing, And I want to learn how Spirituality can help me to achieve Happiness *now*, in my current life, as well as in my afterlife.

Truth be told, I just don't see that it is important for me to know the many types of Karma, or the Ego, or the levels of Reincarnation, or Enlightenment, or whatever. How does it matter? I do see the value in learning all that if it helps people embed these principles more deeply into their psyches. I can see the value of different ways of categorizing, or phrasing, or creating frameworks to help trigger an *Aha!* moment in someone's Mind because of the way a certain concept is explained. In fact, that is what MBA programs do. They are less about new knowledge, and more about taking real life examples—case studies—and applying frameworks to problems. As in—*Microsoft had X problem, and they solved it by doing Y. We will call that the Y framework. Google had the*

same X problem, but they solved it by doing Z. We will call that the Z framework. Then we will discuss why Z worked for one, and Y worked for the other, and charge you \$250k while doing it.

Jokes aside, there is legitimate value in this. Absolutely. What education can do, after giving you a certain amount of base knowledge, is refine your analytical skills, or manner of thinking, so that when you have to go out into the real world and apply your knowledge, you can do it more efficiently and accurately. There is value to reaching certain goals by treading the path that other masters have walked. Why reinvent the wheel when you can learn from others? I understand that. The distinction I am making here is that dogma or detail relates to *methods* of teaching and learning, not the actual knowledge itself. While there is much to learn in the material world—all sorts of fun stuff like science and math and geography—woo-hoo!—there doesn't seem to be all that much to learn about the ultimate truth. Not that I can see.

Anything else that is taught seems to be man-made details. To me the ultimate truth is simple. I believe that the truth is the *absence of I*, or the *absence of the Ego*.

Ta-daa!

Actually, I'm serious.

This is not a new theory in any way—it's one that has been spouted by Hinduism, Buddhism, Deepak Chopra, Eckhart Tolle, religious leaders, and other revered teachers. Surprisingly, despite my skepticism and demands for logic and scientific support, I have arrived at the same place that many others have.

The “I” as we know it does not exist. It is not real. There is no Ego. No Body. No Name. No Profession. No Home. No Separateness. No Attachments.

Instead we are all in a continuous, connected state of energy. Or we are trying to get there, by breaking through our flesh-and-blood “cages” and releasing the energy within. Perhaps to finally arrive at a purer, more elevated form of energy.

Imagine a world where all of us are not so worried about fending for our physical bodies and our physical comforts. How many wars would be eliminated when one Soul is able to recognize another and look past the artificial barriers of land and race and power? How many people, miserable in their jobs, would no longer feel the need to slog it out, day-after-day, for a paycheck that will only buy them temporary, dissolving pleasures? How many women in prostitution, or innocents doing child-labor, or men and women and children working in sweatshops, would be released if mankind didn't feel the need to satisfy a never-ending black hole of carnal and material desires? How many petty grievances, hurtful words, small, sharp digs at even loved ones and friends, would disappear if we weren't so busy looking out for only Me, Myself, and I?

How many crimes of rape and theft and domestic violence would be unnecessary if there was no body to pleasure, comfort, or anger?

How much loneliness and lonely suffering would vanish, if the possibility of being “alone” no longer was there?

I believe that we are Soul Energy, and not the bodies that encase it. Every single one of our troubles on this planet, in this lifetime, appears to be due to our attachment to physical bodies and physical comforts.

However, given that we've already acknowledged that Detaching completely from a regular life is not an option for most of us, what do we do?

Well, it's not a big mystery or rocket science. As Sherlock Holmes once said, "There is nothing as deceptive as an obvious fact."

We should just get as close as we can.

If complete Detachment is not possible, then we should try to Detach as much as possible. The Happy Graph makes sense to me. External, temporary factors are just not capable of creating internal, permanent Happiness because the two are a contradiction. We want something constant, but we are expecting it to come from sources that are always changing. If we can learn to Detach from the external and our Egos, and instead connect with our own Souls and that of others, we may find greater Happiness.

Once we are no longer attached to just ourselves, and once we can see *The Mirror in the Stranger*, acts of positive Karma will inevitably follow. Once we are not so busy taking care of our own bodies and our own wants, we automatically have the time and inclination to lift our heads and notice those around us.

I was obviously making up the whole scenario about Quantum Spirituality and fidgety Electrons[♡] and Soultrons and Orbit[♡] jumping. But in a way, I wonder if that isn't close to the truth. Our objective in this life may be to accumulate more positive energy through good Karmic acts so that our Soul Energies burn brighter and climb to the next Orbit[♡]. Even if there is no such thing as an Orbit[♡] 5, or Heaven, or Karma, generating more positive energy can only result in more Happiness for

all of us NOW, right here, on this planet, in this lifetime itself. Think about it. If we all started acting with deeper love and compassion towards every Soul that we meet, then one day, wouldn't that circle back around to benefit each of us? It's hard to imagine, I know, because realistically it's never going to happen universally. Let's not kid ourselves. But if we could get *closer* to a kinder, gentler world, wouldn't we be *closer* to complete Happiness, in this lifetime itself?

So to me, the most important concepts seem to be: *the absence of I*, or the absence of the *Ego*, which can be achieved through Detachment and Karma.

That's pretty much it.

The rest that I have talked about is either a part of these two, or not necessarily needed to reach our ultimate goal of complete and permanent Happiness.

Vegetarianism is a form of positive Karma. Reincarnation makes sense, but it doesn't matter whether it is true or not. Whether or not we have many lives or only one life to get to our final destination, the point is we have a journey to make. Astrology, Palm Reading, Stones, Numerology, Chanting, ESP, Religion, and Meditation are simply ways to measure, influence, or recognize the path of energy. None of these appear to be necessary steps towards reaching Heaven.

In the end, breaking free from the Ego—through Detachment—and connecting with other Souls—through Karma—seems to be the way to achieve our goal of Happiness, whether in our current life or in our afterlife.

That's it, that's all we need to know, in my opinion. Once we have the base knowledge of what we believe in, the rest is action. How we

motivate ourselves to act is up to us. We can each customize our own map from the array of Meditation Methods, Religions, Rituals, Prayers, Scary Horoscope Predictions, Diamonds, Rubies, and other tools provided.

Of course, that all said, I am always open to being shown another way. I would welcome it. If someone can clearly explain to me why something else besides Detachment and Karma may be the true path to reaching Enlightenment, I'm all for it. Because a tiny part of me will always remain agnostic.

BIG BANG OR BIG KAHUNA? AGNOSTICISM

As mentioned earlier in the book, agnostics are defined as those who are unsure of what to believe. They have not ruled out the idea of a higher power or purpose, but they are not sure there is one either. Atheists are considered to be certain of the fact that there is no God. Theists, like atheists, are also devout in their beliefs—but they believe the opposite, that there *is* a God.

If I had to break down my spiritual formula, it might go something like this:

My Spirituality = 60% Logic + 30% Faith + 10% Agnosticism

I may be a different agnostic than others, because a large percentage of me does believe in a higher power. There is enough circumstantial evidence and grounds to make me feel this way. However my spiritual beliefs are subject to change at any time. And it does require me to take a leap of faith. I've narrowed down my beliefs to those I find most

intelligible, but in the end, 30 percent of my beliefs, 3 chips out of 10, is simply faith.

A gamble.

A hedge.

A hunch.

Insurance.

A bet on God.

Just in case there is one.

As much as I like life, if I had absolute and indisputable proof that there is a Heaven or God, and that Detachment and Karma would bring me everlasting Happiness, would I renounce everything? Of course! Not even a second's hesitation! The next forty or fifty years of my life is nothing compared to eternity. I think many of us would be able to give up the material life if we knew for *sure* what the correct path was. But if there is a God, then for some unknown reason, he is keeping himself hidden. He is expecting us to stumble onto the way ourselves, or to use our thinking Minds to find the truth, or to go by faith to guide our actions.

Like many of you, the rational part of me doesn't like this. And I am a little annoyed at the fact that we have to go through this test in the first place, I mean seriously, what is the point? Why couldn't we already *be* in that thrilling place where we are neither in nor out, left nor right, down nor up, in that wormhole of Absolute existence that many have said they have reached during blissful stages of meditation? Why does it have to be such an *effort* to get there? Why?? WHY?!! (insert whiny voice here). I didn't ask for this life. At least I think I didn't, though I don't know what mischief my Soul has been up to between lives.

I happen to like the life I lead, I know I have a lot of good fortune that many others don't. My life is actually quite comfortable and fun for the most part. Yet who wouldn't want to be in a state where you feel like you're ecstatically happy *all the time!!?* If that is what Heaven really is, then I'll take it! As the atheists often say, if there was a God, why would he allow all this horrific cruelty to happen here? It doesn't make sense to me, I don't get the point. If there truly is an all-knowing force out there, why do we have to be tested, why did we have the ability to fall from Grace? Don't give us that ability in the first place, and we wouldn't have fallen. Don't give us free will. Just keep us in Heaven. Then we wouldn't *need* free will. Why do we have to go through all of this?

I just don't see the point of it all. However once I get past my annoyance at the fact that there seems to be no good reason for free will, and I accept it for what it is, the rest of me feels that since we do have it, there is a reason for it.

Therefore I am hedging my bets that there is an afterlife—as crude and un-spiritual as that might sound—and I am acting accordingly. And less crude and un-spiritual is the fact that over time, as I have found the truths of Detachment and Karma to seem more and more applicable to the mysteries of this world, it has become less about me and my salvation and more about love and compassion for others. As you progress down this path, you not only begin to feel the *absence of I*, but also the *presence of Others*.

And yes, we may not be able to reach the permanent and complete Happiness that we are all searching for, now, while living a conventional life. But I think we can get close.

SUMMARY

Ultimately, the spiritual path that I have chosen does not involve me becoming bald and silent and saffron colored. I like physical comforts and the material world. Thus my journey will be a bit more opulent than that. In addition, there is a small whiny part of me that is not so sure there is a God in the first place. However, the majority of me does believe that we are planned freaks, therefore I want to pursue a spiritual path to some degree.

In the next few sections, I talk about how we can introduce the concepts of Detachment and Karma into our daily lives. As in the previous chapters, I will continue using my experiences as examples. Not just because I enjoy talking about myself, which I always do, but because I don't want to preach at you. I don't know who you are, or what your life is like, or what difficulties you may be facing. It's too simplistic to give you a set of rules to apply to your entire life. Plus, I never like it when other books tell me what to do. I will decide for myself, thank you very much.

So I am going to tell you what *I* am doing, and leave it up to you to take what you find useful. Sometimes it helps more to learn how a person is realistically following what they preach rather than have their wisdom showered upon you from a pulpit.

In addition, I will continue to use strange and seemingly insignificant examples when trying to explain myself. There is a reason I am doing that. Most of us do not have time for grand gestures of charity or renouncement in our daily lives. This book was especially written for those who are normally too busy for Spirituality—people like myself

who can't take time out to consistently meditate or attend retreats. I'd like to, but with an uncertain ROI, that is going to have to wait until I am older, there is simply no way I can fit it in right now.

Meanwhile, I will show you the rather offbeat, casual ways that I manage to integrate Spirituality into my life. I think it is equally, if not more impactful, to incorporate Spirituality in the smallest of actions, as frequently as possible, rather than wait until there is a large span of free time. Opportunities to perform a kind act, or to stabilize your Happy Graph, or to connect to other Soul Energies and see The Mirror in the Stranger are all around us. I will tell you how I find these opportunities. You will be encountering stories about traffic tickets, tailgating drivers, dress tags, and a person who goes by the name "Starburst".

But by now you should be used to my rather unconventional approach to this entire subject, and if not . . . well, you've been warned.

2. INCORPORATING DETACHMENT

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY & MY ATTACHMENT BUCKET

First things are first. If I have decided that I am not going to renounce everything, but instead participate in the material world, then I am going to need some basics. The goals of being completely Detached AND living a regular life are not 100 percent compatible.

If I've decided to take up an identity, i.e. I will be Preeti Gupta, Financial Planner, then I am going to need a house to live in, a car to drive in, clothes, food, and more. I would also like to have love, security, and a fulfilling career.

I am not creating some brilliant new theory here. Maslow's Hierarchy is what I am referring to, and what I have personally experienced. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs says that a person has to have their most basic requirements met first before they can go on to think of more spiritual issues. The hierarchy is shown in a famous pyramid, as follows:



I need to have food, shelter, clothing, security, love, and respect before I can get to the point of thinking about a life beyond. Otherwise I am too worried and distracted by the one I am living now. I simply need certain things to stay alive. Period. Although it is amazing how some of the poorest people in the world, who don't have many of the basics, still manage to show kindness and charity to others, and act in a very spiritual way.

However, if I have chosen to stay attached to the material world, then I am not going to be fine with being poor. That is not the lifestyle I grew up with, that is not the lifestyle of my peers. Sure, I could live in a hut and stay alive, but then what is the point of that, I might as well renounce everything and not bother at all. From my own perspective, that is. I am not saying I must have the mansion, expensive car, and designer clothes that I described in my dream scenario. I grew up middle-class. Luxuries would be nice, however I can be content without them.

But since I am used to a middle-class lifestyle, I have other needs that might not be *survival* basics, but they are *lifestyle* basics. I don't think I am being too greedy to want to be able to afford eating out every now and then. And I don't know about you, but I NEED to crank up my heat to 70 degrees in the winter while I walk around in shorts. I hate being cold and it's . . . it's . . . well I NEED to, that's all!!!

Now, along with these basics come certain responsibilities. If I, Preeti Gupta, have committed to paying rent to a landlord according to a twelve month lease I have signed, then how can I be unaffected if I lose my job and I'm in danger of not following through with my promise?

I may be okay with paring down and having less for myself as I grow older, but if I have kids, I would feel responsible to them for a decent education, and help starting out in life. That is the kind of support I grew up with. So once I take on the responsibility of caring for others who are depending on me, even if *I* am okay with less, it's not fair of me to impose my views on others.

This is where I don't completely understand the controversy behind Mahatma Gandhi and his son. According to stories, Mahatma Gandhi's son struggled for much of his life due to a lack of education or opportunities. He was frustrated and depressed at not being able to earn a living or have a normal childhood, and he became an alcoholic. Apparently his father believed he should adopt the values of a simple life and have few attachments. Therefore, an education was no longer necessary. Even though Mahatma Gandhi was a former lawyer and highly educated himself. This was not due to a lack of resources or any limitations like that, from what I have heard. It was simply due to Gandhi wanting his son to follow his increasingly spiritual ways.

Mahatma Gandhi was an extremely wise, enlightened person. I don't have that opinion because that's what others think. I have decided that for myself, based on what I know of his teachings and sayings. He was absolutely brilliant. I can't find anything I would disagree with. Except this, if the story is true. If it is, and his son was not given a chance to have an education, I think that was unfair. As I said, I believe that if I have a child, I am indulging in reproduction, an act of the material world. I have brought someone into existence who has a right to be a part of it in the way that his peers are. My child can be taught my spiritual

values alongside everything else, but he should decide for himself what path he would like to pursue once he is older. So whereas I may be Detached and become more so, I can't Detach completely, because I need to covet enough money and security to provide for my children. And if I can't provide, I am going to be unhappy to see my children suffer, Happy Graph or not. It's just given.

As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, there is a concept called *dharma*, which means following one's duty. If one has taken on certain responsibilities, those should be fulfilled. This is what I am referring to, although some may disagree as to how and when it applies.

Accordingly, I believe that complete Detachment is not possible if one is participating in worldly matters and therefore subject to life's ups and downs. But here is where my Spirituality does help me. I know about the Happy Graph and how its plot points can be different for each person. For some, their life is like a roller coaster ride, because they are deeply affected by whatever happens to them. For others, it can be much smoother, because they are easy-going, and more able to let small things go. That is what I try to do. I try to reduce the volatility on my Happy Graph as much as possible.

I am going to be unhappy if I lose my wallet. I am going to be happy if I get that promotion. But I recognize that tomorrow I might get my wallet back or I might find the promotion to be stressful. What is unhappy today can be happy tomorrow. Or vice-versa. Tough times are not always going to be there. So I can remain cheerful and steady in how I handle life's lemons. I can also enjoy the blessings that life gives me, but not be so attached to them that I am devastated if they are taken away.

I may be more disturbed when my basics are not being met. It's hard to remain calm when you can't pay rent. So I cut myself some slack and let myself be moody during those times. But if something happens that does not affect the survival and lifestyle basics that I have put in what I call my *Attachment Bucket*, I try to step back and put it in perspective. I remind myself that as long as I have everything I need to live a stable and secure life, things will be fine.

THE 10-80-10 RULE & MY ATTACHMENT BUCKET

Some of us may have higher expectations in certain areas over others. My Attachment Bucket does not consist only of the basics of a middle-class lifestyle. There is one attachment in there which is going to affect my Happy Graph more significantly than others.

I believe in the 10-80-10 rule. Not all of us can be in the top 10 percent in every area of life. Some of us will be blessed with amazing good looks and a metabolism to match. Supermodels, for example. Those people would rank in the top 10 percent of the looks category, the rest of us falling somewhere in the middle 80 percent, with a few unfortunate people in the bottom 10 percent, according to society's standards for outer beauty.

Some would work the job they do even if they didn't need the money. They love their fields that much. Another 80 percent of people find appealing and unappealing aspects to their work, but are relatively content with what they do. However they certainly wouldn't continue if they didn't have to. The last 10 percent of people might hate what they do but must continue to earn and struggle for a lifetime.

Besides Physical Appearance and Work, Love is another area of expectation. I believe there are soulmates out there, and they do experience a love that is just like in the movies. However it's not common and so we hear about it, but not everyone finds it except for the top 10 percent in this category. Those are the ones we might refer to as "lucky in love". I suspect that most people fall in the middle 80 percent, as undiplomatic as my statement may be, where their marriages are less than ideal but they are relatively content. Those in the bottom 10 percent may have a loveless marriage or be destined to live alone for most of their lives.

Some of us would be okay with things not going so well in certain departments, but be sad or worried if another area was not up to expectations. Some people's focus is to be in the top 10 percent of the Looks category, and it affects them more than anything else could.

Each of us will have a different list of what is essential. For example, entrepreneurship and having a job I enjoy is very important to me. Yet despite what some may think, my more important priority is finding the right partner and having a vibrant circle of family and close friends. In fact, I feel so strongly that I want to be in the top 10 percent when it comes to Love, I have told God, many times, to please apply any good Karma I might have earned towards granting me this wish. Only if there is anything left over on my good Karma account will I want it applied elsewhere. And if that means I only have enough good Karma to have the partner, but not the job of my dreams, then so be it.

Although everyone wants to be surrounded by love, there are those who are loners, and those who are okay being single for the rest of their lives. I know of people who wanted to be married sooner rather than

later, and in their own words “settled for someone”. I have also come across people who are dissatisfied, but staying where they are because they are getting their fulfillment from work, extramarital affairs, or the affluent lifestyle offered by their spouse. Many don't leave unhappy marriages because they don't want to hurt their kids or family. I don't judge any of that, I feel that divorce should be avoided as much as possible, and I admire those who have the strength to sacrifice their wishes for the sake of others. I don't know what the future has in store for me, either, but I know that this will always be a priority.

Because I am so attached to success in this area of my life, I know that it will cause sizeable troughs and peaks to occur on my Happy Graph, not only if I *don't* find the right partner, but perhaps even if I *do*. So much of my Happiness will be tied to that one person. It's a dangerous thing to do, I know. It's like I am putting my Happiness in someone else's pocket. They can walk away with my Happiness at any time. It's based on an external factor—a person—and as we know, external factors are always temporary. Anything could happen to that person. Anything could be said to me by that person. My job could be great, but my partner could lose *his* job, and HIS stress could affect me. Or, both of us could be fine, but someone we love—parents, a sibling, a child—could go through hard times. You see how attaching to even one part of life immediately exposes you to various ripples on your Happy Graph.

Nevertheless, I have not only put this in my Attachment Bucket, but my expectations are sky-high. I want to be at the top of the bell curve when it comes to the people in my life. With these high hopes, my Happiness will be significantly impacted by whatever happens in this

department. I know that. But there is nothing I can do, it's important to me. All I can do is try to be realistic about my expectations and recognize that while I can strive and hope to have it all, less than that can be more than enough if my top priorities are met. I will consider myself very fortunate and blessed if I achieve Happiness in the areas I care most about.

EXPECTED PROBLEMS & MY DETACHMENT BUCKET

There is a second bucket which I also keep, as I go through life—it is called my *Detachment Bucket*. What is that? Well it contains all those blips and bumps that I suspect will be coming up in the future. I know I can't expect perfection from an imperfect world, so I prepare myself for it.

For example, I have gotten a few tickets in the past. Like anyone else. Not many, I am a safe driver, but I certainly speed and cut lanes and ignore parking signs and do other unsaintly things when the situation requires it. (The situation “requires it” according to me, not according to the police unfortunately! ☹)

I have learned to stop being so red-faced, foot-stomping, and foul-tempered on the rare occasions I get a ticket. My Detachment Bucket contains X amount of traffic and parking ticket fines that I am probably going to pay over the course of a lifetime. I don't know how many tickets that will be, or the total dollar amount, but it is some reasonable number that does not indicate I am a ridiculous driver and need to change my behavior, or that I am cursed by the Ticket Gods.

A few of these tickets I *won't* deserve—they would have been issued to me unfairly. Many I *will* deserve. And there will have been times when I *did* deserve a ticket, and no one caught me. So regardless of

whether I get a ticket I think I did or did not deserve, I tell myself that overall things are probably even and tickets are an inevitable part of life. Nowadays when I get one, I barely spend a few minutes worrying about it, beyond the initial ten minutes of being annoyed at no one in particular. In my 20s, when I was not so spiritual or aware of my Happy Graph, the same ticket would have bothered me for much longer.

Regardless of age or maturity, I know a number of people who will rant and rave when they get one, and let it ruin their day, maybe their week. They are affecting their own Happy Graph by this behavior. The ticket is here, it's not going away. It's happened to you already. You can contest it and win, but you still received it and you still had to make the effort to fight it. Regardless, it was an unwelcome blip in your life, whether you had to pay the fine or not. That ticket can be a -1 on your Happy Graph or it can be a -5. If it's a 0, then *you* need to write the Super Dummies Spirituality book and teach *me*, because there is no way I can be completely untouched by the experience of getting a ticket, unless, perhaps, I was a billionaire, but even then, it's going to register something of some sort. But while I can't expect a 0 when I get a ticket, I can try to keep my wave at a smaller -1 rather than a -5. I am prepared for it. I have put *Traffic Tickets* in my Detachment Bucket.

The things that go in my Detachment Bucket are not always predictable either. There can be an incidence that is large in scale and takes me by surprise. At those times, I have to remember to calm down and take a step back and look at the situation when it's occurring. Someone who has been helping me revise this book has warned me that I may get a lot of flak for some of the things I have written. I hadn't thought about it, and

I have never been through an experience like that because this is my first full-length book. It is hard to prepare for that in advance. But if it does happen, I will try to put *critical feedback* into my Detachment Bucket. I do tend to be . . . oh . . . not so politically correct when I write, so what do I expect, anyway? I know I am not writing things in this book out of spite, I am trying to be honest in the spirit of sharing my true opinions. I like to be real because what is the point of “sharing” if others can’t relate to it? If I am thinking something, others probably are too. That is what I feel.

So if criticism does occur, I will rack it up to being a part and parcel of writing a book. That does not mean I will close my Mind to feedback. If many people say the same thing, then I would take a closer look at my own actions or writing to see if their opinions are valid. Putting something in my bucket does not mean I am going to be blind to it when it happens. I examine each situation on its own, and if something was due to my own irresponsibility or mistake, I try to learn and fix it for next time. Otherwise, I leave it in my Detachment Bucket and keep it far away from my Happy Graph.

SUMMARY

To summarize how I apply the concept of Detachment to my very real, very materialistic life, I limit the number of factors that can send my Happy Graph on a roller coaster ride. In other words, I have two buckets. My Attachment Bucket is the one that contains all the external factors—people, place, time, objects, and results that I have given myself permission to be attached to. I allow myself to go slightly up and down on my Happy Graph if I do or do not get what I want. I cut myself some

slack, realizing that I can't expect myself to be saintly and unaffected if certain needs such as home, family, love, health, and a few other *must-haves* are not met. Some of these must-haves are basic, at the lower levels of Maslow's Hierarchy, and some are must-haves for me but *nice-to-haves* for others. However, I have given myself permission to have higher expectations when it comes to a few priorities.

The second is my Detachment Bucket. In this I put everything else. Long lines, misplaced wallets, incorrect charges on my phone bill, or even big ticket items such as my unfulfilled dream of becoming a Bollywood Star. (Hey, no smirks from the peanut gallery!) If these things do or do not happen, I will not let myself be too affected. I know that mishaps will occur, and as long as they are not due to circumstances I can control, I don't bounce around like a fidgety Electron when something in this bucket affects my life.

Here's an easier way to summarize all of this—remember the episode on *Friends*, when Ross and Rachel are dating, and Rachel allows Ross to create a list of five celebrities he is allowed to sleep with if he ever meets them? Ross not only takes great care in finalizing those five names, but he laminates the card as well. Unfortunately for him, he meets one of the contenders for that list in real life—Isabella Rossellini. But because he didn't put her on the final list, he doesn't get to sleep with her.

Do the same—choose five, or even fifteen goals that matter to you in life, and put them in your Attachment Bucket. Then close the lid. Anything that is not in your Attachment Bucket is by default in your Detachment Bucket. And anything that is not in your Attachment Bucket you do not get to sleep with. So choose wisely.

3. INCORPORATING KARMA

BUDGETING FOR BAD KARMA

Just as Detaching completely from life is impractical, so is expecting myself never to incur any negative Karma. So knowing that I will occasionally need to indulge in questionable behavior, I carefully budget actions that might result in Karmic penalties. For example, I cut lanes in traffic jams. I will ride in the empty exit lane when I have no intention of exiting, only to cut back into traffic at the last moment, relishing my victorious savings of 29.2 seconds over the poor suckers still waiting patiently at the back of the line. *Mua-haaa-haaa-haaa!*

I do this because I am in a hurry. For good reason. According to me. Not according to the law and the furious driver I just cut in front of, I know. But here's my somewhat un-spiritual thinking. I can't be perfect 100 percent of the time. It's hard to be that, in the material world. I've got meetings to attend, deadlines to make, people to please. There are times when I am simply in a tearing hurry. At those times, I will drive a bit faster and push limits to get to where I need to go. I'm not ridiculous about it, of course. I am not one of those shoulder-drivers. (Well . . . unless everyone else is doing it.) I don't go at unsafe speeds, though I might go a bit beyond the supposed 10 mph cushion. But I only do that sparingly, when I give myself permission because I feel it is necessary. "Necessary" being a relative term, I know. Other times, like when I am driving home in the evenings and not in such a hurry, I will pay my dues like everyone else and wait at the back of the line. I refrain from the small but unethical act of gaining distance and speed at the expense of

someone else losing it because I cut in front of them. That is, in a very indirect way, taking someone else's Happiness. Why should I arrive faster at my destination than someone else, don't they want to get to where they are going as well?

So when I am not in a rush, I act in consideration of others. I will let people cut in front of me, and be nice about it, because I know I may do it to them when I need to. I try to budget acts that are self-serving, no matter how small they might be, with careful consideration as to whether it is worth the risk that there is a God and he may be putting this on the list as Naughty instead of Nice.

If I do incur bad Karma knowingly, I try to repay it. I am not fanatic about it, I don't consciously think about it. It's just a general philosophy entrenched in my Mind that manifests itself on its own. I don't keep track of the fact that I have cut in line three times so I must repay those three times back to the Universe or else I'm going to get it. If I can do something kind or considerate for someone else, and it's not inconvenient to me, then why not?

Sometimes I am more in the mood to go out of my way. Sometimes I am not. Sometimes *I am just grumpy, and I am especially mad at the driver who wants to cut in front of me, because there is something about her I just don't like, she's on the phone, popping gum, looking like she tries to cut in line all the time, not even looking at me with the obligatory "I am so sorry, do you mind letting me in?" hand wave, and darned if I am going to let her in, I'll tailgate the car in front of me to within an inch of space and risk ramming them by accident, but SHE is not going to get in, so help me God!*

So though Karma is something I am aware of constantly, sometimes I am better at applying my knowledge than at other times. But I am more careful in my actions when possibly incurring bad Karma. Unless there is a reason I can justify to myself for acting a bit selfishly, I try not to do it.

FOLLOWING THE GOLDEN RULE

As I mentioned in earlier chapters, there are times when I do not want to pollute my Karma, but I am not sure if what I am about to do is acceptable or not. I know that intent is more important than the action itself. So when I am confused about the correctness of a certain course of action, I think it's safe to follow the Golden Rule—*what would I want done, if I was in the other person's place?*

The Golden Rule has been a teaching in the Bible, and other books, and it makes a lot of sense. At first glance, it seems a simple one to follow. If I would be comfortable with being on the receiving end of my own actions, then I am mostly likely on solid ground. *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*

Sometimes, however, it is not so easy to follow the Golden Rule, as I discussed in the chapter on Vegetarianism. It's hard to project my feelings onto the Soul of an Animal and to know what they might feel, though all evidence is there that they run away in fear and do not enjoy being our dinner.

Yet another problem is that it can be hard to know who will be on the receiving end at all. The affected party might consist of a faceless institution instead of a specific person. But what I have learned is that

determining appropriate or inappropriate behavior is easy—at least when it affects those within the Human Orbit[♡]—if you make an effort to drill down through the dilemma to find an example of a specific person that will be on the other end.

Take, for example, a department store to which I am about to return a barely used dress or electronic item which I bought with the intention of returning because I only needed to use it once. Does that involve the accumulation of negative Karma? I think it does.

At first glance, it might not seem like such a big deal. Department stores earn millions or billions of dollars each year, and if the dress or electronic item is in good condition with the tag still on, it can be sold to someone else. There isn't really a *loss* for anyone in this situation, is there? There isn't really a *person* who is being harmed, is there?

Yes. There is a person on the other end, even if it's not one whose face or name I know. It's an employee of the store or a shareholder of the company. It's the people who are invested in the success of that business and will be impacted by my doings. It's the other customers out there who will feel the pinch when lower sales and increased returns cause prices to go up.

Somebody, somewhere, is going to be affected by me returning the used item. Even if nothing else is involved during the return but placing it back on the shelf and selling it again later that same day. The act of me purchasing the item required someone to ring up the sale. I used up their time. I also used up a plastic bag. The act of me returning it required someone to process the return and spend more time to get it back on the floor. Miniscule, almost invisible dents in the fabric of the

Universe, I know. But there, nevertheless. If I was a shareholder in that company, would I like it if customers kept returning items and taking up resources? Sure, one or two returns might not budge the stock even a penny. But if enough people were to have the mentality that used returns are harmless, then eventually that resource drain would add up to more labor costs and less profit. Would I like it if my shares paid less dividends, or decreased in value, because customers like me were taking advantage of store policies? No.

In fact, I may unknowingly BE a shareholder of the very company to which I am making the return. How do I know that a mutual fund I own, or my 401k, doesn't have a part of my money invested in this company? They can be invested in hundreds of stocks which I am not able to individually recall. True to the concept of Karma, my own selfish behavior can circle back to affect myself.

As soon as I drill down and project myself onto the specific type of person that would be at the opposite end of my actions, I begin to see clearly what the right course of conduct is. It can take some thinking and hard work at times, because it's easier to succumb to temptation and remain in denial about who I may be impacting.

Do I always do the right thing? No, as I mentioned, sometimes I knowingly go the wrong way anyway, if I feel there is a strong enough reason that I am willing to incur the bad Karma. Others may disagree, but I think there needs to be some fudge factor allowed, at least for the lifestyles many of us are trying to live. However, if the dicey activity I am contemplating is not a basic need connected to my Attachment Bucket, I almost always refrain.

I may cut in line in traffic because I have to get to work on time. Work is important, and I know I only do this when necessary. Returning clothes or electronics or anything else which I purchased with the intention of never keeping? There is no justification for that, I have enough material goods. And my actions *are* going to affect a living Soul, even if I don't know who it is specifically. Sometimes, it just takes a little effort to see *The Mirror in the Stranger*.

SMALL ACTS OF KINDNESS

These may seem like trivial examples of my attempts to incorporate the philosophy of Karma into my life. But I believe that this is what Spirituality is supposed to entail. It is not only about obvious, grand gestures of volunteering and donating and spending weeks at an ashram (although those are commendable acts at any time). It's also important to incorporate spiritual values on a daily basis, and eventually have them become so much a part of me and my value system that even in small, seemingly harmless actions, they guide me in the right way.

The ability to apply Karma in small ways is especially important to recognize, because many of us professionals delay the thought of charity, or volunteering, or other spiritual acts until *later*, when we are not so busy. It's quite understandable. Between completing an education and settling into a career, marriage, kids, and homes, there is more than enough to do in our 20s, 30s, and 40s.

It's not that we don't have noble intentions. We are nice people. We are responsible citizens. We would take the time to help an elderly neighbor shovel their driveway. We would give up our seat to a pregnant

woman on the bus. If we saw a person needing our help, we would. However these opportunities are not easily noted by us because we mostly have our heads down, focused on our own goals. I do not know who my neighbors are at this moment, and many of my friends have not introduced themselves to theirs either. How can we notice that our neighbor is elderly or sick or may need help when we haven't met them in the first place?

When most of us are in our cars, driving by ourselves to work, and then running from meeting to meeting and eating at our desks, and then running home to pick up the dry cleaning, cook dinner, and pay bills, where is the time to look up from our own lives and notice someone else's? Unless we have a real emergency, most of us don't ask our friends and family for much help either, it's a do-it-yourself kind of mentality. Everyone worries about their own nuclear family. I know this is an often made statement, but we don't see children playing on the streets or people sitting out on their porches these days. In fact, most houses don't even *have* porches anymore. We also don't go to the stores to shop, because we can order from home, online. Meaningful contact with people has become less and less.

There is something being lost with the passage of time. The Human race has gotten more and more focused on achievements and material wealth. Religion, community, neighbors, respect for the elderly—many of these have disappeared from our list of priorities. We don't care what society thinks of our behavior anymore. That can be helpful and harmful. Good because we are a more tolerant and free world. Bad because we are no longer held accountable by others if we digress, and because we don't

make the time to help each other out.

Women work outside the home now. They have financial independence and are valued contributors to our economy. Thank God, I would go crazy if I had to sit at home. But where they were previously the glue that brought neighbors and society together, now everyone is out working. The decreasing interaction of people with other people, due to technology, hectic work schedules, hectic homework schedules, fear of crime, and the Me generation, will result in Souls that rarely extend a hand to help other Souls, and therefore no opportunities to improve their Karmic balance.

I am the worst perpetrator of isolation. Hi kettle. I've hurt many valued relationships with friends and family over the years, due to laser focus on my ventures. In my defense, I had to, for the most part. It was hard for many of them to understand, because most of my surrounding community did not consist of entrepreneurs, they were of the steady job/stable path variety. But when you take the risks that I did, you better be prepared to back it up with lots of hard work and sacrifice. I felt it would have been irresponsible of me to do otherwise. I did not want to become a financial burden on anyone and I was always racing against my dwindling bank accounts and time. I had no social life whatsoever, so it's not like I was sitting around enjoying myself and ignoring others. I had no free time, I was always working, and even then I was barely keeping afloat. In my Mind, I was going to make it up to everyone *later*. It's not that I wouldn't have helped someone in an *emergency*. Just like everyone else, I would have been pleased to help someone who asked for it. In fact, when I am finally in the process of

helping someone, I am willing to go to almost any lengths to do it, because in my heart I do care about them. But people don't usually ask for help in this day and age, there are not so many tragedies in people's lives. It comes down to opportunities less dramatic.

I have a cousin who has not spoken to me for the past two years, and I think of her every day. She always remembered my birthday, made elaborate plans to entertain me everytime I visited India, and was more of a sister than a cousin, even though she made all the effort to connect and I took most of it for granted. I loved her, but I was busy and I didn't think much about doing anything to reciprocate beyond the occasional email. I knew that the efforts in our relationship were lopsided, but I had full intentions of making it up as soon as I was closer to reaching that smooth line on my Happy Graph that I was striving so ardently to reach.

To make a long story short, my cousin came to the US, a once-in-a-lifetime trip most likely, and I didn't even realize she had come and gone. She was greatly hurt that I had forgotten she was coming, and I don't blame her at all. Now that is an extreme example of my being utterly oblivious to people around me and not taking the opportunity to give a little of myself to another human being. It's not so much that I didn't have the time for her, of course I did. I wanted her to visit me when she came. It's just that I got so caught up in my routine that I neglected to lift my head and think about others around me. Sadly, there are many more stories like that in my life.

There were those who did not need help, necessarily, but would have loved to see me more often, to have me read and comment on their

published whitepapers at work, or pay more attention to emails and links they had sent. To have me take the lead sometimes and organize dinners instead of always leaving the details to them. To call more often to hear about their lives. To notice a new haircut or remember to ask them about something they had mentioned in passing, like a new hobby.

I am still buried head down in my own life as I try to climb my way out of the entrepreneurial hole I created for myself in terms of financial debt. But I will say that I am getting better at performing small acts of kindness for others. Partly because I have slowed down, and freed up some time to get closer to a normal schedule. I still work long hours, but not as crazy as before. I have shifted my mentality of saving thoughtful acts for *later* to doing them now, as the occasion arises. The first half of my life was about *work*, I sincerely hope the second part of my life is about *people*. I think I will get to that point in the next few years. To me, that's the eventual vision of how my life will be. Filled with people I have positively impacted, a house where someone is always stopping by, and friends I can call at a moment's notice to get together and just relax.

I credit this gift of spiritual awareness to a famous nun named St. Therese of Lisieux. She died in 1897 and was famous for her treatise on *little acts of love*. She believed in taking little steps towards reaching God, such as cleaning the floor of her church without being asked, or performing a difficult and tiring task with a glad heart and smile. Small acts that might not have been noticed by others, but added up to a lifetime of selfless service and inner peace.

I try to follow her example as best I can. And I understand that those of us very much engaged in the material world may only have time for small acts . . . it is most definitely a rat race and people are barely keeping up with their own priority list. But it's a start, and it's not so much of an effort once it becomes a natural part of one's daily rhythm. It's just a matter of taking a breath and looking up and noticing those around us.

I am trying my best to no longer delay and to stop swatting the snooze button on my Spirituality Alarm Clock. I am not going to wait for bedbugs or some other major calamity to drive me out of my sleep and out of bed. I am going to awaken NOW, and start incorporating Karma and Spirituality in small ways throughout my day—before it's too late and time has already passed me by.

TURNING NEGATIVE KARMA INTO POSITIVE

I often encounter people who are obviously at a less evolved point in their spiritual journey, people acting selfishly or offensively. Believe me, it is NOT EASY to refrain from treating them in the same way. But I have begun to use these opportunities to improve my own net Karma by taking what could have been a negative experience, resulting in my returning negative energy, and converting it to positive instead.

There is a crucially important lesson I have been given in life which has helped me evolve to this point. Through my own difficult experiences in this regard, I have learned not to judge people. Being open-minded was not something that came naturally to me in my 20s. I came from a middle-class, somewhat traditional Indian background.

Although I was born in the US, my parents were from India and had certain values and perceptions they brought with them. I was a geeky homebody whose main goal was to study and achieve, like many of my generation and community back then. I was not exposed to anyone different from our small circle of friends. Going through life experiences and reaching my upper 30s had something to do with opening my Mind to all types of people and perspectives. So did entrepreneurship.

When you have been judged as an entrepreneur, often times unfairly, because people don't identify with the atypical path you have taken, you begin to appreciate what it's like to be misunderstood. As someone who grew up in a community that valued security and accomplishments, I could relate to why people viewed my lack thereof as irresponsible. But sometimes I felt that people had only two standards to judge me by—right or wrong. There was no in-between, no shades of grey. Since I was not making much money from my ventures, I was a failure. Someone who appeared to be launching one harebrained scheme after another. Someone who was living in la-la-land and perhaps afraid of real work. I tried to explain to people there are degrees of risk that entrepreneurs can take. Some take more calculated and careful risks than others. Not all of them are crazy, irrational people who throw caution to the wind. Most entrepreneurs work exceedingly hard, harder than many in regular jobs. Those are the ones that actually try to execute on their vision, they are not the “entrepreneurs” who sit around talking and daydreaming, doing nothing to move forward. There is a difference between a person who calls themselves an entrepreneur because they don't want to hold down a job, and one who is genuinely passionate

about what they are doing and has entrepreneurship in their blood. There is evidence of whether someone is putting their time and money where their mouth is, whether they are putting the sacrifices behind the risks they are taking. Whether they have achieved something creative and seemingly impossible on limited resources, even though it may not have resulted in profit despite every effort.

Through entrepreneurship, I learned that there are shades of grey to everything in life, nothing is black and white. I learned that sometimes, someone may go off the beaten path, and do something that I find strange. For example, one of my friends would like to be a stay-at-home dad. He is simply not the ambitious type, and he wouldn't mind being the one to do more housework and take care of his future kids. While I find this charming from afar, I can't say that it matches my own partner preferences. But I don't let my own likes or dislikes alter my views of him as a person. There is nothing wrong with his wish, everyone has reasons for what they want. Sometimes your personality is coded in such a way that it is a part of you, acting that way is a necessity, you are compelled to be an entrepreneur or a musician or a stay-at-home dad, because you are simply not built like everyone else. I knew I could count on family and friends to sacrifice everything for me if I needed help in the *traditional* sense—such as if I had an accident, or needed support as a medical student, or maybe even as an Olympics hopeful, or something concrete that they were familiar with. But when I started my journey as an entrepreneur, most people didn't even know the word. Cell phones didn't exist, I didn't own a laptop. There was certainly no Internet. Entrepreneurism was not common at all, and no one could understand

what I was trying to do. Don't get me wrong, people did try to support me at first, and sporadically throughout the years. People tried their best, within their own set of values, to be there for what I was doing. Many of them helped me much more than I might have, had I encountered someone so far outside the realm of what I was used to. Understandably, as the years dragged on and I got older, and as everyone else became set on the society-approved path while I lagged further and further behind, support became harder for people to give.

I understood why people thought that my problems were self-inflicted, why they thought that I could have more time for them if only I wouldn't selfishly devote my time to my “hobbies”. But they didn't understand that I was wired that way, I lived and breathed my businesses, and without some creative endeavor to channel my energies into, I had no reason to get out of bed in the mornings. As much as I knew and appreciated the fact that those who loved me would do anything to support me if tomorrow I were to be diagnosed with a major medical problem, I wished there was a way to communicate that not having work that challenged and fulfilled me would be worse than any type of disease I could get. I preferred living a short but memorable life to living a lifetime in mediocrity. I did not want to merely exist, I wanted to feel *alive*. Not being an entrepreneur would be a fate more distressing—physically and emotionally—than an accident or any other type of tragedy that could have befallen me.

When I meet people who have jobs or habits or thoughts or appearances or other aspects to them that I don't relate to or may even find shocking, I am taken aback initially, just like anyone else. But I

project my entrepreneurial self onto their Souls, and remember what it was like to feel judged as *wrong*. I have realized that there are very few situations in life where someone or something is clearly right or wrong. Most of the times, the correct word to use is *different*. Killing someone? Yes, that is wrong, if there is negative energy behind it, and it is not self-defense. Cheating while having entered a relationship like marriage, which implies monogamy? I would say wrong, because if monogamy is not a person's desire, then they should not have gotten married in the first place. No one is forcing them to. There may be shades of grey behind the types of cheating, sure, but I think it is safe to say it is usually wrong overall.

Beyond those types of situations, we get more and more into a land where right or wrong should not exist. So the word that I have naturally started using is *different*. Not “You’re WRONG, I don’t agree” but “I think we have a DIFFERENCE of opinion.” Your way to do the laundry or debate a topic or live your life is not wrong. It is simply different. I agree with the phrase “It is all relative.” Practices or perceptions in one society may be completely different in another. *Thin* is *in* for most of the world, but apparently larger women in Mauritania are considered beautiful. Today a particular diet or habit is awful for you—it can kill you!—tomorrow the latest media outlet will draw attention to itself by sensationally negating all that we’ve previously been told was true. Just a few decades ago love between people of two different colors or races was a *sin against God*. Now that has been mostly accepted, but love between those of the same gender is not. Our moral beliefs can sometimes be part of the *maya* that surrounds us.

What I have learned to do is take the experience I had of being misjudged, as an entrepreneur, and project it onto someone else who *I* may be ready to misjudge. Maybe I don't relate to *why* they are different, but I can relate to the fact that they *are*. I can relate to the fact that they may be misunderstood, just like I was. In this way, by looking past someone's Ego, and seeing The Mirror in the Stranger, I have learned to open my Mind and show more compassion to those who I may formerly have labeled.

Yet even more than experience gained over the years, or entrepreneurship, what opened my Mind to the spectrum of personalities and emotions in people was the realization that our Souls are all coded in the same way—we are all looking for permanent Happiness. The Mind is the compiler which translates that code, and unfortunately, in that translation, people do different things, sometimes desperate and even cruel, to try to achieve their Happiness.

I can't help being angry at someone who has done something wrong, like stealing or cheating. It is my natural first reaction. But whether this is considered condescending or not, I eventually calm down and begin to see these people for what they are—lost Souls. Almost like children—toddlers, in fact—who don't understand the world yet, and are just focused on their own needs, saying MINE, MINE, MINE! Toddlers are cute and accepted for their selfishness because they are not supposed to know any better. In the same way, I feel that many of us adults don't know much more either. We are lost children, lost Souls, in our search for Happiness. In that search, we grab what is MINE and forget to consider others. Sometimes we just don't know any better.

While I act like a selfish toddler myself at times, I try to play the role of a parent when the situation is reversed. It is very difficult to do, don't get me wrong. It's a work-in-progress, my spiritual evolution is not complete. I have been in a situation where someone stole money from me, and yet wanted to be forgiven and stay friends (even though he wouldn't pay the money back). While I was extremely angry at him for many, many reasons besides just the stolen money, I also realized that he was basically a desperate Soul trying to achieve Happiness in his own misguided way. He was not well-educated, he didn't seem to have strong role models, he was stuck in low paying jobs due to lack of a green card, and despite his terrible behavior, he was still confused, lost, and unhappy. Being able to look past his Ego and past his actions, and see a reflection of myself in him, I realized that he was just like me, vulnerable, hungry for love, hungry for security, and trying to meet his basic needs in the material world. Unlike me, he didn't have the means to do it. Of course, he could have stayed alive with the minimum wage he was making. And he did have opportunities to earn more if he was willing to work harder. There were better ways for him to achieve what he was looking for if he had the character and values. But maybe he wasn't imparted those values growing up—I knew his father had died young. Perhaps he felt that society condoned that type of behavior—he had formerly lived in one of the most corrupt parts of India. Whatever the reasons, had I been born into the same body, and into the same town, family, and circumstances, I might have turned out exactly the way he did. It's possible. I don't know if I would have fared any better. Maybe I would have. Some of us are stronger and

more evolved. But maybe he was a new Soul, still in the beginning stages of his spiritual journey, and if I showed him compassion and morality, he would learn from it and grow himself. If he was my child, and I was his parent, that is what I would have done. I would have forgiven him, loved him no matter what he did, and tried to educate and bring him up as best as I could.

So over the years, I have learned that there are ways to convert negative energy into positive, both of the internal and external kind.

Internally, I have gone through a lot of painful experiences which have been so deeply felt, that I try never to inflict the same wounds on someone else. I know what it feels like to be judged, or financially unstable as an entrepreneur, or lonely as someone single, or treated rudely by an ex—and I can use that knowledge to recognize The Mirror in the Stranger and stop perpetrating the same hurtful energy. I can turn negative energy that I had to absorb in the past, to create a positive outcome for someone else in the future.

Secondly, I can take negative energy that someone is sending my way, *externally*, and return it back to the person in a positive way. Instead of reacting angrily to someone's unpleasant behavior, I can show compassion and model behavior in return. I can refuse to absorb and internalize the negative energy. I don't even let it in. This not only prevents me from having a bad day and bad energy, but also stops it from rebounding to someone else. Although environmental global warming is not a goal, “spiritual global warming” should be—converting more of the world's negative energy to positive would truly make the world a better, happier place.

SUMMARY

Building a positive Karmic balance does not require much of my time or money. It is not only about extravagant charitable acts. Loving Karmic acts can be performed right now, starting today. And, as with Detachment, it is more practical to allow for leeway in this regard, because expecting myself to generate good Karmic Energy all of the time is not realistic, though I can get very, very close.

Accordingly, I have learned to: 1) budget for bad Karma (and make up for it as well), 2) truthfully assess my behavior by imagining myself on the receiving end of it, 3) fit small acts of kindness into my day, starting now, and 4) turn negative energy into positive, doubling the opportunities to enrich my Karma.

If enough of us treat others in a way that we would want to be treated, then one day when we are snapping at someone, or we feel grumpy, or we are cutting someone off in line, or we are acting in a way that we can be judged, we will be pleasantly surprised and warmed when someone smiles at us in an act of compassion and kindness. I hope that day comes soon for all of us.

4. REACHING HAPPINESS & ENLIGHTENMENT

SURROUNDING MYSELF WITH POSITIVE ENERGY

While you should help those around you, one thing to keep in mind is that you also need to help yourself. You must continue to grow spiritually so that you can encourage others on their journey. It's like what they teach on airplanes. Put on your own oxygen mask first, then turn to help the poor hysterical whoever sitting in the seat next to you.

It takes more effort to warm yourself in a cold room. There is a world full of cold rooms and cold Souls, so I try to surround myself with people who are open-minded and warm-hearted. I need to draw on positive energy from other evolved Souls in order to have positive energy to offer others.

Have you ever had someone in your life who was supposedly a “friend” but seemed unusually glad whenever something unfortunate happened to you? Someone who felt better about themselves by putting you down? Yeah? Me too. I got rid of them.

I know that type of person is usually feeling insecure and that I could stay in their lives to be a true friend and bring up their confidence. There have been times when I invested in that effort. At other times I was going through problems that were draining, and my energy was already low. I did not have any positive energy to spare and I could not absorb any more negative energy. Sometimes you are at a point where you are stable and content and able to give to others. Sometimes you are less so.

I like people who are easy going, who don't always pick on small

issues, or point out someone's flaws, or gossip or criticize. My attitude is live-and-let-live and I am hard to offend. There will always be discrimination and biases in attitudes, articles, and comedy routines, but if the core Soul of the person seems clean, I let the pettiness go. I am always amazed when people have the energy to jump into a long, intense debate on why a comedian's joke is offensive. At times, there is validity and value to that type of dialogue, no doubt. But if someone is always holding those types of passionate, difference-of-opinion discussions on any and all topics, it might mean that the person is tied much more to the material world and its details and semantics than I want to be. My Spirituality involves letting go of details and ties to the material world as much as possible, and getting closer to people's Souls and propagating love. People who are fixated on trivia and proving others wrong are not people who are going to inspire me on my quest to do the opposite.

There is no guideline I use for who I let into my life, and who I do not, I simply go by my moods at the time. But I have noticed that over the years, I have fewer friends who are similar to me in profession or social status, and more who match me in values and outlook.

I find myself drawn to those who are also interested in Spirituality. There has definitely been a shift in my preferences during the past few years. Although not as much as one would think, because I remain a material girl. I am not immersed in religious classes, temples, or groups. I actually don't have a visibly spiritual life, my friends and family will be surprised when they learn about my writing this book. I don't show any outward signs of thinking about Spirituality, in terms of small Hindu idols in my room or the way I speak. I don't sit down and meditate as

you know. I don't do yoga. I rarely read self-help or philosophy books. I like historical fiction or tell-all books about celebrities. And the Wall Street Journal which is all about money. And junky women's magazines with embarrassing racy articles screamingly advertised from their covers.

If you look at my outer lifestyle, my Spirituality would be hard to discern at all, especially since I have been so focused on achievement and myself for most of my life. I have certainly heard the word “selfish” used to describe me much more than “spiritual” over the years. Spirituality is not something I wear on my sleeve. But more than classes or books or trinkets, the way I have surrounded myself with evidence of my increasing Spirituality are the people I let into my life. Kind, principled, simple people who emit positive energy are my role models and I try to surround myself with them as much as I can.

SURROUNDING MYSELF WITH SMART ENERGY

However—I hope I don't sound mean—I am a no-nonsense, tell-the-emperor-he-has-no-clothes, cut-to-the-chase kind of gal. If I feel someone is playing up an esoteric, irrational type of Spirituality all in the hopes of making themselves feel important, then I see right through it.

There is a movie called *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* with Kate Hudson and Matthew McConaughey. (In my opinion, he is by far the best looking guy in Hollywood, but I digress.) There is a card game they play when she visits his parents' house which is similar to the game called *Bluff*. But instead of saying “BLUFF!” if they feel someone is lying about the cards they have placed down, they say “I call BULL-

SHIT!” It’s not the words so much (despite my joking around in this book, I am not a fan of cursing), it was the way they were said. That’s sort of what plays in my head everytime I hear someone questionable go off on their Spirituality soapbox.

This doesn’t happen to me with everyone, of course, most people I greatly respect and learn from. In fact, even the soapboxers probably have something they could teach me, if I could just get past their “frou-frou-ness”. Most of them have real knowledge and awareness. They do. It’s just that they like decorating it with all these ornaments and fancy words. Now come on, is it honestly necessary that you give me some exotic name like *Nevoa* (which means “Mist”) while you insist that I call you *Starburst* (I don’t even want to know what that is referring to)? I am not kidding, this just happened to me a few days ago. Some woman saw on a message board somewhere that I was looking to publish a book on Spirituality. She contacted me, and started telling me that she saw a vision in meditation that I was *Nevoa*, and I had come into her life for a reason—perhaps for her to teach me and show me the way. This woman works at a well-known firm on Wall Street. From our initial email exchanges, she sounded professional and well-spoken and I felt we were on the same wavelength. Until we got into Spirituality.

When I started getting irritated after a few of these “mystical” conversations, I let her know, as nicely as I could, that I was still a beginner and had much to learn, but whereas I thought she could teach me a lot, her style of instruction was different from what works best for me and perhaps it was better I try another “teacher”. This was me getting rid of her gently, I tried not to be obvious about what I really thought. Her

email response told me to look inside and ask myself “Why I was afraid” of our conversations. Why was I “running away”? Could it be that I was “afraid of the truth”? She said I had to let go of questioning because “rational thinking is irrelevant”. She said she would “help me find the truth”. She said other strange things. She signed her email “To Eternity and Beyond. Love, Starburst.”

Um, WHAT?!! Are you kidding me?!? Sorry, no can do, I just don't have the patience for this, although I did not take for granted the generosity of someone willing to invest their time in me. Most people don't do that—I realize that—so her intentions were most likely sincere and loving. I told her I appreciated her offer, which I did.

But come on, was all that necessary? Now here is where I try not to judge in that for some people, it *may* be necessary. Being loopy may help them get into the mood. Like candles and music, perhaps, in a spa setting. I am assuming it's something like that. If that *really* is the case, then I genuinely would stop making fun of it. Because setting a mood to focus on something is what I do all the time. When I am about to sit down to a long session of writing, I will read a few pages from a favorite author for inspiration. When I write and speak, I use lots of superfluous adjectives and go off on chatty tangents. I can be frou-frou. If someone really uses all that to get into a spiritual mindset, then there is nothing wrong with it.

Where I use caution is when someone may not have much to share on a topic, but they act like they do just to feel important and needed. That's not a genuine attempt to teach someone, albeit in your own style, it's an attempt to feed your own Ego. What tips me off to that kind of behavior is when that person immediately assumes a superior role without

having any idea of what I have to offer. Most of the times I am sure they know a lot more than me, I already acknowledge that my exposure to formal Spirituality concepts is limited. But sincere spiritual seekers and teachers seem to approach a discussion with humility and a desire to share views, not project them down to me like I am Moses and they are bestowing upon me the ten commandments. Many teachers are acknowledged masters, and they may speak in an elegant, high-level manner. However that's the way they express themselves consistently. They don't speak one way when talking about work, and then another way when talking about Spirituality. Either it's your entire style or it isn't.

My point is, I make sure that I am seeing the substance, and not the package of what is being presented to me. And I make sure that the people I surround myself with are real, have let go of their Ego, and are genuinely trying to connect with my Soul.

CONFRONTATION, NOT CONSOLATION

I also try to “call Bullshit” with myself when I am using Spirituality for the wrong reasons. I am acutely aware of the fallacies of Human psychology and wanting to buy into something for reasons other than logic or the truth. The People Who Do Not Agree will say that I want to believe in Spirituality to comfort myself that I am not alone and that someone is looking out for me. I don't think I am doing that, although I don't see anything wrong with it if it helps someone. I do use Spirituality to comfort myself to some degree. But I think I am seeing everything clearly and objectively. I choose to have some faith based on circumstantial evidence and logic, not because I want someone's lap to go hide in

when the world is mean to me.

In fact, when I used to do financial projections for my business plans, I always did a bottom-up calculation, not top-down, even during the heady dot-com days back when the Internet was new and people were supposedly given millions in funding based on some numbers they scribbled on the back of a napkin. Even then, I was realistic when it came to budgeting. A bottom-up calculation means that a person has to justify, dollar by dollar, how they are going to bring money into the business. *I will sell 100 widgets at \$5 and 300 twidgets at \$6 in Year 1 and the reason I am estimating this is that competitor Y did the same in their first year of business. So I have a realistic comparable on which my projections are based.*

A top-down calculation is: *If 1 billion people are in the market, and I capture a measly 1 percent of it, I will sell 10,000,000 widgets in Year 1. I am going to be rich!! Yay ME!!*

How am I going to bring in each individual dollar? That involves *confronting* my dreamy entrepreneurial self and being real. Not how much of the market I hope to capture based on some thirty-second rough estimate, which is *consolation* to myself that I am going to be rich soon and my sacrifices will be worth it. Consolation is easier to hide behind and feel better with, confrontation requires effort and doesn't always bring peace of Mind. But in the end, it is the only path for a skeptic like me. Some people are different. They are content to draw on Religion or Spirituality for the comfort it brings them. They don't want to question or confront it in any way. They are okay with going on pure faith. That can work at times.

At other times, however, there is a danger that engaging in too much consolation can lead to false hopes. I'm emphasizing this because I've seen it happen with someone I once knew. He was in a sticky situation and instead of trying to address the problem, he passively sat back and said God had come through for him before and would come through again. There were at least three possible solutions I suggested he try, but though he agreed they might work, he insisted there was no need to do anything about the issue because God would take care of it in the end. Of course, the worst happened and though he eventually recovered, I suspect he would have done better had he tried harder on his own.

I know many people find motivational speakers or self-help books inspirational, and I have also skimmed through them occasionally. But I think it's dangerous when people think they can get everything they ask the Universe for if they employ certain gimmicks. It does not matter how much you verbalize or visualize or affirm something. Sometimes you don't get everything you want, period. But you are more likely to have a wish granted if you make an effort towards it, whether Spirituality is real or whether it is not. Buddhism and Hinduism say that one must strive for what they want. The Universe will note our attempts and try to help deliver us our desires, but we have to put energy in that direction first—good luck is not going to be magically showered down upon us.

Becoming spiritual is not a fairytale ending to all of life's problems. It can definitely lead to permanent Happiness, but it will take focus and time, maybe even several lifetimes. In the meantime, it is important to keep challenging ourselves to make real progress towards our goals by

doing, in addition to visualizing and verbalizing. It is important to keep questioning our beliefs and actions—spiritual and otherwise—and to regularly reassess whether they are taking us in the right direction.

As I continue to evolve spiritually, I never remain too complacent. I continue to use real life experiences to test my view that Detachment and Karma are the pillars of Spirituality and Happiness. I continue to project myself on the receiving end of my own actions to test whether they are acceptable or not. I continue to make the effort to question my beliefs and learn what others have to say about Spirituality. Most of all, I continue to shed blood, sweat, and tears, by working very, VERY hard at my goals. I don't let astrological predictions of fame or a false sense of spiritual security alter the natural course of my life.

KEEP EXERCISING

There is a saying that a message must be heard an average of seven times in order for it to make an impression and change someone's habits.

For some of you, reading this book is one of your first true exposures to Spirituality. For others, it is simply one of many.

Regardless of where you are, I hope that my experiences have helped nudge you a bit further along in your spiritual journey. Most of us have a long way to go, including myself. As I mentioned earlier, I continue to discuss Spirituality with like-minded people who can share how they incorporate their values into their everyday lives. I surround myself with good role models. I might not read many books on Spirituality or attend any classes or retreats, but I do stay in touch with Spirituality in little ways that are natural for me and my personality.

I may not be a spiritual marathon runner, but I take small spiritual walks occasionally, to train my Soul to stay in shape. It's so much harder to get back to the gym routine once I let myself stop. I may keep my spiritual activities light, but I keep them going. For most of us who don't follow a formal, organized Religion, we need to act as our own personal trainers.

I hope this is not the final stop for you either. My book is just a primer. There are amazingly rich, in-depth, well-researched spiritual books out there by experienced authors, physicians, self-realized Souls, Ph.D.'s and many others who present Spirituality in unique and interesting ways.

And forming theories about the mysteries of the Universe is not the exclusive domain of bald robed people or book authors. You can create your own. Spirituality can be pondered in all sorts of ways—through music, poetry, nature, traffic jams—in almost *any* way, in fact.

While there is no guaranteed ROI on investing time into Spirituality, it doesn't require such a huge investment, either. Small, daily attempts to remember what is truly important are all that is needed to keep you evolving.

Whatever you do, don't let your good intentions fade as you put down this book and get pulled back into the whirlwind of life. It is too easy for us to revert back to snoozing in our comfortable beds hoping that the tsunamis and problems in the world continue to pass over us. When we finally get flooded out of our beds, and beg God and fellow Souls for help, it may be too late. The seeds of Spirituality and universal Love and Compassion must be sown now.

WE CAN FIND HAPPINESS

Although it may not be possible for us to Detach completely and spend the rest of our years serving others in order to transcend this world and reach Heaven, that does not mean we cannot find Happiness right now, during this life itself. We already have the knowledge that we need. There is not much else to know—what is left is for us to apply what we know, in ways that meaningfully impact our lives. But only you know what will work for you, no one else can determine that for you. As connected as we all are, we are also each on our own course.

The Happy Graph is within us, it's in our Mind and Soul. Our Mind can be trained to correctly translate the source code of our Soul Energy. There is no other tool that we need. Yes, it is hard, and I am not there yet either. But it is realistically possible.

I know that the conclusions I have drawn may not be much different from what you have heard before. *Happiness is within us, it's in our Mind, yadda yadda yadda.* But I promise you this—I truly do feel that Happiness is within us, based on the logical analysis we just conducted of what it constitutes and how we would get there. And I also promise you that except for where I changed a few details to protect people's identities, whatever I have told you in this book—every single story, every single example, every single opinion—is true. I did not write anything that I did not believe or experience myself. I did not exaggerate anything, I did not write something only because it sounded good. Because that would defeat my purpose.

I wrote this book to explain to you, my friend, my coworker, someone I am most likely meeting every day, how I live a life just like yours but

have experienced increased peace and Happiness from the knowledge I have been blessed with so far. It has made a difference in my life, it genuinely has. I am much less affected by the external and temporary and I am much more connected to those around me. I am definitely more relaxed now than I have ever been, and I attribute most of that to what Spirituality has taught me. That is why I felt compelled to share my story.

Yet I continue to live the same life that you do, I am not much different. If you continue to search and question and try, just like I did, I believe you will progress too. And perhaps one day you will share with me what I can learn from you.

Until then, take care . . . and may your life be filled with lots of Love, Positive Energy, and Ergs of Happiness . . . !

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Ashish, Manuel, Ronna, Ryan and Jason, Jeff, Dee, Theo, Ailen, Ian, Gordon, Katherine, Debra, Clare, Kelly, Chryshanti, Monica, Julie, Joe, Brian, Peter, Karan, Paul, Dennis, Barbara, Sandra, Ajay, Anuranjan, Jason Curtis, Neil, Muazzam B. Sham, and John “Shadowstock” who helped shape this book with the generous gift of their time.

A special thanks to Ura who has been a constant and never doubting collaborator throughout.

And thank you to all the other loving Souls—too numerous to mention— who have brought me to where I am today.

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Preeti Gupta was born in Chicago to parents emigrated from India. She has been published in several community magazines and newspapers. *3 Chips on God* is her first book.

In addition to being an author and a seeker of Spirituality, Preeti is a Financial Planner and CPA who loves money (yes, she is aware of the irony). She lives in New Jersey, alone with her laptop and chocolate. She does not have any plants or pets, because she is traumatized after the death of her cactus which she killed in 1999.

